ONLINE TASK CROWD WORKERS, WEB-BASED DIGITAL LABOUR PLATFORMS AND BUYERS: A LABOUR PROCESS STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Faculty of Humanities

2023

LEE STRINGER

ALLIANCE MANCHESTER BUSINESS SCHOOL

People, Management and Organisations

List of contents

2

Word count: 80116

List of tables

List of figures

Abstract

Despite growing interest in crowd work among academics and policy-makers, with various types of digital labour platforms, services or tasks (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019), the work and employment challenges and tensions are under-researched (Pongratz, 2018), especially through the underutilised resource and lens of the labour process theory (Gandini, 2018). This thesis will focus specifically on the work and employment challenges and tensions for *online task* crowd workers of web-based digital labour platforms and buyers.

The focus of this research will address an important gap given that the numbers for digital labour platforms, posted tasks, jobs or projects, and people seeking work are steadily increasing, with labour increasingly globalised. Furthermore, a number of risks stem from the way this market is emerging, the way it is regulated and the factors for engagement.

This study uses publicly available digital labour platform content, comprising of 4 terms of services and 36 related policies, as well as 34 semi-structured interviews with *online task* crowd workers and buyers, from 4 prominent web-based platforms. The researcher carried out qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) and a template style of analysis (King and Brooks, 2017), and followed a sequence of steps to analyse the data, including the tentative use of *a priori* themes based on the extant labour process and crowd work literature.

The findings from the analyses show that digital labour platforms differ only marginally in their approach to labour process issues while labour process theory gives a high degree of insight into understanding the subject of inquiry: for example, through explaining issues of skills, autonomy and bogus self-employment, and consent and/ or resistance at work. The findings also indicate how platforms impact the collective identity of sellers as to *online task* crowd work being a(n impersonal) social endeavour, and signal how control coexists but also has limitations, and how it can be situation specific, unique to the nature of platforms.

This work contributes towards addressing gaps identified in the existing literature (Gandini, 2018; Pongratz, 2018; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019; 2021; Wood, 2019), while also demonstrating the durability of labour process theory as a robust theoretical lens. Moreover, this study also shows how the findings can be applied in the real world by suggesting policy implications around issues of skills and their mismatch, and limited autonomy and (bogus self-)employment status, by highlighting the need for regulation, and implications for trade unions around issues of collective identity and voice in terms of the challenges they may face in addressing the unique demands of labour, indicating a need for different agendas.

Keywords: Gig economy, online task, crowd work, labour process, qualitative research

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Dedication

To my wife

Yanchen Zhang

Chapter 1: Introduction to thesis

1.1 Opening

Work in the gig economy is an important focus of attention for academics and policy-makers (Huws, Spencer and Syrdal, 2018:114), with various types of digital labour platforms (DLPs), services or tasks (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:26-29), and a noted dearth of good evidence informing policy (Forde et al., 2017:99). The work and employment challenges and tensions respecting platform work require further exploration (Pongratz, 2018:60), especially through the intellectual lens of the labour process theory (LPT) (Gandini, 2018:2). This study aims to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions for *online task* crowd workers of web-based DLPs and buyers. This chapter introduces the thesis, first by outlining the background and context to the thesis (and will signpost the kinds of work the participants are fulfilling, or outsourcing), followed by the research gap/ problem, objective and questions for the research, and its significance (which will signpost the main intellectual contribution). A structural outline of the thesis concludes the chapter to provide a roadmap of what to expect.

1.2 Background

The emergence of DLPs during the last decade or so constitutes a significant transformation in the world of work (Berg et al., 2018:XV) which represents a conjunction of three important changes. Notably "from local to remote…, full-time to temporally flexible and… permanent to casual" (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:247). This was driven by developments in the internet, new cloud-based technologies, online services, facilities and payment systems and changes in work structure, which enable and demand flexible patterns of work (Barnes, Green and de Hoyos, 2015:17). As such, from around 2010, work through DLPs, or 'crowd work', garnered greater attention from academics to understand work under these new business models and by policy-makers concerned with employment rights and regulations (Huws et al., 2018:114).

Crowd work operates as a marketplace, where the mediation of physical and digital services or tasks transpire (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:23). It is fixed in commercial DLPs that include web-based platforms whereby work is outsourced to a geographically dispersed crowd, and location-based applications, which allocate work in particular geographical areas (Berg et al., 2018:XV) and are conceptually quite distinct (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:243). The former includes: *online task*, *playbour* and *profession-based freelance* crowd work, and the latter relates to *asset-based services* (see Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:26-29).

The focus of this research is paid *online task* crowd work related to web-based DLPs, which the requester has initiated. While work ranges from micro tasks to macro tasks (Briken et al., 2017:7), the latter forms the bulk of work outsourced/ carried out (Kuek et al., 2015:3; Wood, Lehdonvirta and Graham, 2018:96), through platforms: Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, for instance – which were found to be the most prominent DLPs (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:243). Macro tasks (in contrast to micro tasks) tend to be larger projects undertaken over longer periods of time and often require a higher level of skill (Kuek

et al., 2015:7). These include: software development and technology skills, and creative and multimedia work – containing: game, mobile, software, and web development, web scraping, quality assurance (QA) and testing, data science, and server maintenance (with reference to the former, and in the matter of the latter:), animation, architecture, audio, logo design, voice acting, photography, presentations, and video production for example. These skills typify the most commonly requested work over DLPs (as they make up well over half of all vacancies), followed by: clerical and data entry – containing: customer service, data entry, web research, transcription, tech support, and virtual assistant – writing and translation – containing: article, academic, creative, and technical writing, copywriting, and translation – sales and marketing support – containing: advert [ad] posting, lead generation, telemarketing, and search engine optimization – and lastly professional services – containing: accounting, consulting, financial planning, legal services, human resources, and project management, for instance, and form the remaining demand apropos the online labour market (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:246).

Importantly, DLPs are positioned as neutral 'intermediaries' in the LP, who facilitate a digital matching service between end-users, and (so are not the direct employer, but instead) offer services to ensure employing a digital workforce remains viable, such as: assistance in task specification, quality inspection and payment authorisation, as well as also providing a more automated approach to hiring and managing (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:26, 29).

1.3 Research gap/ problem, objective and questions

A number of 'gaps' were identified in the existing literature that underpin this work's core and subsidiary research question(s). These relate to web-based DLPs, which are associated with paid *online task* crowd work. Specifically, the work and employment challenges and tensions are under-researched (Pongratz, 2018:60), especially utilising LPT (Gandini, 2018:2). In fact, elements of: skills, autonomy, consent and resistance (ibid, 2018:13) – and collective identity and voice (Pongratz, 2018:69; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:8; 2021:7) – and control (Wood, 2019:113), require further exploration. That is to say, little is known about the social relations of production and value creation around both the supply (sellers), and demand side (buyers).

Given the lack of research in this specific area of the gig economy as to particular LP issues, this study will aim to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions from the expansion and evolution of web-based DLPs for *online task* crowd workers[1] and buyers. To achieve the research aim, four subsidiary research questions have been created (see Figure 1.1 below), and will give a deeper and more nuanced answer to the main research objective.

Figure 1.1: Core and subsidiary research questions

> - What are the work and employment challenges and tensions from the expansion and evolution of web-based DLPs for *online task* crowd workers and buyers?

---

[1] This refers to platforms including Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, being more prominent (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:243), and to sellers who undertake macro tasks (as opposed to micro tasks), being more representative (Wood et al., 2018:96).

LP dimensions will be used as an intellectual lens for addressing the core research question. Notably, the subsidiary research questions focus on applying LPT to the empirical domain of web-based DLPs and *online task* crowd work(ers and buyers), and builds upon an emerging area of work (including Schörpf, Flecker and Schönauer, 2017; Gandini, 2018; Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Wood et al., 2019; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019; 2021, and so on).

The research focus is salient given that the numbers for DLPs, posted tasks, jobs of projects and people seeking work are steadily increasing (Schörpf et al., 2017:92). Further, a number of risks stem from the way this market is emerging, the way it is regulated and the factors for engagement (see chapter three) and yet, the work and employment challenges and tensions require further investigation (Pongratz, 2018:60), especially using the LPT (Gandini, 2018:2).

1.4 Significance of the study

This thesis will contribute to the field apropos knowledge, theory and practice. First, the work will help to address the reported gaps within the existing literature, specifically, regarding the social relations of work in a specific part of the gig economy (Gandini, 2018; Pongratz, 2018; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019; 2021; Wood, 2019). As such, this thesis adds new knowledge on skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work (as well as collective identity and voice), and control. Here one noteworthy contribution is that, as yet, the platforms' terms of services have not been investigated in the extant literature with respect to LPT (see chapters five and eleven), and findings from this work add new insight regarding how DLPs attempt to regulate core dimensions of the LP. This study can draw new debate and insight on skills (mis)match, by suggesting that searching and matching is undermined, indicating possible labour market issues (ILO, 2020), and makes new, important links to labour indeterminacy (see chapter six and s 11.2.1). This thesis further advances new insight as to how platforms constitute bogus self-employment (most importantly, by constraining factors limiting autonomy), and suggests how it could be contingent, variable and nebulous (given routes to autonomy associated with self-employment), which further contributes knowledge that a structured antagonism may be contingent, variable and nebulous (see chapter seven and s 11.2.2). This study puts forward new insight on consent and/ or resistance at work. It indicates that workplace (mis)behaviour arises out of four areas of contention to resist managerial authority and power, and to regain control over work. But it also signals that each strategy may represent consent or resistance, or both (see chapter eight and s 11.2.3). The evidence in this work also advances new ideas apropos collective identity and voice, where some sellers adapted as a means to appropriate identity, as a source of group solidarity typically to the work, over network alliances, and less

towards traditional forms of collective organisation (see chapter nine and s 11.3.1). Last, this thesis further adds new insight on control's coexistence, its limitations, and it materialising in a situation specific way which is unique to the nature of DLPs (see chapter ten and s 11.4.1).

Second, this study will make a theoretical contribution by demonstrating the durability of LPT as a robust theoretical lens. Lastly, the findings of this thesis can be taken forward to provide real world value by suggesting policy implications on issues of skills and their mismatch, and limited autonomy and (bogus self-)employment status, in highlighting the need for regulation, and implications for trade unions on issues of collective identity and voice as to the problems they may face in tackling labour's unique demands, suggesting a need for different agendas.

1.5 Structure of the document

Having outlined what the research is about and why it is important, this section will now offer a structural outline of the document to provide a roadmap of what to expect. Notably, it gives a short summary of each chapter's purpose and contents in the order of the twelve chapters. To start with, in chapter one, the background to the thesis was introduced, the research gap/ problem, objective and questions have been outlined, and the value of such work suggested.

Following, in chapters two to three, the extant literature will be reviewed. In chapter two, LPT will be critically discussed, and the theoretical lens of the thesis developed. Specifically, first, a historical summary of LPT will be provided, and the need for a core theory explained. Core LPT will then be defined, its criticisms outlined, and its robustness stated. 'The Disconnected Capitalism Thesis' (Thompson, 2003, 2013) will also be considered. Lastly, concepts related to core LPT will be looked at, and definitions for each given. In chapter three, the lens will be extended (from chapter two), and the subject of inquiry covered. In particular, first, an outline of the gig economy will be offered, and its extent and impact shown. DLPs, as labour market intermediaries (that link buyers and sellers in their economic exchange), will then broadly be considered, before narrowing the focus to web-based platforms, *online task* crowd work(ers) – who undertake macro tasks – and buyers. This includes explicit links to dimensions of LPT put forward in chapter two. Research gaps will also be identified, reinforced and rationalised.

From there, in chapter four, the research design and methodology will be detailed. The study follows an interpretivist approach broadly, incorporating a mixed method design. Specifically, first, the gravity of meta-theoretical assumptions will be considered prior to the epistemology, ontology and axiology being outlined, and the theoretical stance discussed. Constructionism (epistemology), realism and relativism (ontology) and interpretivism (theoretical perspective), are deemed to be appropriate. The research gap/ problem, objective and questions will then be recapped, before techniques and procedures – methods of data collection, sampling and recruitment, the conduct of the interviews and the methods of data analysis – being outlined. Here, publicly available DLP content, and semi-structured interviews will be used, purposive sampling strategies chosen, and a qualitative content analysis (QCA), and template analysis will be conducted. Last, limitations of the design, and ethical considerations will be looked at.

Next, in chapters five to ten, the findings will be set out. While QCA data will be presented in chapter five, template analysis findings will be reported in chapters six to ten. To start with in each chapter, the findings will be outlined and the main contribution indicated. The evidence will then be presented following this. In chapter five (which will report on subsidiary research question one), the DLPs' terms of services variability will be scoped as to LP issues, and will set up what follows. Here the findings on registration, verification and approval, employment status and control, and scope for collective identity and voice will be detailed. In chapters six to ten, people's experiences of working through platforms will be presented around issues of skills (chapter six), autonomy (chapter seven), consent and resistance (chapter eight) – (that will report on subsidiary research question two); collective identity and voice (chapter nine) – (which will report on subsidiary research question three); and control (chapter ten) – (that will report on subsidiary research question four). In chapter six, the findings as to DLP reviewing, screening and sifting (RSS), defining and differentiating skills, tactics for survival, ratings and reputation, and posting, rating and reviewing work will be put forward. In chapter seven, data apropos sellers tendering for different contracts (and continuity of engagements), negotiating prices, employing (co/) workers, work times and methods or obeying instructions will then be presented. In chapter eight, the evidence on appropriation of work, of materials used in work and of time spent on work will be detailed. In chapter nine, findings around *online task* crowd work as an impersonal social endeavour, articulation of voice, and *online task* crowd work as a social endeavour will then be presented. And lastly, in chapter ten, the findings on platform terms of services, algorithmic management, and finally, limitations of control will be reported.

Afterwards, in chapter eleven, a discussion structured by the themes of the data will be had (in three parts) that will be taken in the order of the five previous empirical findings chapters (six to ten). Chapter five will be integrated over these sections. The thesis' contribution(s) to debates as to the LP dimensions will be discussed, and LP concepts (considered in chapter two) recapped. Specifically, to begin with, a discussion apropos the searching and matching of skills, and their mismatch and labour indeterminacy will be provided, before issues of self-employment, (bogus self-)employment, autonomy and structured antagonism are discussed, and surviving by consent and/or resistance are explored (the first part). A discussion around *online task* crowd work being a(n impersonal) social endeavour will then be had (the second part), prior to looking at control's coexistence, its limitations and its specificity (the third part).

Finally, having reported the data (over chapters five to ten), and discussed key themes and contributions from this research (in chapter eleven), in chapter twelve, the thesis overall will be concluded. Notably, first, the main findings as they relate to the research question(s) will be offered, giving an explanatory answer, and second, the ways this work contributes to the field, regarding knowledge, theory, and practise will then be discussed. Here, reported gaps will be reflected on, the contribution to LPT will be considered, and how the findings may be applied in the real world will be discussed. Third (and further to chapter four), the limitations of the work will also be reflected on. Here, issues related to this study's qualitative research

methods will be looked at, and how the work has been affected by Coronavirus (COVID-19) will be explored. Lastly, recommendations apropos future research areas will then be made.

Chapter 2: Labour process theory - history, debates and dimensions

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will develop the theoretical lens of the thesis through critically discussing LPT. This will be done firstly by providing a historical summary of LPT, charting major evolutions and points of contestation and debate in the literature over a number of 'waves' (Thompson and Newsome, 2004), resulting in an informed core theoretical appreciation of the nuances, and complexities of LPT as a field (Thompson, 1989, 1990). Following, the chapter will then define core LPT, setting out its principles and purpose, outline its various criticisms (notably by Marxists, post-modernists and post-structuralists), and (despite the criticisms) suggest it to be a robust lens to tackle emerging developments. 'The Disconnected Capitalism Thesis' (Thompson, 2003, 2013) is then considered and the importance of linking workplace events to that of the wider political economy discussed. Last, it will explore concepts related to core LPT in more detail of skills, labour indeterminacy, control, structured antagonism, autonomy, consent and resistance, and provide definitions for each, which will then be used throughout this study. This chapter will conclude by summarising the knowledge reviewed, in advancing the research questions. Later in chapter three, specific research gaps will be outlined further.

2.2 Labour process foundations: Braverman

It has been about 50 years since the publication of Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974) and is where the development of LP analysis is largely rooted (Smith, 2015:223). The concept was taken and developed from the work of Marx (1987), especially *Capital Volume I* (Marks and Chillas, 2014:98), and affirmed LPT as a significant strand of Marxist research in the study of work and employment through the 1980s and 90s (Gandini, 2018:4). Braverman (1974) sought to critically analyse what he regarded to be the degrading result of technology and scientific management upon the nature of work (Smith, 2015:224). He viewed capitalism to be "the incessant drive to enlarge and perfect machinery on the one hand, and to diminish the worker on the other" (Braverman, 1974:228). Drive for efficient production, is a drive also for control over labour's capacity for creativity and movement, he argued (Smith, 2015:224)[2].

Broadly speaking, LPT suggests that management are driven to control labour, and because employers are purchasing labour's capacity to work, rather than labour itself, the result is the indeterminacy of labour; and management control and greater technocratization of work lead to labour's alienation from the products of their labour and they lose interest in the LP having sold their labour power, and therefore control becomes central (Marks and Chillas, 2014:98).

At its inception LPT proposed that the imperatives for labour control and cost reduction gave rise to an intrinsic tendency for deskilling, and degradation – job fragmentation, lowering skill requirements and management systems taking the place of worker autonomy (Adler, Forbes and Willmott, 2007:20). In other words, "management utilises its controlling power in order to

---

[2] It is noteworthy that almost 5 decades after Braverman's (1974) thesis about the degradation of labour via management control and technology that such issues are still just as pertinent today, only via digital automation.

cheapen and deskill, or deskills in order to cheapen and control" (Thompson, 1990:97). This was informed by Taylor (1911) which served as the template for capitalist work organisation.

Braverman's (1974) interpretation of trends here, however, drew criticism (Smith, 2015:225). Various themes were neglected such as worker subjectivity (see Knights and Willmott, 1990; Thompson and Smith, 2010); resistance (see P. Edwards, 1986, 2010; Van den Broek and Dundon, 2012) – which drew the most attention (Thompson, 1990:96) – consciousness and agency (see Burawoy, 1979); gender (see Wood, 1982, 1989; Thompson, 1989; Thompson and Smith, 2010); national diversity and managerial strategy in capitalism (see Littler, 1982; Burawoy, 1985; Smith and Meiksins, 1995); and later, ideas of the employment relationship, national institutions, and the geography of capitalism with the growth of the global economic system; and finally, the state and forms of regulation (MacKenzie and Martinez Lucio, 2019).

Many of these critical contributions, however, appear beyond the scope of one study. Hence, a summary review of the historical and contemporary LP debates will provide a more rational focus for the research questions detailed in chapters one and four of this work, covered next.

2.3 Waves of labour process theory: A historical summary

A history of LP debates can be seen across a number of 'waves' (Thompson and Newsome, 2004). The first contains Braverman's work, and supportive arguments. The second includes writers such as Friedman, R. Edwards, Burawoy, Littler, and others – from the late-1970s up until the late-1980s – whose typologies of 'workplace regimes' on control-resistance-consent became central to LPT. The third appears to be largely characterised by the 'paradigm wars' however, is controversial because there is a degree of overlap with the former 'periodization' (Smith, 1989, 1994). Debates, on the one hand, were between LPT and various 'new society and production' perspectives, and on the other hand, among those who attended the annual international LP conference, *territory and tasks* (Thompson, 2009:100-101). The former held new 'alternative paradigms' to Taylorism and Fordism (Thompson and Newsome, 2004:144) including: 'flexible specialisation' (Piore and Sabel, 1984), 'lean production' (Womack, Jones and Roos, 1990), or 'innovation-mediated production' (Kenney and Florida, 1993). The latter was initially between consolidators and reconstructionists. Consolidators viewed the second wave as consisting of common concepts vital for analysing trajectories of work systems and capitalist economies, but at risk of being overwhelmed by seemingly contradictory empiricist case studies on control or skill; the main solution being a core theory (Thompson, 2009:101).

2.4 The core theory: Principles and purpose

From the 1990s the core theory of LP came to be developed and affirmed. Thompson (1989, 1990) sought to consolidate and distil the knowledge produced by the empirical studies from the previous decades, in to a group of theoretical principles, or conceptual tools that capture the systemic features of capitalist LPs; to provide a direction and focus for future research or theory-building (Jaros, 2010:84). Although core LPT, however, is widely held to be based on Braverman together with his co-thinkers – with respect to managerial control and deskilling –

this is contended to be a mistaken view and instead contains the theoretical inputs of writers including Braverman, Friedman, R. Edwards, Burawoy, among others (Thompson, 1990:99).

While there were other contributors – notably, P. Edwards, 1990 and Littler, 1990 – and later elaborations – cf. Elger, 2001; Thompson and Smith, 2001; Jaros, 2005; Thompson, 2009 – Thompson's (1990) formulation is "the most formally explicit and impactful" (Jaros, 2010:71).

The core rests on the notion of labour as a commodity and so its indeterminacy, and thereby the conversion of 'the potential for work' into 'actual work effort', under conditions that permit capital accumulation (Littler, 1990:48). Four tenets flow from here (Thompson, 1990:99-102):

> *First, as the labour process generates the surplus and is a central part of man's [sic] experience in acting on the world and reproducing the economy, the role of labour and the capital-labour relation is privileged as a focus for analysis.*
>
> *Second, there is a logic of accumulation which forces capital constantly to revolutionise the production process. This arises from the competition between units of capital and the antagonism between capital and labour that is unique to capitalism as a mode of production. This logic of accumulation has no determinative link to any specific feature of the labour process, such as use of skills… [But] there are constraints on attempts to dispense with hierarchical relations and pressures to eliminate or reduce existing skills, as well as to divide aspects of conception and execution.*
>
> *The third point follows from the above. There is a control imperative. Market mechanisms alone cannot regulate the labour process… Reorganising the control imperative specifies nothing about the nature, specificity, or level of control mechanisms, nor is it necessarily linked to concepts of managerial strategy… [Nor does it dismiss or exclude the influence] of control mechanisms that originate outside the workplace.*
>
> *Fourth, the social relation between capital and labour is an antagonistic one… Precisely because capital has continually to revolutionise production and labour's role within it, it cannot rely wholly on control or coercion. At some level workers' co-operation, creative and productive powers, and consent must be engaged and mobilised… The result is a continuum of possible and overlapping worker responses, from resistance, to accommodation… to compliance… and consent.*

While core LPT drew extensively on Marx's categories, it is not a Marxist theory (Thompson, 1990:102). For Thompson (1990:102), rather than being down to any specific element of the 'package', such as Marx's Labour Theory of Value, it is because core LPT refuses the notion of an 'automatic progression' from workplace struggles to that of wider social transformation.

Its primary purpose is to account for the complexity and variations of workplace relations and identify key trends across organisations, sectors and nation-states, while at the same time to

set out systemic features of capitalist LPs that shape or constrain those relations, rather than attempting to predict, or explain determinate relations (Thompson and Newsome, 2004:135).

2.5 The core theory: Criticisms and responses

The rejection of Marxism on the one hand, produced a theoretical break in workplace conflict and social conflict – thereby untangling core LPT from Marx's failure to predict the demise of capitalism in Western countries – but, on the other hand, the core was seemingly left without a means of linking workplace occurrences to the broader political economy (Jaros, 2010:71). An issue that is regarded a key critique of core LPT (Marks and Chillas, 2014:98). One other issue that came as a consequence of this theoretical decoupling, was that core LPT was left lacking a meta-theoretical footing in terms of its epistemology and ontology (Jaros, 2010:71).

As a result, core LPT has been criticised by Marxists (see Jaros, 2005) and post-modernists, or -structuralists (see O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001a, b; O'Doherty, 2009a, b), covered next, and also by Human Resources Management (HRM) theorists (see Storey, 1985), elsewhere. From here, the rebuttals are then teased out through the subsequent sections of the chapter.

2.5.1 Marxian disapproval

There is debate over the rejection of Marxism. On the one hand, two main Marxian criticisms have emerged; notably that core LPT is managerialist, and methodologically deficient (Jaros, 2005:7-9). First, in overstating managerial agency the core is said to be myopically focussed on occurrences in particular workplaces. Second, due to its departure from its Marxian roots, the core is said to be bereft of a method to reveal the laws of motion of advanced capitalism; and so Marxist's see core LPT as 'theoretically trivial' and 'politically irrelevant' (ibid, 2005:9). On the other hand, however, proponents of core LPT contend that the theoretical decoupling from Marx enhances critical scholarship, as it discards its less defensible schema and paves the way for enriching analyses of consciousness, and social structure (Adler et al., 2007:21).

2.5.2 Post-modernist and post-structuralist disapproval

There is also debate between post-modernist, or post-structuralist and core LPT proponents. The dispute is over theorising occurrences in LPs as specific middle-range sites, behavioural dynamics in workplaces, where agency and structure interact, and where various discourses converge (Jaros, 2010:72). Much of the discord came from incompatible epistemological and ontological positions (Thompson and Smith, 2010:3). Both sides have been argued at length elsewhere – for example, see Thompson (2009) (a core advocate) and O'Doherty (2009a, b) (a post-structuralist advocate) – and so rather than rehashing old debates here – that mostly was not about the LP and thus "repeat to nobody's benefit" (Thompson and Smith, 2010:3) – Jaros (2010) offers an evaluation of this dispute – combining concerns from core proponents such as, Elger (2001), Jaros (2005), and Ackroyd (2009) – and assesses the implications for core LPT, the upshot of which shows it to be a robust lens to tackle emerging developments.

2.6 The core theory: A robust lens

It would appear core LPT has succeeded on two fronts despite its criticisms (Jaros 2010:84). First, as an antidote to the late-1980s belief that "the labour process bandwagon… [had] run into the sand" (Storey, 1985:194) whereby a welter of post-Braverman (1974) empirical work was produced in a context where key aspects of his work had largely become discredited, to an extent where the theory in LPT became challenged; and second, by way of facilitating the formation of an intellectual community (Jaros, 2010). Further, Jaros's (2010:71) assessment of post-modernist, or post-structuralist and core LPT perspectives, on crucial issues, led him to argue that they appear to have more in common than first meets the eye, and so suggests that moving beyond paradigm wars (as Thompson and Smith [2010:3] advocate) is possible.

Consequently – based on core-inspired works, such as Bolton (2005), Bolton and Wibberley (2007), and Bolton and Muzio (2008) – Jaros (2010:84) argues that Thompson's (1990) four tenets have proven a robust foundation for analysing LP dimensions – of control, resistance, identity, or agency, and skills for example – across a wide range of sectors (Jaros, 2010:84) and thus they will provide a strong basis for the research questions in chapters one and four.

2.6.1 The Disconnected Capitalism Thesis

Furthermore, building on his earlier work, Thompson (2013) appears to have moved the LPT back towards a broader agenda. Thompson's (2003:372) initial observations asserted for the pursuit of linkages between territories of the LP, employment relations, firm governance, and political economy. Thompson's (2013:474-475) later work expands on this. He proposed that the dynamics and interrelations of four institutional domains be considered, together with the scale of financialization's effect and include: accumulation, corporate, work and employment. The first has no overall logic and refers to patterns of dominance and interconnections in the circuits of capital. The second refers to the power relations and modes of coordination within and across firms. The third refers to a social and technical division of labour, and LP. Finally, the fourth refers to industrial, and employment relations policy that shape national structures.

A revised position of linking workplace occurrences to that of the wider political economy is a catch-22 problem, requiring the support of a variety of different concepts and methodologies. On the one hand, difficultly ensues when grappling with the need to model linkages between the LP and the broader political economy while attempting to maintain the boundary-integrity of a middle-range theory (Jaros, 2010:79). On the other hand, linkages here are essential for understanding issues of identity, resistance, and voice (Marks and Chillas, 2014) – as shown in Dundon and Gollan (2007) on re-conceptualising non-union voice for instance. To this end the revised thesis recognises a continued need for a nexus of various different concepts and methodologies to grasp dynamics of capitalist political economy (Thompson, 2013:483-484). Moreover, P. Edwards (2010:37-38) offers guidance on how this can be achieved practically:

> *If we are interested in the dynamics of workplace relations, we need a relatively micro*
> *focus, albeit one that is sensitive to material conditions – and it is reasonable to ask…*

that researchers give explicit attention to these conditions. But a 'complete' placing of a workplace regime in the circuit of capital would be too much to ask. A reasonable approach is to pursue causal influences as far as needed for the task at hand.

Thompson's (2013) multilevel analysis model however, has drawn criticism. It has been said that he misses issues with the Varieties of Capitalism approach which he alluded to, such as the fallacy of nationally integrated business models and the focus on financialized capitalism might not be appropriate to all areas of the global economy, such as Asia (Smith, 2015:236).

2.7 Dimensions of labour process theory: Concepts defined

The next (sub)sections will now discuss concepts related to core LPT in detail, and advance definitions for each (shown in Table 2.1 below), which will then be used throughout the work.

2.7.1 Skills

Aspects of the LP hinge around 'skill' and so is central to LPT (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010:91). Defining skill is crucial for occupational status and is usually linked to pay (Noon, Blyton and Morrell, 2013:111), the organisation of work as well as control (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010:91).

Although skill is a nebulous concept (Noon et al., 2013:111), there is general agreement that it encompasses three dimensions (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010:92). These consist of skill in the worker, skill demanded by the job, and also the political aspect of skill (Cockburn, 1983:113). The first resides in the individual, and is accumulated over time – with every new experience adding something to their overall ability. The second is the skill required by the job, and does not necessarily match the skill in the person. And the last is the political definition of skill – of which a trade union, or a group of workers can guard against any challenge (ibid, 1983:113).

Furthermore, Noon et al., (2013:112) takes Cockburn's (1983) three categories on skill, and places them into operational terms. In order, the first is concerned with identifying individual attributes gained through education, training or experience, including that gained at work or 'on-the-job'. The second focusses on task requirements regarding complexity and discretion. And the third concentrates on skill in the – political and historical – setting; in particular, how skill has developed over time and is constructed by various interest groups (ibid, 2013:112)[3].

Capital-labour struggles can be around 'use-values' – the skill necessary in creating 'surplus value' – and higher skills can mean greater productivity but also higher costs and so the use-values that workers have and sell are important to both capital and labour (Smith, 2015:226).

While organisations adapt to ongoing pressures for change – by reducing costs, introducing products or services or adjusting quality standards – aspects of the LP are affected such as what workers do, how they do it and how decisions are made (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010:91).

Moreover, while Braverman argued that capitalism possesses a degradation imperative – by which low value skills replace high value ones – in reality however, this is just one propensity

---

[3] Noon et al., (2013) however, point toward weaknesses of the three approaches of assessing skill.

among several, and rather than being absolute, appears more contingent (Smith, 2015:226). Indeed this is perhaps determined by other concepts associated with core LPT covered next.

2.7.2 The double indeterminacy of labour power

Labour power holds two components: mobility and effort power that form the basis of capital-labour strategies, tactics or policies within capitalist employment relations (Smith, 2015:231). The first is associated with a distinction – that was originally made by Marx – between labour and labour power which reflects the decentralisation of the authority over the latter's disposal to the worker; who has the freedom and burden or choice and constraint, in respect of where and to which employer she or he sell her or his labour services to (ibid, 2015:231). Based on his earlier work (see Smith, 2006) – where movement and mobility was applied to the LPT – Smith (2015:231) argues that this is called mobility power and is indeterminate on two fronts. First, for the employing organisation as a result of the uncertainty around whether or not they will retain the worker, and second for the worker as a consequence of the uncertainty around whether or not the former will carry on purchasing her or his labour services (ibid, 2015:231).

Here and drawing on the work of Alberti (2014), Smith (2015:231) concludes that capital and labour plan, strategize and mobilise resources (of an individual or collective kind) concerning the issue of mobility power as rational-strategic actors.

The second component is about worker effort and the wage-work bargain. Smith (2015:231) put forward that – based on the works of Baldamus (1961), and Thompson and Smith (2009; 2010) – the amount of effort required for a particular wage is a central concern of LPT with a focus on management strategies to control – manage, regulate, discipline – labour to realise returns. Conversely management also seek labour's creative powers (P. Edwards, 2009:44). Similarly – based on Burawoy (1979) – how labour develop formal and informal work rules in order to limit effort or resist managerial control – but while also wishing to work effectively (P. Edwards, 2009:44) – is also key (Smith, 2015:231) and contradictory (P. Edwards, 2009:44).

2.7.3 Control over the labour process

Control is a main concern of LPT research (Wood, 2019). It refers to "the ability of capitalists and/or managers to obtain desired work behaviour", or to forms with which companies direct, evaluate, reward, and discipline labour (R. Edwards, 1979:17). On the one hand, there is the indeterminacy of labour – labour as a commodity requires the conversion of labour power, or 'the potential for work' into labour or 'actual work effort' for capital accumulation to take place (Thompson and Harley, 2007:149). Labour contracts (including employment and service) are incomplete, and can never be entirely specified, with work details left vague and open-ended (Wood, 2019:112) and "are a commonplace observation" (Thompson and Harley, 2007:149). On the other hand, the purchasing of labour power generates a 'structured antagonism' over the creation and distribution of surplus value (P. Edwards, 1986:5). Thus, as a consequence, the 'control imperative' is necessary for regulating the LP (Thompson and Harley, 2007:149).

The concept of control has moved on since Taylor, or indeed, Braverman, with second wave writers focussing on themes of accommodation, compliance, and consent (Smith, 2015:226). P. Edwards (1986:6) draws a crucial distinction here between 'detailed' and 'general' control. The first covers the details of work tasks – that is, whether managers and/ or workers decide on various aspects of the LP such as work speed, allocation and discipline, while the second relates to: "the accommodation of workers to the overall aims of the enterprise" (ibid, 1986)[4]. Should the first be more employer dominated and entail control strategies of 'simple control', 'technical control' or 'bureaucratic control' for instance (see R. Edwards, 1978:112), then the former can direct attention to working environments which are directed and regulated, where there is limited responsibility, coercion and low trust; while the latter suggests that employers may use labour power more effectively by engaging with it (Smith, 2015:225-226). Moreover, Wood (2019:112) reaffirms – Friedman's (1977a) view – that detailed control can undermine general control by alienating workers and sparking resistance to the general aims of the firm.

In this regard, managers might appeal to the professional values, career, creativity, goodwill, and trust of workers, deeming this a more suitable method for conversion (Smith, 2015:226). For instance Friedman (1977a:47) argues that managers can loosen direct control as part of a strategy to maintain or augment their control over the LP. Because "capitalist firms exist to make profits" (P. Edwards, 1986:2) – and rigid control might run counter to that aim by being counterproductive and overly expensive (Smith, 2015:226) – managers may provide workers with 'responsible autonomy' by allowing them some discretion over their work, through giving them status, authority and responsibility; aligning their thinking to the firm's ideals (Friedman, 1977a:48-49). Similarly, Burawoy (1979:92) shows how the constitution of the LP as a game – providing workers with degrees of autonomy – can both secure and obscure surplus labour and later argues a shift from coercive mechanisms to those of consent (Burawoy, 1985:123).

Furthermore, Barker (1993:408) asserts that "concertive" control – which was first developed conceptually by Tompkins and Cheney (1985) – can replace a bureaucratic system. Workers can achieve concertive control through reaching a substantial, negotiated consensus around how to shape their behaviours – which hinges on ideas, norms and rules – based on a set of core values – such as those found in corporate literature – thereby, aligning their activities in the organisation's favour, forming a supervisory force of themselves (Barker, 1993:411-412).

Moreover for Sinclair (1992:611-612, 622), the hegemony of team ideology – which is based on the use of work groups being seen as essential for effective organisational performance – has created a tyranny of oppressive stereotypes – which encourage teams to fulfil unrealistic objectives, or be used for inappropriate tasks – through concealing coercion and conflict with consultation and cohesion, among others.

---

[4] In either case however, R. Edwards (1978:112) argues that any system of control embodies elements of directing, evaluating, rewarding and disciplining labour.

While managers are 'in control' of productive activity – although creating and recreating this pursuit is limited – under the capitalist mode of production (Friedman, 1977b:83), there may be a shifting 'frontier of control' (Goodrich, 1921). This is because "employment relationship implicitness [that is brought about by implicit labour contracts that are informally negotiated] foments a fluid and incomplete frontier… between worker autonomy and managerial control" (Hughes, Dobbins and Murphy, 2019:175). Figure 2.1 is a graphical representation of this. A frontier of control develops on the one hand between aspects of the employment relationship which have been set unilaterally by managers, and on the other hand, those aspects that are inherently more contestable around the wage-effort bargain (Donaghey et al., 2011:60). This transpires due to structured antagonism or divergent interests (Hughes et al., 2019:175) that shapes the frontier by manager and worker strategies interacting (Donaghey et al., 2011:60).

Figure 2.1: Dynamic shifts in the frontier of control
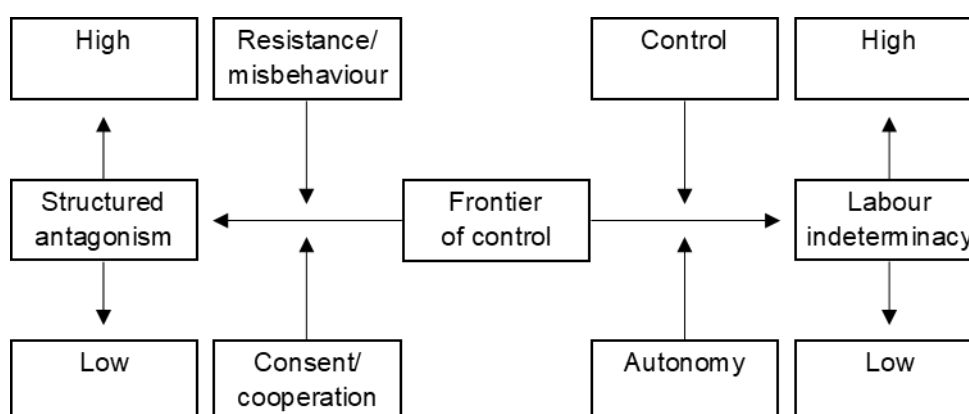
Source adapted from Donaghey et al., (2011)

Framing this, in the spirit of 'The Disconnected Capitalism Thesis', for P. Edwards (2010:37):

> *Changing structural conditions shape events within the politics and production, and at this level people make choices as to how to respond to these conditions, and out of the resulting actions, bargains and compromises a new pattern of workplace politics emerges.*

Therefore, "control is… situation specific, dependent upon the variability of managerial intent and behaviour as well as worker resistance and consent" (Donaghey et al., 2011:60-61). In a similar vein, observable conflict depends on contextual conditions like the use of direct forms of control versus those that come under general mechanisms (Hughes et al., 2019:175-176).

Furthermore, rather than being seen in zero-sum or replacement terms, LPT now states that control can coexist in multiple forms (Smith, 2015:226). This can be seen in the propositions on control in Thompson and Harley (2007:153-154) who argue that control entails *continuity, in combination*, their *extension* into new territories, and their *increased hybridity* for example.

Moreover from Burawoy (1979, 1985) onwards, LPT understood that consent can be created from both worker and manager practices, but in not acknowledging structured antagonism or

divergent interests – like several post-structuralist and HRM writers – one is left with consent and accommodation only, and not control and resistance (Thompson and Harley, 2007:152).

2.7.4 Structured antagonism

As a by-product of the dynamics of exploitation and control (Thompson and Smith, 2001:57), a structured antagonism sits at the heart of the employment relationship (P. Edwards, 1986). Because workers generate value in the LP – and deploy their labour power under conditions of effective control – and some value is taken, the result is exploitation (P. Edwards, 2018:5). This produces a structured antagonism – an inherent aspect which engenders overt or latent conflict – over the creation and distribution of surplus value (Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:6).

Struggles as a behaviour around the issue of control vary in character and intensity and they have history that shape following developments (P. Edwards, 1986:77). They occur between management and labour over *skills* – around the use-values of workers – *time* – around how time is used (i.e. the intensity of labour), and for how long (i.e. the extensiveness of labour) – *rewards* – around the wage-work bargain – and lastly *the content of work* – around what and how work is done, and the scope for autonomy, or self-management (Smith, 2015:226, 233).

Contradictory forces are at play however, rather than a mere conflict of interest (P. Edwards, 2009:44). On the one hand antagonism is embedded in the employment relationship. On the other hand however, a day-to-day level of cooperation is important. A structured antagonism shapes how relations are handled, but does not feed directly into the interests of either party (ibid, 2009:44). A balance needs to be struck, as extracting a surplus is mutually beneficial – as a failure here can hurt both parties – but workers remain exploited (P. Edwards, 2009:44).

2.7.5 Autonomy

The concept of autonomy refers to the extent to which workers are able to exercise initiative and discretion over what occurs on-the-job and the degree is a result of the manner in which the work has been organised – notably the extent of standardisation of work processes, and the mechanisms for control utilised by managers (Kalleberg, Nesheim and Olsen, 2009:101).

In unpacking this concept further, Breaugh (1985:556) argues there to be three distinct types of work autonomy, including 'work method autonomy', 'work scheduling autonomy' and 'work criteria autonomy'. The first refers to the degree of discretion/ choice workers have regarding the procedures (methods) that they utilise when going about their work. The second refers to the extent to which individuals feel that they can control the scheduling, sequencing or timing of their activities on-the-job. Lastly the third refers to the degree to which workers are able to modify/ choose the criteria which comes to be used for performance evaluations (ibid, 1985).

Moreover, workers may engage autonomy through *skill* – where it largely hinges – (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010:91), *labour indeterminacy* – in particular, through mobility and effort power – (Smith, 2015:231), *control* – notably, through responsible autonomy – (Friedman, 1977a:48), and *resistance* – when framed "as an *active* set of practices that attempt to recover a degree

of autonomy at work" – (Fleming, 2001:191) for example. Indeed workers deploying software or creative skills for instance are often required to make subjective contributions and so have a relatively high degree of autonomy, with opportunity for self-expression (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2013:967; Schörpf et al., 2017:89). In terms of indeterminacy apropos mobility power, workers could have the freedom/ choice over where and to which employer she or he sells her or his labour services to (Smith, 2015:231). Responsible autonomy largely provides autonomy, albeit up to a point (Friedman, 1977a:49). And lastly resistance and misbehaviour (and also to some extent, effort power) around four 'appropriations' – whereby workers might regain control – of work, product, time and identity (see Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:25, or are covered next). One final point to make is that autonomy therefore appears as contingent, in that such aspects come to be determined at the frontier of control by manager and worker strategies interacting in both advancing their respective agendas (Donaghey et al., 2011:60).

2.7.6 Consent and/ or resistance at work

Worker activity could represent consent – that "implies some level of *agreement…* to a set of work relations" (Thompson, 1989:176) – but also acts of resistance and misbehaviour. When it comes to the concept of consent, Thompson (1989) argues that consent alone does not go far enough in defining cooperation and suggests that there is also an element of compliance. This "indicates that workers [might] *give way* to the structure of power and control inherent in capital's domination of the labour process" (ibid, 1989:176). Acceptance is arrived at through concessions at the shifting 'frontier' where the concepts play out (Thompson, 1989:176-177). Practically then consent and compliance are linked by virtue of consent being "the other side of the coin to control: it refers to the *self*-control determined through participation in practices reproducing the capitalist labour process" (ibid, 1989:176-177). When it comes to resistance and misbehaviour, such acts can take the shape of informal and formal, overt or covert, and individual and collective workplace (mis)behaviours, that can challenge managerial authority and power by tempering and moderating or mediating it (Van den Broek and Dundon, 2012).

While there are more deliberate efforts of worker activity to alter the terms of the LP, such as collective bargaining, strikes, and (in the extreme), quasi-revolutionary protests (P. Edwards, 2010:39), formal or organised forms of resistance have seen a quantitative decline (Van den Broek and Dundon, 2012:97). We therefore turn our attention to the more specific and small-scale acts of worker resistance and misbehaviours; that in themselves may shape the LP (P. Edwards, 2010:39). Early sociological studies such as Roy (1952) and Burawoy (1979) have sought to explain the rationality of worker behaviour here (Smith, 2015:227), and later works such as Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), and Noon et al., (1997, 2013) build on this tradition.

Ackroyd and Thompson (1999:24) argue a distinction between resistance and misbehaviour. They (1999:24) suggest that misbehaviour is "anything you do at work you are not supposed to do" (Sprouse, 1992 cited in ibid, 1999:2) and argue it can capture what the other available models cannot. Broadly speaking, their (1999:25) typology propounds that misbehaviour can take four directions; that arise out of four areas of conflict. These include the appropriation of

work – notably, work activity, effort bargaining, 'soldiering', and destructiveness, or sabotage – *product* – in particular, perks, pilferage, fiddling and theft – *time* – notably, time perks, time wasting, absence and turnover – (the latter two of which are related to *work*) and last *identity* – in particular, goal identification, joking rituals, sub-cultures, sex games, and class or group solidarity – which vary in degree/intensity between positive engagement and active hostility[5].

While resistance and misbehaviour often overlap (Van den Broek and Dundon, 2012:100) a crucial difference can be seen in their nature and motive (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:24). Because "not all activities can be directly related to a pattern of control and resistance" (ibid, 1999:25), such as sexual misbehaviour – whereby a worker may be pursuing a romance, or conquest – absenteeism – in which a worker may be having an affair – or sabotage – where a worker can merely be having fun – more might be needed (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999).

In the absence of traditional forms of industrial conflict however, Van den Broek and Dundon (2012:98) argue that misbehaviours (which are more difficult to identify and measure) should be treated as acts of resistance in themselves as they might reflect the most available forms.

Further, establishing unifying terms for how workers may react has proven difficult (Van den Broek and Dundon, 2012:100). Indeed resistance contains ambiguity (P. Edwards, 2010:39). While resistance/ misbehaviour may be an act of getting back at management or customers, it may also be a means of workers getting by when faced with degradation or mundane work (Van den Broek and Dundon, 2012:100). In other words, informal actions can be conforming (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:24). In a similar vein, Noon et al., (2013:260) argue that their five survival strategies – covering 'making out', fiddling, joking, sabotage and escaping – can be interpreted as consent or resistance, or as both. For example, making out may be viewed as mutually beneficial acts of 'game playing' (for managers and workers), rather than as acts that undermine managerial control. Fiddling may be seen as 'deserved' perks, rather than as theft. Joking may be viewed as groups self-regulating, rather than as assaults on managerial authority. Sabotage may be seen as letting off steam, or well-intentioned actions, rather than as malicious acts to 'get even', or as well-meaning acts to 'expose' (whistleblowing). And last escaping may be viewed as acts that cause workers to accept the status quo, rather than as acts that undermine managerial aims or reduce organisational performance (ibid, 2013:260).

There are however, competing managerial frameworks on militancy (resistance and conflict) and moderation (accommodation and cooperation) with different points of view (see Dundon and Dobbins, 2015:914). For example, neo pluralism, political Marxism and radical (material) pluralism. While radical pluralism is the mainstream perspective here (Ackers, 2014:2608), it is argued from a neo-pluralist frame of reference that the 'British sectarian left' give particular emphasis to 'economic workplace militancy' (Ackers, 2002:5), whereas neo-pluralist analysis

---

[5] Drawing on Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) and Van den Broek and Dundon (2012), Jenkins and Delbridge (2020:6-7) argue that lying may also be seen as resistance and misbehaviour.

"stress... cooperation over conflict and trust over power" (Provis, 1996 cited in ibid, 2002:17). Thus, the conflict – cooperation dialectic interplay may shift depending on your point of view.

Last, before concluding by summarising what has been reviewed, Table 2.1 below advances definitions for the concepts related to core LPT, which will now be used throughout this work.

Table 2.1: Dimensions of labour process theory: Operational definitions

Dimensions of LPT	Operational definitions
Skills	There are three dimensions of *skill* – skill that resides in the man [sic] himself (concerning individual attributes acquired through education, training and experience), skill demanded by the job (concerning task requirements involving complexity and discretion), and lastly, the political definition of skill (concerning social relations).
Labour indeterminacy	Labour power possesses two indeterminacies – *mobility power* (concerning indeterminacy for the employing organisation around whether or not they will retain the worker, and for the worker around whether or not the former will continue purchasing their labour), and *effort power* (concerning labour effort and the wage-work bargain).
Control	*Control* refers to the ability of capitalists and/ or managers to obtain desired work behaviour.
Structured antagonism	A *structured antagonism* is an inherent aspect of the employment relationship which engenders overt or latent conflict over the creation and distribution of surplus value.
Autonomy	*Autonomy* refers to the extent to which workers are able to exercise initiative and discretion over what occurs on-the-job.
Consent	*Consent* implies some level of agreement and refers to the self-control of workers determined by way of their participation in practices which reproduce the capitalist LP.

Resistance	*Resistance* are any acts which you are not supposed to do at work.

2.8 Concluding summary

Through a number of waves of development we have come to a core theory (Thompson and Newsome, 2004). For all the criticisms levelled against such a conception – by Marxists (see Jaros, 2005), post-modernists and post-structuralists (see O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001a, b; O'Doherty, 2009a, b), as well as by HRM theorists (see Storey, 1985) – it has proven to be a robust lens to tackle emerging developments (Jaros 2010). Opening out the analysis, is 'The Disconnected Capitalism Thesis' (Thompson, 2003, 2013), since reflecting upon change and the evolution of workplace events can enable a greater appreciation, which links to the wider political economy as vital (Marks and Chillas, 2014), and may be achieved in a practical way (P. Edwards, 2010). Concepts of: skill, labour indeterminacy, control, structured antagonism, autonomy, consent and resistance, are a central focus of core LPT (Thompson, 1989, 1990). These have been defined, and will be taken forward and used in this study. For example, we have seen that skill holds three dimensions (Cockburn, 1983:113), that autonomy pertains to the extent workers can exercise initiative and discretion (Kalleberg et al., 2009:101), and that consent "implies some level of agreement" (Thompson, 1989:176), where acts of resistance/ misbehaviour relate to "anything you do at work you are not supposed to do" (Sprouse, 1992 cited in Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:2). And, that control applies to "the ability of capitalists and/or managers to obtain desired work behaviour", or to forms with which companies direct, evaluate, reward and discipline workers (R. Edwards, 1979:17-18). Crucially, these concepts are well-suited for addressing the research questions–in chapters one and four of this thesis. Chapter three (next) will extend the theoretical lens of the thesis developed, and discuss the subject of enquiry. Following, chapter four will explain the research design and methodology.

Chapter 3: The gig economy, online task crowd work and labour process theory -

setting the scene

3.1 Introduction

In extending the theoretical lens considered in chapter two, in this chapter the phenomenon of the study will now be discussed. This will be done firstly by providing an outline of the gig economy, thereby illustrating the positioning and scope of the research, and it will debate its extent and impact, while recognising that there appears to be both conceptual and technical issues as to different size estimates. It will then broadly examine DLPs by way of discussing their business models, considering a number of commonalities, and discussing a regulatory debate (around issues of bogus self-employment), before narrowing down the discussion to the study's focus, notably, regarding web-based DLPs, *online task* crowd work(ers) – whom undertake macro tasks – and buyers. This will include explicit links to the dimensions of LPT developed in chapter two. The remaining sections will add understanding as to how platform users sign up to the DLPs, the way the nature of platform work is shaped and controlled, the fees, followed by a discussion as to *online task* crowd work(ers) and buyers, DLP and buyer control and seller resistance, and collective identity and voice, and structured antagonism(s). Lastly, the chapter will conclude by reinforcing and rationalising the research gaps identified.

3.2 Outlining the gig economy: Positioning and scope of research

The 'gig', 'platform' or 'on-demand' economy appears nebulous and no single definition of it has reached a consensus (Lepanjuuri, Wishart and Cornick, 2018). Accordingly, and for the purposes of the thesis, this section (and Figure 3.1) will seek to present an outline of the gig economy – and therefore, attempt further explanation and elaboration of the phenomenon – and will illustrate the positioning and scope of the research. As outlined in s 1.2, crowd work functions like a marketplace, whereby the mediation of physical and digital services or tasks occur (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:23). As Figure 3.1 below shows, it is rooted in commercial DLPs including web-based DLPs, where work is outsourced to a geographically dispersed crowd (hence crowd work), and location-based applications, commonly known as (CKA) 'apps' that allocate work in specific geographical areas (Berg et al., 2018:XV) and are conceptually quite distinct (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:243). The former has three different crowd working types: *online task*, *playbour* and *profession-based freelance* crowd work, and the latter relates to *asset-based services* (see Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:26-29).

Figure 3.1: Positioning and scope of research within the gig economy
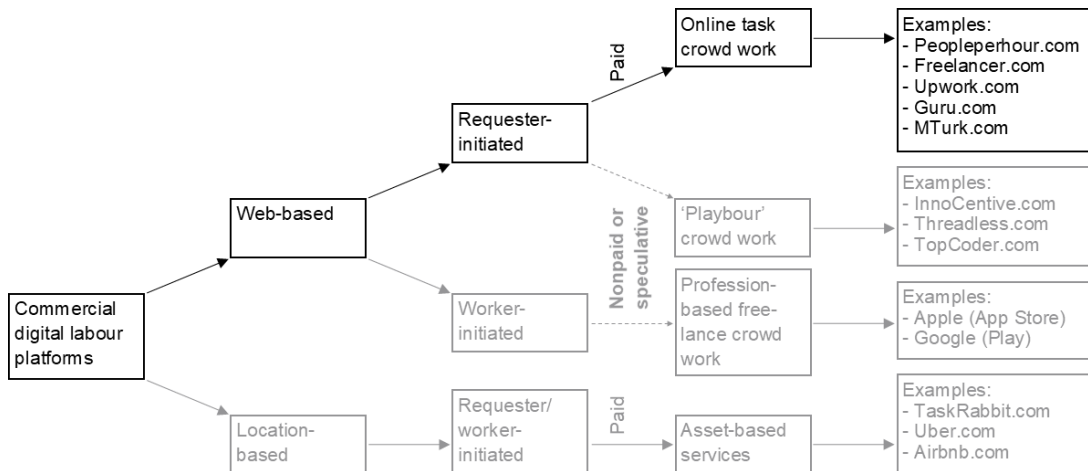
Source adapted from Berg et al., (2018) and Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019)

The blacked out area in Figure 3.1 illustrates that this research is concerned with web-based DLPs that are associated with paid *online task* crowd work, which the requester has initiated.

3.2.1 Estimated size of the gig economy

While it is widely recognised that existing economic statistics are not suitable for measuring the gig economy as to its extent and impact (Abraham et al., 2017; Forde et al., 2017; Huws et al., 2018; Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018), various efforts have been made and are outlined in Table 3.1 below, illustrating scale. One estimate in Huws and Joyce (2016, see Table 3.1, row A) suggests that the overall community of crowd workers – including those working from home, and offline work such as carpentry, cleaning, gardening or driving – in the UK, was as many as 11 per cent in early 2016. In the US Katz and Krueger (2016, see Table 3.1, row B) reveal that 0.5 per cent of all those surveyed (in late 2015), indicated that they were working through a DLP like Uber or TaskRabbit. Finally covering Europe – notably 14 member states in the European Union[6] – Pesole et al., (2018, see Table 3.1, row C) show that 8 per cent of all those surveyed (in mid-2017), work via web or location-based DLPs with some frequency.

Table 3.1: Prevalence of gig type jobs

	Source	Subjects	Gig workers (I)	%	Location
A	Survey	2, 238	246.18	11	UK
B	Survey	3, 850	19.25	0.5	US
C	Survey	32, 409	2592.72	8	EU

Key
I.   Calculated from the information in the cited studies.

---

[6] Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

3.3 Digital labour platforms: The point of production

While there is a difference between web and location-based DLPs (Berg et al., 2018:XV), a number of commonalities can be seen (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:23-25). They are understood here to be "a digital-based point of production, intended as the 'place' where the labour process is enacted upon workers" (Gandini, 2018:2). Yet this may be contestable as the actual labour effort itself can be exercised in different places. They take the shape of websites or apps, and are the digital services that facilitate 'crowdsourcing' – a term used to describe the activity of outsourcing work to the crowd (Berg et al., 2018:3) – by enabling the association between external buyers and sellers (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:23).

DLPs operate under and have been shaped by a capitalist economic system (Srnicek, 2017; Spencer, 2017). The business models are based on attracting a large number of users (also known as [AKA] *scaling at speed*), to build critical mass and reap economies of scale, which enables them to expand market share and stock market valuation by way of value-skimming the buyer-seller economic exchange via fees (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:29-30).

The appeal of DLPs is wide-ranging – across elements of the DLP itself, the labour pool, the contract of employment, algorithmic control and digital trust – and attracts various audiences including producers, consumers, advertisers, and venture capitalists (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:23-25). First, DLPs overcame the hurdle of technical infrastructure – and the related cost – which was needed to allow third-parties to buy or sell labour on a global scale. Second, this technological innovation now meant cheaper labour, on-demand for consumers (Berg et al., 2018:3) and greater access to skill (Zhao and Zhu, 2014:427). Third, concerning the employment contract, through defining workers as 'independent contractors' in their legal terms section (Pongratz, 2018:64), DLPs (Felstiner, 2011) and individuals wishing to engage persons to execute a task, job or project now had the means to avoid employment costs and regulation (de Stefano, 2016:12). Fourth and regarding algorithmic control, quality assurance could now come through complex software algorithms, and thus replacing the need for direct managerial control (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn 2019:24). This is a primary function and is based on the rating and reputation systems (Wood, 2019:112). Finally, there is an element of digital trust which is needed – and is propagated by the latter part – in the absence of DLP liability, thereby substituting consumer protection (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn 2019:24).

3.3.1 Regulatory debate

There is a regulatory debate at the core of the gig economy. Some say that DLPs are new to the point that they disrupt "existing regulatory schemes", others suggest that they are a "ruse for avoiding regulation" (Katz, 2015:1070). Indeed some argue that there is a degree of legal engineering going on termed 'bogus' or 'false' self-employment shifting the risk onto workers who lack protections or entitlements (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:31). This occurs when working arrangements have limited or no features of self-employment, or they possess many characteristics of direct-employment (Behling and Harvey, 2015:970); with an intention of reducing responsibilities, or tax liabilities for employers (OECD, 2000:156). Yet, Wood and

Lehdonvirta (2019:1-3, 7) propose four points. First, that the gig economy exists within or gig workers generally operate inside a grey area of (self-)employment. Second, that not all DLPs function on the basis of false self-employment, with those that do increasingly taking steps to avoid doing so. Third, that gig workers often identify as freelancers over other classifications, and finally, in some cases, enjoy aspects of autonomy associated with self-employment, and that platforms might reduce potential for bogus self-employment between buyers and sellers.

Avoidance, change and ambiguity of the law however, seems to be crucial for DLPs. Indeed, much of the price advantage that they enjoy could be attributed to circumventing regulations, with some even seeking to change the law by deploying novel tactics, which entails the rapid expansion of their activities to a point that it provides the leverage needed to do so (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:30-31). While genuine self-employment is viable, and therefore employment protections will not apply, cultivating and positioning themselves in "a regulatory sweet spot" (Gillespie, 2010:348), and the problems of ambiguity around employment status, creates space for them (and buyers) to take advantage of gig workers by gaming the system (Taylor et al., 2017:33). A circumstance that might work for DLPs or buyers, but not workers; who become placed beyond the scope of various layers of protections associated with social security and employment rights or forms of collective representation (Grimshaw et al., 2015). Thus, gig workers potentially receive low pay, no benefits and job security – enjoying no true legal protection – and DLPs could strive to actively encourage this (Felstiner, 2011:155-156).

3.3.2 Signing up to digital labour platforms, how they work and fees

Since the positioning and scope of research deals with web-based DLPs that are associated with paid *online task* crowd work (see Figure 3.1), the focus of the remaining sections will be here, rather than on exploring the other crowd working types. That being said, the scope will be narrowed further to macro tasks – being more representative – which are associated with online freelancing DLPs: Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com, and Guru.com, rather than micro work and DLPs like: MTurk.com, Clickworker.com and CrowdFlower.com[7].

Concerning online freelancing DLPs Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, this short section will now discuss aspects of signing up, how they work and fees.

New users are generally required to register for an account in order to buy and sell services. For example and in general, the process of signing up for all new users commences with the option to register with a pre-existing third party account such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google or Apple (depending on the DLP), or there is the option to do so with an email address. New users are required to provide a name (or username) and password, and might be required to provide their location (which varies by DLP). At this point, new users may also be required to select an account type of either buyer or seller (which can be edited later), and might also be required to agree to, and abide by, the terms of service (and related documents), of the DLP,

---

[7] For research that deals with micro work(ers), see Joyce et al., (2019:167-178) for example.

or agreement could be assumed through use (depending on the DLP). Once the initial stage of registration is complete, new users are required to verify their email and complete details[8].

DLPs generally encourage sellers to gear their profile toward attracting buyers. For example, they do this by requesting that sellers personalise their profiles through including their career experience, defining their skills, and giving examples of their previous work in their portfolios.

Buyers can hire sellers in two main ways, either by posting a task, job, project (or contest[9]) to receive proposals (or competing entries) – and can choose to have DLP support assist in finding a seller – or by purchasing a pre-scoped task, job or project (depending on the DLP).

Buyers who require a seller(/s) or an agency (and are hiring by posting a task, job or project) are required to fill out an online form. For example, buyers are required to give their task, job or project a title and are encouraged to describe it in detail. Guidance is given by instructions and examples. There is also the option to upload files (such as images, documents, audio or video) which are intended to go further in explaining the brief, if needed. Buyers are required to select relevant predetermined skills to aid with matching, or this will be done automatically (which varies by DLP) with the option to modify. Concerning payment, buyers are required to select a budget type – of either fixed price, per hour, or could select 'not sure' (depending on the DLP) – a currency (which differs by DLP), and a budget. Guidance is provided on budget (depending on the DLP) by variations correlating to and indicating an expected level of seller or an anticipated size of task, job or project. Buyers select a predetermined estimated range, input their own estimated range, enter an estimated figure, or select 'not sure' (depending on the DLP). Regarding task, job or project duration and/or hours per week, buyers are required (or have the option via 'not sure') to specify a predetermined estimate (which varies by DLP). Buyers are also required (or have the option) to decide the visibility of the task, job or project by selecting public or private (depending on the DLP) and to select the sellers' location, such as a particular on-site location, a preferred county or time zone (which differs by DLP). Once the required fields have been completed, the buyer is able to submit the post for moderation.

A posting can come to a seller's attention in a number of different ways. For example and in general, sellers can use the DLP search features and manually search for appropriate tasks, jobs or projects, or they could save automatic searches that inform them of new postings, or they may receive invites either from buyers directly, or from DLP support assisting the buyer.

Should a task, job or project (or contest) posting match the seller's skill set or ability then the seller may choose to submit a proposal (or a competing entry of finished/ near-finished work if contest-based, depending on the DLP). It will then be for the buyer to review the proposals (or competing entries), in order to select the seller (or work) that they consider most suitable.

---

[8] The application may also be reviewed and approved by a moderation team (which differs by DLP).
[9] Buyers can also 'start a contest' where sellers submit competing entries of finished/ near-finished work (depending on the DLP).

Here DLPs perhaps reduce transaction costs, such as search and information costs (Pallais, 2014; Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2019; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2021). For example, Wood and Lehdonvirta (2021:1374) indicate that decreased search costs could come though platforms providing search engines and algorithmic suggestions, and reduced information costs might come through DLPs displaying digital certification and reputation scores (among other data).

For larger projects, work may be divided "into a series of phases, due dates, or deliverables" (Upwork.com, 2021) or 'milestones' (for review), where payments are made (upon approval) which the buyer and seller(/s) or agency discuss and agree on before the work commences.

The terms of services govern the buyers and sellers' interaction on the DLPs (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:30). The details of which will largely be covered in chapter five. For now we briefly discuss leaving feedback. Generally, once the task, job or project is complete and the seller has been paid, both parties are asked to provide feedback (or a review) and a rating (often with a grading of 1-5) depending on the DLP, which is published in their profiles.

As for fees, DLPs are (somewhat[10]) free to use, allowing their users a basic level of features. For example, buyers can sign up, post a task, job or project, receive bids, review sellers and communicate with them at no cost. Equally, sellers can sign up, personalise their profile, use DLP search features, bid on tasks, jobs or projects (albeit conditions apply[11]), enter contests, and discuss details of postings with potential buyers, free of charge (depending on the DLP).

3.4 Online task crowd work(ers)

In the context of paid *online task* crowd work(ers) only, work can be outsourced to the crowd either as micro tasks, or as macro tasks; each varying in size and skill (Briken et al., 2017:7). The former includes numerous types, and DLPs here vary by task specialisation (Berg et al., 2018:15-16). On MTurk.com (2020) for instance the tasks can range from but are not limited to, carrying out data validation and research, to survey participation and moderating content. By way of comparison, macro tasks tend to be larger projects performed over longer periods of time and often require a higher level of skill (Kuek et al., 2015:7). Indeed they reflect more traditional forms of 'contingent' and 'freelance' work and make up the majority of digital work that are being outsourced/ carried out through platforms (ibid, 2015:3; Wood et al., 2018:96).

The numbers for DLPs, posted tasks, jobs or projects, and people seeking work are steadily increasing (Schörpf et al., 2017:92). On a global scale according to Kuek et al., (2015:3), 4.8 million online freelancers had completed tasks in 2013 and generated gross service revenue of around $2 billion which they estimate could increase to $15 - 25 billion in the next decade.

In terms of where this market is emerging and what occupations and skills it is affecting, an index that established and tracks 5 prominent DLPs – Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com,

---

[10] There are however, wide-ranging fees, charges and taxes for both buyers and sellers, some optional and others non-optional (see s 5.2.2 below).
[11] DLPs provide sellers with a limited number of free *proposal credits*, *bids*, or *connects* (see s 5.2.2 below).

Upwork.com, Guru.com, and MTurk.com[12] – reveals that demand for software development and technology skills, and creative and multimedia work was the most predominant (making up well over half of all vacancies), followed by clerical and data entry, writing and translation, sales and marketing support and lastly, professional services (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018).

Though these vary by gender, most are male dominated. For example one study shows that software development, and creative work (the highest skills in demand), tend to be occupied more by males, and this appears broadly the case across the others (Pesole et al., 2018:40).

While sellers are dispersed globally, they tend to reside within low-medium income countries (Lehdonvirta et al., 2014:13). For instance, Horton, Kerr and Stanton (2017) found the top 20 countries[13], arranged here by continent, to be: 1. India, 2. Philippines, 4. Russia, 5. Pakistan, 6. Bangladesh, 8. China, 14. Vietnam, 15. Indonesia, and 18. Armenia (*Asia*), 3. Ukraine, 10. Poland, 11. UK, 12. Belarus, 13. Romania, 17. Serbia and 19. Germany (*Europe*), 7. US and 9. Canada (*North America*), 16. Argentina (*South America*), and last here, 20. Egypt (*Africa*).

Factors for engagement (be it short or long-term), appear wide-ranging and changeable. For example, Barnes et al., (2015:21, 28) reveal numerous motivations which include enjoyment for some, as a way of gaining skill, confidence and flexibility for others, and as offering a way to obtain or to maintain a labour market position, to earn or enhance their income. Moreover, a primary advantage can be seen in their autonomy as they usually decide where, when and how long they work, what tasks they do (Felstiner, 2011:154) and what buyers, methods and rates[14] through mobility power (Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:29; 2021:1389) and algorithmic control (Wood, 2019:113; Wood et al., 2019:64-65) for instance. Experiences that may come later as Alacovska (2018) found the opposite for those new to crowd work. Such motivations may alter due to personal circumstance, such as changing caring responsibilities or financial commitments, or due to acquiring new skills, or knowledge for example (Barnes et al., 2015).

Although there could be some benefits, crowd workers might also experience various issues in addition to the drawbacks discussed above around the lack of legal rights and protections. For example, Wood et al., (2019:56) suggest that problems can come via algorithmic control, resulting in low pay, social isolation, working irregular as well as unsociable hours, overwork, insufficient sleep and exhaustion. Indeed, Schörpf et al., (2017:97) also reveal similar issues with control affecting autonomy in terms of working time. Moreover, there could be problems with *privacy*, such as firm or researcher violation; *information asymmetries*, such as unequal availability of information in the buyer's favour. For example, sellers receive little information about buyers, and the task, job or project – and might result in *moral and ethical challenges*; and last *deception* by information asymmetries along with satisfaction clauses (and the lack

---

[12] Although, these DLPs appear to be the most visited and represent the majority of the market (in terms of gross transaction value) as well as different market mechanisms and contracting styles (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:243, 246), MTurk.com is concerned with micro work only (MTurk.com, 2020), which is not a focus for this study.
[13] While this concerns Upwork.com only, this DLP seems to be most prominent (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:243).
[14] Workers that are genuinely self-employed (as opposed to those that are falsely self-employed) usually tender for different contracts, negotiate prices for services and employ others in addition to, or in place of, themselves (Behling and Harvey, 2015:970).

of an effective dispute mechanism) leaving room for buyers to receive, reject and keep work without justification and for disguising the nature of the task, job or project to get consent (or compliance), by locking the sellers in, as exiting can negatively affect them (Felstiner, 2011).

While some seek to sidestep DLPs to avoid platform fees, or labour competition (Alacovska, 2018:1576) and perhaps the above issues, the social relations of production across all three parties "forcefully take place on the platform and cannot exist outside of it" (Gandini, 2018:7). Communications are often bound to the DLPs for surveillance for example, thereby ensuring that outside bargaining is averted, and the terms of service are met (Schörpf et al., 2017:97).

3.5 Crowdsourcing: The buyers

Paid crowdsourcing, online outsourcing or online work offers some unique benefit over other traditional outsourcing models (Felstiner, 2011:151-153). Platforms operate as a conduit and provide buyers with a means of outsourcing their paid work (often overseas), to a global pool of labour (the crowd) who span geographic and economic contexts, and enable coordination, performance, delivery, quality control, and payment of work online (Kuek et al., 2015:7). The benefit or motivations behind crowdsourcing appear to be of an economic nature – providing cheaper labour, on-demand (Berg et al., 2018:3). DLPs allow buyers a means of overcoming geographical distances and of exploiting economic differences. Sellers typically reside within low-medium income countries (Lehdonvirta et al., 2014:13) where there may be a lower cost of living, and so they could be more willing to accept a lower wage than those from countries with a higher cost of living (Berg et al., 2018:3). Moreover, 'labour arbitrage' or underbidding practices by sellers may force those competing for work in rich countries to reduce their pay (Graham, Hjorth and Lehdonvirta, 2017:145). There is greater access to skill (Zhao and Zhu, 2014:427), across various different time zones, and so all manner of task, job or project can be carried out twenty-four seven and quickly, given their large numbers (Berg et al., 2018:3).

The buyers' workforce could be adapted at a whim – because there is very little obligation to either the DLP or to the sellers (Felstiner, 2011:151-152) – and might occur in ways that may allow employment costs and regulation to be avoided (de Stefano, 2016:12). Indeed this can be achieved via "a process of legal engineering" (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:31); helped by issues of employment status ambiguity, and thereby of knowing which legal rights or protections apply, enabling buyers to 'game the system' (Taylor et al., 2017:33); or due to the strong 'freelancer identity' reducing the likelihood of workers' claiming (Wood, 2019:113).

While the identities of organisations tend to be obscured – allowing them to evade corporate social responsibility, and potential concerns over DLP use (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:26) – we know that users range from large to small (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:241), and are likely based in rich countries (Lehdonvirta et al., 2014:13). Indeed large corporations such as, General Electric and Microsoft, for example – are currently being publicly displayed on Freelancer.com and Upwork.com – and small and medium-sized companies such as Cup The Market and KLOO Games for example – are currently shown on Peopleperhour.com, as

reported to – use DLPs[15]. Moreover, Kässi and Lehdonvirta (2018:246) show the top 5 buyer countries to be the US, the UK, India, Australia and Canada; who total >90 per cent of posts.

Although there could be some advantage of using crowdsourced labour, there might also be some 'inherent risks'. For example, there could be issues of *control* over the work and how it is performed (Felstiner, 2011:153). For instance, some sellers – such as software or creative workers – nurture creativity, while holding a degree of control, and so buyers face numerous challenges over applying direct control (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2013:967; Schörpf et al., 2017:89). *Quality* can suffer due to the former; and last, knowledge of value potentially gleaned by crowd workers may lead to *intellectual property* issues (Felstiner, 2011:153-154).

3.6 Digital labour platform and buyer control: Decreasing (or increasing) risk

Platforms (and buyers) attempt control in three ways: via terms of services, self-employment classification and software algorithms (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:30). First, DLP terms of services have been tightly defined to specify governance structures and ensure that all transactions adhere to contractual requirements. This might relate to indirect bureaucratic or concertive controls (Barker, 1993) for example. Second and relatedly, by defining workers as independent contractors (in platform terms of services), self-discipline is encouraged, and commitment is mobilised to quality work. This could correspond to indirect control in terms of responsible autonomy approaches (Friedman, 1977a) for instance. Third, and finally, against the backdrop of the DLP terms of services, software algorithms (that are based on rating and reputation systems [Wood, 2019:112]), is another method for control. This form of 'consumer control' or more broadly 'algorithmic management' (Fuller and Smith, 1991; Lee et al., 2015), replaces direct control with computational processes that are embedded into labour relations and which manages and evaluates the exchange (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:24, 30). Maintaining a good reputation is crucial as DLPs use algorithms to filter work away from sellers with low ratings, making work through the platform less viable (Wood et al., 2019:64). This might relate to various forms for indirect control and responsible autonomy approaches.

Yet one thing to note is that while some works have linked algorithmic management with the use of control mechanisms aiming to generate commitment and self-direction (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Wood et al., 2019), other works have associated it with automated control and Taylorism as to automation of task assignment (Irani, 2015), and surveillance by monitoring screens, keystrokes, or clicks, for instance (Kittur et al., 2013; Elmer et al., 2019), which depicts *online task* crowd work as 'digital Taylorisation'. This indicates that information technologies can engender "the Taylorisation of white-collar work" (Bain and Taylor, 2000:9).

However, "control inevitably begets resistance" (Hall, 2010:167). While control over labour is not a primary objective for many DLPs, it is imperative for both them (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:29), and for buyers (Schörpf et al., 2017:89). That said, control can never be

---

[15] See Appendix A for other examples of organisations reported to use DLPs.

total – because of labour indeterminacy and/or structured antagonism for example – thereby leaving room for expressions of resistance and misbehaviour (Marks and Chillas, 2014:109).

Such (mis)behaviours, however, can take on different meanings for workers who lack formal structures of representation (or who may regard representation of this kind as futile). Notably when faced with "a changing industrial landscape and labour market configuration", Van den Broek and Dundon (2012:103) argue that unorganised workers have sought more innovative and subtle ways to resist managerial authority and power, and may apply here. For example, some works have shown sellers adapting to circumvent DLP rules by sidestepping platforms entirely (Alacovska, 2018:1576) or circumventing monitoring systems (Wood et al., 2019:64). Moreover, Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019:24-25) suggest that ratings are not always impartial, devoid of collusion or retaliation. While the nature of online work limits potential for collective organisation, and action or voice (Felstiner, 2011:152), work has also suggested a potential for self-organisation over social media groups, for instance (Wood et al., 2018:108).

3.6.1 Collective identity in platform work: Identity as a collectivised process

Collective identity in platform work can act as a countervailing force against employer power. For some DLP workers, online communities enable information to be shared between sellers about buyers, which can build network bonds (Panteli, Rapti and Scholarios, 2020:477). One example is the browser extension "Turkopticon" that allows sellers to leave or use reviews of buyers, with the intention of holding them accountable, and of prompting better behaviour on MTurk.com (Irani and Silberman, 2013:616). In another study, Gray et al., (2016:138) reveal collaboration among sellers to be widespread including sharing administrative overhead and task information, and helping each other with the completion of tasks, for example. A "strong collective identity may provide a vehicle for organising and expressing worker voice" (Panteli et al., 2020:482), perhaps even more should traditional union bargaining be regarded as not always suitable for contemporary forms of platform work (Joyce, Stuart and Forde, 2022:17).

3.7 Structured antagonism: Locating the source of conflict

Locating the origin of a structured antagonism poses a challenge given the complexity of the 'triangular relationship' between the DLP, the buyer, and the seller, and beyond. This can be seen in a number of scenarios, serving here as an example rather than as an exhaustive list.

The source of overt or latent conflict can stem from the DLP, the buyer or both. For example, Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019:1-3; 2021:1369-1370) argue that DLPs trigger a new economic relationship, or a dual contradictory process (that they term 'platform labour' or 'subordinated agency'), which entail features of self-employment on the one hand whereby workers access enhanced agency over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times and methods, while at the same time, face dependency on or increased subordination to DLPs on the other, which they contend produces a structured antagonism (cf. Joyce et al., 2022). This manifests as conflict towards the DLP in relation to fees, pay and voice, while workers retain their entrepreneurial attitudes towards the buyers. Yet Schörpf et al., (2017:89) suggest that a main issue for self-

employed crowd workers is securing continuous employment, and DLPs have become more important in fulfilling that need. Should the working arrangements have limited or no features of self-employment, or they possess many characteristics of direct-employment (Behling and Harvey, 2015:970), then this can entail an employment relationship (albeit, under bogus self-employment) and so a structured antagonism may exist in the traditional sense. Yet, there is a 'triangular relationship' (Schörpf et al., 2017:89) and thereby, it could be inferred that there is a shared employment relationship between all three parties. In this sense, the source of a structured antagonism is nebulous, difficult to locate, and is potentially split between the two.

3.8 Concluding summary

This chapter began by briefly outlining the gig economy in order to locate the positioning and scope of research within its composition (see Figure 3.1), and though contested, it also gave an idea of its overall scale. Platforms were then broadly examined by outlining their business models, considering a number of commonalities and discussing a regulatory debate (around issues of false self-employment), before narrowing down the discussion to web-based DLPs, *online task* crowd work(ers) – whom undertake macro tasks – and buyers, this study's focus. This included explicit links to LP dimensions developed in chapter two. These sections gave an overview of signing up to the DLPs, how they work and fees, followed by a discussion as to *online task* crowd work(ers) and buyers, DLP and buyer control and seller resistance, and collective identity and voice, and structured antagonism(s). The chapter has synthesised the extant literature or what is known into a coherent and critical form, thereby setting the scene for the phenomenon to be investigated. Consequently, it has also identified some areas that we still know little about. For example, we know how this market is emerging – in terms of its estimated size and trajectory, prominent DLPs, buyer locations and size, and seller locations and the occupations, skills and sexes affected. We also know how this market is regulated – in terms of existing regulatory schemes, the DLPs' terms of services, and algorithmic control – and numerous factors for engagement for both the buyers and sellers. We have seen from this background and context stem a number of risks for platform users and yet, the work and employment challenges and tensions are under-researched (Pongratz, 2018:60). This study will investigate this through the underutilised resource and lens of the LPT (Gandini, 2018:2). Chapter four (next) explains the research design and methodology. Afterwards, chapters five to ten will report the empirical findings in order to address the subsidiary research questions.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

4.1 Introduction

This study seeks to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions from the expansion and evolution of web-based DLPs for *online task* crowd workers and buyers. This chapter will explain the research design and methodology. It firstly considers the importance of meta-theoretical assumptions before outlining the epistemology, ontology and axiology of this work. Specifically, constructionism (in terms of epistemology) and realism and relativism (in terms of ontology) were chosen. Secondly, the chapter will discuss the theoretical stance of this study, in particular, interpretivism. Thirdly (as detailed in chapter one), it will recap the research gap/ problem, objective and questions prior to outlining techniques and procedures used for the thesis. These sections will include the methods of data collection, sampling and recruitment, the conduct of the interviews and the methods of data analysis. Specifically, this study uses publicly available DLP content, and semi-structured interviews, adopts purposive sampling strategies, and conducts QCA and template analysis. This chapter will then look at the limitations of the design, and ethical considerations, and last give a concluding summary.

4.2 Meta-theoretical assumptions

The development of knowledge in a particular field is underpinned by a research philosophy, or "a system of beliefs and assumptions" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019:130). These meta-theoretical assumptions have practical consequences that shape the way the research is carried out in terms of the topic and the focus of study, how the data is regarded, collected and analysed, how we theorise and how research accounts are written up (Cunliffe, 2010:5).

To take this point further, Crotty (1998:3) describes four elements of the research process as distinct, yet interconnected, which include *the epistemology* – the theory of knowledge which is embedded in the theoretical perspective, and therefore, the methodology – *the theoretical perspective* – the philosophical position which informs the methodology – *the methodology* – the strategy, plan, process or design behind the choice and use of methods – and finally, *the methods* – the techniques or procedures which are used in order to gather and analyse data.

As such, Saunders et al., (2019:130-131) note the need for a well-considered and consistent set of assumptions in constituting a credible research philosophy (or theoretical perspective), which will inform the other aspects of the research process. Therefore, care was taken when considering different *epistemological assumptions*, such as objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism (and their variants), *ontological assumptions*, such as realism and nominalism – (that both inform) theoretical perspectives, including positivism, interpretivism, critical inquiry (Crotty, 1998:5), structuralism and 'post' traditions (Prasad, 2018:7) – as well as, *axiological assumptions* (Saunders et al., 2019:130). These assumptions will now be considered below.

4.2.1 Epistemology, ontology and axiology

While there are other types of assumptions which are typically made by researchers working within each research philosophy (Saunders et al., 2019:133), to keep things relatively simple for the purpose of the thesis, we look at ontology, epistemology and axiology. Beginning with the first two, for Burrell and Morgan (1979:1), ontology refers to "assumptions which concern the very essence of the phenomena under investigation", and epistemology, to "assumptions about the grounds of knowledge… [especially] about how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings". Each theoretical stance embodies a particular way of understanding "what is" (ontology) and "what it means to know" (epistemology), and are philosophical issues which typically arise together (Crotty, 1998:10).

Epistemologically, research philosophies spread along a multidimensional continua between two opposing extremes[16], objectivism and subjectivism (Saunders et al., 2019:134). The first holds that "meaning and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness" (Crotty, 1998:8). Thus ontologically, it embraces realism (Saunders et al., 2019:135), advancing that "the social world external to individual cognition is a real world made up of hard, tangible and relatively immutable structures" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:4). Further, objectivism underpins the positivist stance (Crotty, 1998:6). In contrast, subjectivism holds that "meaning… is imposed on the object by the subject [/ social actors]" (ibid, 1998:9). Thus ontologically, it embraces nominalism (Saunders et al., 2019:137), advancing that "the social world… is made up of nothing more than names, concepts and labels which are used to structure reality" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:4). Further, subjectivism underpins stances of structuralism and post traditions (Crotty, 1998:9). We now turn to the orientation of this work.

Constructionism (or 'social constructionism') contrasts to objectivism (Crotty, 1998:42), but is a less extreme version of subjectivism (Saunders et al., 2019:137). Unlike the latter, "subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning" (Crotty, 1998:9). Its origins can be traced back to a number of academic disciplines, such as social philosophy, sociology, as well as the sociology of knowledge, among others (Cunliffe, 2008:124). At its core is the idea that "all reality, as meaningful reality, is socially constructed" (Crotty, 1998:54). That is to say it advances that "reality is constructed through social interaction in which social actors create partially shared meanings and realities" (Saunders et al., 2019:137). Social constructionism, ontologically, embraces realism and relativism (multiple realities), the latter advancing "what is said to be 'the way things are' is really just 'the sense we make of them'" (Crotty, 1998:63-64). Crucially, these assumptions underpin interpretivism, the theoretical stance of this work.

In terms of axiology, this refers to the role of values (Saunders et al., 2019:134). Saunders et al., (2019:145, 149) outline some implications for interpretivists. Specifically, they (2019:145) put forward that interpretivist research is value-bound; that interpretivist researchers are part

---

[16] As a side note, "most of the paradigm positions… [that is, the theoretical perspectives in terms of their defining epistemological, ontological and methodological characteristics], are now described as partly overlapping and forming a continuum rather than a dichotomy" (Niglas, 2010:219).

of what is researched, and therefore will be subjective; that such researchers' interpretations are key to contribution, and thus, there is a need for interpretivist researchers to be reflexive.

4.3 Theoretical perspective

Within the social sciences – where business research is situated (Bryman and Bell, 2015:19) – and humanities, the bulk of qualitative orientations are best described as non-positivistic or narrative tradition by inclination and include a range of traditions – hermeneutics, dramatism, semiotics, critical theory and post-structuralism (among others)[17] (Prasad, 2018:7). Although these non-positivist genres link to stances of interpretivism, structuralism, critical inquiry and post traditions, interpretivism is this study's research philosophy and so will be covered next.

Interpretivism emerged in the early and mid-twentieth century in the work of German, French and English writers, and was advanced as a critique of positivism from a subjectivist position (Saunders et al., 2019:148). These thinkers held the view that the subject matter (specifically people and their institutions), or methods or both of the social sciences differ from that of the natural sciences (Outhwaite, 1975:12; Bryman and Bell, 2015:28). Accordingly interpretivism contends that the study of human beings and their social worlds require a different logic from that of the study of physical phenomena because people of different cultures, under different circumstances, at different times, create different meanings (Saunders et al., 2019:148-149).

Furthermore, when accounting for the richness and complexity of social worlds and contexts interpretivist researchers are positioned well as they seek to create new, rich understandings by looking at the perspectives of different groups of people, while positivist researchers seek to discover definite, universal laws which apply to all by reducing such complexity to a series of law-like generalisations and thereby rich insights become lost (Saunders et al., 2019:149).

Moreover there is debate that the claims to certitude and objectivity of the positivist sciences cannot be sustained and that the findings from that of the natural sciences are themselves in fact social constructions and human interpretations but in a particular form (Crotty, 1998:71).

While there are a number of unique and distinct sub-traditions that fall under interpretivisim – such as symbolic interaction, hermeneutics, dramaturgy and dramatism, ethnomethodology, and ethnography – all sub-traditions "share fundamental interpretive ideas and assumptions" (Prasad, 2018:14, 19-104). In particular, is a commitment to *Verstehen* (or understanding) – advocated by Weber, 1864-1920 – which Duberley, Johnson and Cassell (2012:21) suggest:

> *Entails accessing and understanding the actual meanings and interpretations actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena in order to describe and explain their behaviour through investigating how they experience, sustain, articulate and share with others these socially constructed everyday realities.*

---

[17] It is worth noting however, that much work does constitute a form of *qualitative positivism* (Prasad and Prasad, 2002 cited in Prasad, 2018:2).

Prasad (2018:13) argues that "all interpretive traditions emerge from a scholarly position that takes human interpretation as the starting point for developing knowledge". In general, these sub-traditions emphasise the importance of history, language and culture (Crotty, 1998), and focus on multiple interpretations, meaning-making, complexity and richness (Saunders et al., 2019:149). This stance will thread through the design, conduct and presentation of this work.

4.4 Research gap/ problem, objective and questions (recapped)

A number of gaps were identified in the extant literature which underpin this work's core and subsidiary research question(s). Notably, the work and employment challenges and tensions require further exploration (Pongratz, 2018:60) respecting web-based DLPs, associated with paid *online task* crowd work (see Figure 3.1), especially using LPT (Gandini, 2018:2). In fact, elements of: skills, autonomy, consent and resistance (ibid, 2018:13) – and collective identity and voice (Pongratz, 2018:69; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:8; 2021:7) – and control (Wood, 2019:113), are under-researched. In other words, little is known about the social relations of production and value creation regarding both the supply (sellers), and demand side (buyers).

Given the lack of research in this particular area of the gig economy as to specific LP issues, this study will aim to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions from the expansion and evolution of web-based DLPs for *online task* crowd workers[18] and buyers. To achieve the research aim, four subsidiary research questions have been created (see Figure 4.1 below), and the sum of these will offer a definitive answer to the main research objective.

Figure 4.1: Core and subsidiary research questions (recapped)

- What are the work and employment challenges and tensions from the expansion and evolution of web-based DLPs for *online task* crowd workers and buyers?
  - *Do DLPs' terms of services differ in approach to LP issues?*
  - *How can LPT help understand challenges and tensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work when using DLPs?*
  - *How do DLPs impact the collective identity of sellers?*
  - *How is labour control implemented when using DLPs?*

4.5 Techniques and procedures

Having now discussed the meta-theoretical assumptions, the theoretical perspective and the research gap/ problem, objective and questions of this study, we now turn to techniques and procedures used throughout the work. Limitations and ethics are then considered from there.

---

[18] This refers to platforms including Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, being more prominent (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:243), and to sellers who undertake macro tasks (as opposed to micro tasks), being more representative (Wood et al., 2018:96).

4.5.1 Methods of data collection

This work deploys publicly available DLP content and semi-structured interviews with buyers and sellers, from 4 prominent web-based platforms. While the terms of services will advance understanding in respect of subsidiary research question one, the semi-structured interviews will do so with reference to subsidiary research questions two to four (see Figure 4.1 above).

4.5.1.1 Digital labour platform content: Terms of services

The terms of services (AKA user agreements or the terms and conditions, for example), and related policies were taken from 4 DLPs: Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com. While these platforms referred to a single document as a terms of service (in one way or another), other policies made up part of these agreements. Specifically, the user agreement, and 23 related policies, were taken from Upwork.com. The user agreement, and 8 associated documents, were taken from Freelancer.com. The terms and conditions, and 6 related policies, were taken from Peopleperhour.com. And lastly, the terms of service, and 2 associated documents, were taken from Guru.com (see Appendix B). These were accessed by signing up, and logging in to the 4 DLPs, saved offline in portable document format (CKA PDF), printed, and were analysed in line with the research questions (see s 4.5.4.1 below)[19].

4.5.1.2 Interview data: Developing the interview guide

While there are a number of different methods at the researcher's disposal for accessing the organisational world qualitatively (Duberley, et al., 2012:15), semi-structured interviews were conducted that cover questions on key dimensions from the LPT (see Appendix C), to which the interviewees were afforded a great deal of leeway on reply (Bryman and Bell, 2015:481).

In preparation of the guide, puzzlement to each of the research questions was stimulated by the existing literature and discussions with supervisors (Lofland et al., 2006:99). Each of the puzzlements were arranged into five general clusters of employment status (and later skills), autonomy, control, resistance and consent, and collective identity and organisation of labour. While the clusters seem to sit in isolation from one another, dimensions of LPT do not easily untangle and thus, there is a degree of blurring or overlap. Illustrating this point, Appendix D shows links between the research question(s), dimensions of LPT, and the interview guides.

Though the themes were largely derived from the LPT and thus, data collection commenced deductively, this study is underpinned by an interpretivist stance (typically associated with an inductive strategy[20]), and deals with predetermined themes in a more flexible and contingent way depending on how participants respond (Saunders et al., 2019:157, 438). The emphasis was on what the interviewees viewed as important in understanding and explaining patterns, events and forms of behaviour (Bryman and Bell, 2015:481). Crucially, the questions did not

---

[19] The terms of services were accessed in May 2022.
[20] Albeit, "[conveying] rigid divisions between deduction and induction… would be misleading" (Saunders et al., 2019:157).

always follow on as outlined and questions that were not included were asked. On the whole however, all the questions were asked, and a similar wording was used across all interviews.

The format of an interview guide can vary, reflecting the needs of the elected methodological traditions, as well as the personal preferences of the researcher (King, Horrocks and Brooks, 2019:63). Both thematic and dynamic dimensions were taken account of when preparing the guide and each underpin the interview questions. Thematically, questions concern the 'what' of an interview, in other words, the knowledge it produces (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:157). Spontaneous questioning will garner unprompted and vivid knowledge, whereas questioning that is more structured will produce data that is later easier to conceptualise (ibid, 2015:157). While there was a degree of flexibility in the conduct of the interviews, in the spirit of pushing forward, the latter stage of analysis was taken into account (see s 4.5.4.3 below), and so the guide was largely adhered to. Dynamically, questions relate to the 'how' of the interview, that is, the interpersonal relationships it produces (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:157). Questioning should encourage positive interaction, ensure conversation flow and stimulate participants to talk in detail about their experiences and feelings (ibid, 2015:157). To these ends, topics and questions were formulated in a way to help answer the research questions (but often without being overly specific and) with some order, comprehensible and relevant language was used throughout the interviews, and leading, closed, overly-complex, and multiple questions, were mostly avoided[21] (Lofland et al., 2006:106; Bryman and Bell, 2015:488; King et al., 2019:81).

Moreover, care was taken to ensure that the interview questions were largely descriptive (by mainly using "what' and "how", and avoiding the use of "why" questions), in order to draw out spontaneous descriptions instead of speculative accounts (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:159).

Two styles are available to the researcher when it comes to the layout of interview questions (King et al., 2019:66). One is to formulate full questions, and the other, is to include memory prompts. King et al., (2019:68) advocate "inexperienced qualitative interviewers opt for the… [former approach], as the skill of phrasing questions appropriately... takes… time to acquire". This research formulated full questions in advance to mitigate the interviewer's inexperience.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015:160-162) argue there are 9 main types of questions that may be asked including – *introductory*, *follow-up*, *probing*, *specifying*, *direct*, *indirect*, *structuring*, and *interpreting* questions, and *silence*. For this study, each topic within the guide typically began with *introductory*/ or *structuring* questions. Use of the former intending to "yield spontaneous, [and] rich descriptions, where [the] subjects themselves provide what they have experienced as the main aspects of the phenomena investigated", and the latter to indicate a shift in topic (ibid, 2015:161-162). Use of *follow-up*/ *direct* questions were then largely deployed to extend answers given (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:161). King et al., (2019:69, 82-83) argue that the former is synonymous to *probing* questions and suggest there are three main types including

---

[21] "The advantage of using full questions [in an interview guide] is that it forces the researcher to think carefully about question formulation" (King et al., 2019:66).

– elaboration, clarification and completion probes, and largely need to be devised throughout an interview[22]. There does however, seem to be a distinction as "probing questions… [do not state] what dimensions are to be taken into account" (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:161). Use of *specifying* (or operationalising) questions can also be seen within the *follow-up* questions and are designed to get a more precise description, as opposed to a general statement (ibid, 2015:161). *Indirect* questions and *silence* also featured and *interpreting* questions will largely have appeared in the interviewer's usage of clarification probes at the point of the interviews.

Perhaps more nuanced, Patton (2015:444-445) suggests that there are 6 question types that can be asked – including *experience and behaviour*, *opinion and values*, *feeling*, *knowledge*, *sensory*, and *background/ demographic* questions. These categories/ or question types seek to elicit specific kinds of data (King el al., 2019:65). *Experience and behaviour* questions aim to evoke experiences, behaviours, activities and actions, which would have been observable had an observer been present; *opinion and values* questions aim to understand what people think, by asking about their opinions, values and judgments; *feeling* questions contrast to the latter (understanding cognitive, interpretive processes) and aim to draw out emotions related to experiences and thoughts[23]; *knowledge* questions relate to the factual information held by the participant; *sensory* questions ask what was seen, heard, touched, tasted and smelled[24]; and lastly, *background/ demographic* questions identify any personal characteristics (Patton, 2015:444-445), and are crucial for contextualising people's answers in the analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2015:488). While King et al., (2019:65) argue that these categories may not always be as distinct as are purported, Appendix D details their use across the two interview guides.

In addition, "no recipe for sequencing questions can or should exist" (Patton, 2015:445; King et al., 2019:65). However, consideration was given to the beginning, main body, and the end of the interview guides. The guides start with questions that are simple and unthreatening by asking for descriptive information. This was especially important to get right, as a failing here could have impacted how rapport developed (ibid, 2019:85). For instance, questions 1 - 4 on the guides eased the interviewees into the focus of the interview, by requesting an outline of career history/ motivations, the process of signing up and using DLPs, and then client/ online freelancer associations. Importantly, as an interview develops it is commonplace to shift into more difficult areas of questioning (King et al., 2019:85). The sequencing of topic areas were as follows – 1. Warm-up questions, 2. Employment status, 3. Skills, 4. Autonomy, 5. Control, 6. Resistance and consent, 7. Collective identity and organisation of labour, and last 8. Cool-off questions. In particular, the latter topic areas were intentionally placed towards the end of the guides, and meant a strategy was needed (that is, topic area 8) to ease the interviewees out of the interview. The intention here was to have closing questions which depart from self-disclosure, and to pass as much control, as was possible, to the participants (ibid, 2019:85).

---

[22] Further, King et al., (2019:69) suggest that the terms probes and prompts are often conflated and so draw a distinction. Prompts are interventions that seek to clarify a question and also feature in the guides and interviews.
[23] Patton (2015:444) suggests that this question type often gets confused with opinion and values and so care was taken over the phraseology e.g. 'what feelings does this provoke in you?' was used rather than, 'how did you feel?'
[24] While argued as distinct from experience and behaviour, questions here were treated as a subset of this category.

This can be seen in questions 15a which focuses on desired future changes; 15b that invites them to offer advice; and 15c/ d which asks if they wish to add anything/ have any questions.

Lastly, since it is both permissible and advisable to change the guide in the course of a study (King et al., 2019:66), the first 5 interviews were treated as a pilot. Crucially, insights gleaned here informed subsequent ones. For example, the initial questions on autonomy, control and resistance were rephrased to be more empathetic to the respondent and a topic area on skill was added in as it was thought that existing questions did not fully elicit participant accounts.

4.5.1.3 Collecting background/ demographic information

A questionnaire was utilised to collect participant background/ demographic information (see Appendix E). At first it was thought that data of this kind could be established from the users' profile(s) within (and across) the DLP(s). Yet DLPs have a relatively problematic, limited and inconsistent range of information available, thus a survey tool was used which seemed to be more sensible. For example, data on name, age, gender, country, occupation, skills typically offered or demanded, aggregate tenure, organisation, and use, either cannot be obtained, or should not be relied upon. For sellers (though information appears to be more abundant than that of the buyers), some DLPs only allow a first name and an initial from the second. This is the case for Freelancer.com, and Upwork.com (perhaps making it more challenging for them to be located outside of the DLP). Moreover, a name (of a person or otherwise) could merely be a front for a larger group of sellers (or agency). Age is not displayed and gender might be difficult to ascertain in the absence of a person's name or profile picture, or both, and even if available, could merely be a front. Country is available, but might be faked, perhaps through changing one's internet protocol (CKA IP) address, as there may be some perceived benefit to this (see 'liability of foreignness' concept in Lehdonvirta et al., 2014:2). Occupation is also difficult to garner due to use (being another aspect that cannot be obtained on a DLP) and is not always displayed. Although assumptions could be made on the basis of skills advertised, the occupation of a seller may be something entirely different when DLPs are used as a way of enhancing their main source of income (Barnes et al., 2015:21). Skill advertised might not necessarily be the same as skills typically employed (albeit, Freelancer.com ranks their use). Aggregate tenure cannot be obtained as tenure is only available on the latter. Moreover, the sellers may have (or have had) a number of user accounts within and across the DLPs. And lastly, names of buyer organisations associations are not typically displayed on user profiles.

4.5.2 Sampling and recruitment

In order for this study to best address its research aims, purposive sampling strategies were adopted. Notable, "the criterion most commonly proposed for sampling in qualitative studies is diversity" (King et al., 2019:57). Participants – specifically, buyers and sellers – and sites – in particular, 4 web-based platforms as well as buyer organisations – have been strategically chosen due to their relevance (Bryman and Bell, 2015:429). The main aims being to capture the bulk of activity, but also to ensure a spread across DLPs, occupations and geography of supply and demand. Moreover, given that the sample population is difficult to reach and that

networks of individuals are a focus of attention (Coleman, 1958), snowball sampling (a form of volunteer sampling) was carried out. Here, a small group of people are sampled, relevant to the research questions, who then go on to propose other participants, and so on (Bryman and Bell, 2015:435). To support this aim, self-selection sampling was used (another form of volunteer sampling), whereby a need was publicised for participants, which allowed them to identify their desire to take part (Saunders et al., 2019:323). This largely came in the form of letters sent over LinkedIn and Twitter (see Appendix F), timed posts and 'tweets' over these services, and posts in Facebook groups[25] (see Appendix G), DLPs – inspired by Wood et al., (2019) – and on forums (see Appendix H). These were linked to the web advertisement (see Appendix I) that gave information about the research[26], participation, and allowed individuals to register an interest and/ or refer-a-friend (see s 4.5.2.3 below), helping snowball sampling.

Snowball sampling falls below a broader category of purposive sampling, termed sequential sampling, and uses the gradual selection principle when the research goal is the generation of theory/broadly defined terms (see s 4.4 above) or as data are being collected, the sample evolves of its own accord, and units are selected by virtue of their relevance to the research goals (Teddlie and Yu, 2007:80). An *a priori* purposive sampling approach was taken in that a criteria was established for selecting participants ahead of time, and created to answer the research question(s) (Hood, 2007:157), in line with the aims above. Notably, the participants – apropos sellers – were required to vary by sex, age, country, DLP, aggregate tenure, skills typically employed and use. And the buyers, were required to differ by country, industry and sector, DLP, aggregate tenure, skills typically employed and use (see Appendix J). Crucially this approach aligns with this study's theoretical perspective because "interpretivists seek to capture the multiple perspectives… inherent in most human endeavours" (Willis et al., 2007 cited in McChesney and Aldridge, 2019:232). As noted above a survey tool was used here[27].

4.5.2.1 Plan A
Broadly speaking, two strategies were put into action concurrently whilst attempting to obtain access – Plans A and B. 'Plan A' involved a mass mailing to buyer organisations by LinkedIn and Twitter, and tweets – to generate interest and secure access to the hiring managers and then following the chain out to sellers – and also requesting assistance from the 4 DLPs over various communication channels. The letters provided information as to the research project, their potential participation, and a 'Uniform Resource Locator' (URL) which if/ when selected, navigated persons to the web advertisement. Notable, a report was offered that summarised the findings to enhance any chance of access. In all cases, the interviewees would receive a recompense of £20 in the way of an Amazon.co.uk eGift Voucher, or an equivalent Gift Card from their home countries' respective website. Though organisations seemingly appear to be reluctant to publicly reveal their use of DLPs (such as in Corporaal and Lehdonvirta, 2017:4),

---

[25] While there is said to be "no intimacy without reciprocity" (Oakley, 1981:49), professional accounts were used and care was taken in identifying (and crafting) online representations of the researcher (Reich, 2015:410).
[26] Acknowledgement – the web advert was kindly proposed by Dr Greetje Corporaal of the Oxford Internet Institute.
[27] DLPs have a relatively problematic, limited and inconsistent range of information available, which warranted the use of a survey tool in order to establish participant characteristics (see s 4.5.1.3 above).

32 were found listed on DLPs (Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com and Upwork.com) and 1 in the aforementioned study. An additional 9 were also established through the survey tool in the participants' responses that were given. These organisations can be seen in Appendix A.

In total this culminated in 384 letters sent over LinkedIn 'messaging' to 384 personal profiles, and 41 letters sent via Twitter 'direct message' to 41 business 'handles' (where there was an option to send a message), and 728 tweets, which targeted the 117 Twitter handles that had been found in total[28]. Adding handles within a tweet places a '1' in the notification bell for the attention of whoever manages the account. Limited to 280 characters by the platform, tweets were scheduled in advance (and took account of the best times to post and time zones), and posted indirectly using a social media management platform, namely Hootsuite.com. Tweets included a URL, which if/ when selected, directed those interested to the web advertisement.

Although the utilisation of pertinent hashtags (to promote a particular tweet), and further tags (which alerts a specific user, whether they follow you, or not, or vice versa), was not possible because of the imposed character limit, a generic 'pinned' tweet was utilised for this purpose (that the researcher retweeted and), which apposite Twitter accounts were asked to retweet.

Given the number of restrictions that have been placed on LinkedIn messaging, letters were sent to individuals once the invitation to connect had been accepted (which happened on 96 occasions), or because there was an option of a 'free message' available (and happened on 79 occasions), or through a process of withdrawing a connection request and sending a new invitation to connect, but with a short message restricted to 300 characters. This contained a brief introduction, and a OneDrive URL, which if/ when selected, directed persons interested to a personalised introductory letter, rather than to the web advertisement (and happened on 209 occasions). Though LinkedIn 'InMail' allows you to directly message other members that you are not connected with, a paid premium subscription is required, and even then, will only entitle you to a limited number (with 3, 15, 20 or 30 available, depending on the plan), before you are required to purchase more. Similarly, Twitter direct messages restrictions meant that it was not always possible to send direct messages which the handles helped to overcome[29].

Moreover, letters were sent to Peopleperhour.com (via Twitter direct message, their website 'submit a request' feature, and over LinkedIn messaging to their founder and chief executive officer [CEO], Xenios Thrasyvoulou, and their co-founder and former chief technology officer [CTO], Simos Kitiris, their former CTO and now chief product officer, Spyros Lambrinidis and 5 directors); Freelancer.com (over Twitter direct message, their 'contact us' feature and over LinkedIn messaging to their founder and CEO, 'Matt' Barrie, non-executive directors, Darren Williams and Simon Clausen, and 9 members of the senior management); Upwork.com (via Twitter direct message, their 'partner with us' email address and over LinkedIn messaging to their former CEO, Stephane Kasriel, and their current CEO, Hayden Brown, their co-founder

---

[28] LinkedIn profiles and Twitter handles were identified purposively using online search features.
[29] Where possible, non-responders were pursued with a further 2 reminders.

and CTO, Stratis Karamanlakis, 8 members of the senior management, and 5 directors); and Guru.com (over Twitter direct message, their website 'contact us' feature, and over LinkedIn messaging to their founder and CEO, Inder Guglani, and their co-founder, James Slavet and 8 members of the senior management)[30]. These set out information about the research, their potential participation, i.e. ways they could help (buyer introductions and/or allowing posting) and contained a URL, which if/ when selected, navigated persons to the web advertisement.

4.5.2.2 Plan B

In a similar way, 'Plan B' worked the other way around, that is targeting the sellers, and then following the chain out to the buyers. Like Plan A, this involved various aspects, with the first being to create a list of potential participants in order to connect with and then message over LinkedIn. Likewise, the letters provided information about the research project, their potential participation, and a URL, which if/ when selected, navigated potential participants to the web advertisement. While it is possible to message individuals via DLPs directly, communications are unavoidably framed by a new or existing task, job or project and it was important that the participants genuinely saw the interview as research participation, rather than as a paid task (Wood et al., 2019:63). Further, communications can be monitored, and so may have drawn attention to a breach in the terms of service, thus, was avoided where possible (see the final element attempted below). Instead (and following a purposive sampling strategy), the DLPs' search features were used (albeit, was preliminary and with caution), so as to identify a mix of potential participants[31]. A Google search tool was then used to find their LinkedIn profiles. Individuals appear to be consistent in their use of profile pictures across online platforms. By 'right clicking' on their DLP profile image displayed, and selecting "search Google for image", together with typing in their full name, along with the word 'LinkedIn', this often, although not always, led to their LinkedIn profiles. From here and similarly to above, it was then a case of sending a connection request, or the option of a 'free message', or a process of withdrawing a connection request and sending a new invitation to connect, but with a restricted message.

In total a mass mailing of 445 letters – made up of 200 accepted connection requests, 3 'free messages', and 231 'withdraw and reconnects' – were sent via LinkedIn to 434 profiles, and/ or over email[32]. This formed a basis for the next part of the plan, growing an audience for the purpose of advertising to. Where invitations to connect had been accepted, their connections became open to searching and browsing, leading to relevant connections being made, albeit restrictions applied. It was only possible to search, browse and connect potential participants in this way, a certain number of times in any given month, before 'blocks' were put into place and when too many invitations were ignored or left pending, restrictions applied[33]. Growing a Twitter audience is less straightforward, as following an account does not necessarily equate

---

[30] All names displayed here are publicly available data.
[31] DLPs have a relatively problematic, limited and inconsistent range of information available, which warranted the use of a survey tool in order to establish participant characteristics (see s 4.5.1.3 above).
[32] 11 emails were also acquired/ sent and where possible, non-responders were pursued with a further 2 reminders. Within these, 5 individuals were sent LinkedIn messages and emails, and 6 were emailed only.
[33] The 'my network' manage (sent) invitations feature was used here in order to withdraw older connection requests.

to an account following you back (and is required for tweets to be viewed). Although the use of pertinent hashtags were utilised on occasion to promote a particular post, the utilisation of mentions (which alerts a particular user, whether connected to or otherwise), was avoided to ensure that the advert applied to all and was thought less effective personalised. Posts were scheduled in advance (like the scheduled tweets), and took account of the best times to post and time zones, and were shared indirectly 721 times, via the Hootsuite.com platform. Posts included a URL, which if/ when selected, directed those interested to the web advertisement.

Further, this post was posted 83 times via 38 Facebook groups (of 68 identified) which were thought to have appropriate audiences. An individual wishing to post is often at the mercy of an admin, or moderator, however. As such, consistency was an issue, or it often ran counter to group rules (which are usually agreed to upon requesting to join). Hence, posts across 30 out of the 68 groups were rejected either at the point of posting, or were eventually removed.

One final element attempted was to recruit sellers by way of posting 'hidden tasks' on to the DLPs (and posting on pertinent forums), and then following the chain to their buyers. Similar to the letters in Plan A and B, posts offered information about the research project, potential participation, and a URL, which if/ when selected, directed people to the web advertisement. A note was also added that participation in this study is voluntary and so should not be seen as a job and also clarified that no feedback would be left (Wood et al., 2019:63). Posting this advert, however, breached the enforced terms of service, and therefore needed overcoming. For example, non-approval reasons included "requests to complete university/college/school work" (from Peopleperhour.com), "job posts that act as advertisements" (from Guru.com and Freelancer.com), and "an offer/agreement to pay outside of Upwork[.com]". As above, letters were sent to the 4 DLPs in order to seek their permission to place a post. Though the advert encountered human moderation on DLPs Peopleperhour.com and Guru.com (and usually in forums), which, despite requests for an exception to be made, was not possible to bypass, it faced automated moderation on Freelancer.com and Upwork.com, making it possible[34]. This came through a process of trial and error, whereby text was systematically removed until the post was successfully posted. Crucially the URL remained that took communications outside of the DLPs[35], and so allowed those interested to register their interest and/ or refer-a-friend.

4.5.2.3 Refer-A-Friend

A refer-a-friend scheme worked towards facilitating both Plan A and B, and was built into the working of each strategy. This scheme had the potential for buyer to buyer(s) and/or seller(s) referrals and also seller to seller(s) and/or buyer(s) referrals. It worked through people telling their friends about this study (and were encouraged to do so over social media), their friends then registering their interest (through the survey tool), choosing option 'yes' under "was this study referred to you by a friend?" and then entering the referrers' first and last names. Each

---

[34] Albeit, Upwork.com on 2 out of 2 occasions caught up with the post and removed it (with a seller on at least 1 occasion alerting them to it), and Freelancer.com became more of a challenge to post, even with the same advert.
[35] Albeit, potential participants often messaged their questions via the DLPs.

week the researcher checked to see if someone had been named as a referrer and for every person (up to four) who had named a referrer and also went onto be interviewed, the referrer received a recompense of £5 in the way of an Amazon.co.uk eGift Voucher, or an equivalent Gift Card from their home countries' respective website. The scheme was pushed across the letters, posts and tweets via LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, the posts on DLPs and forums, the web advert, participant information sheet[36] (see Appendix K), survey tool, and interviews.

There were a number of terms and conditions, however (that had been stipulated in the web advertisement) which applied, and had been included for various reasons. In order to qualify the referrers needed to have registered (so that they could be contacted), the referrals must have gone on to be interviewed (to ensure that they were useful to the study), a minimum of 2 registered referrals was required (as 1 referral per referrer was always deducted to ensure anonymity), and the referees were required to enter the first and last names of their referrers on registration (to ensure that the correct referrer was recompensed). Further considerations were that up to four referrals would be awarded for only (to mitigate it seeming coercive), the offer applied to individuals even if they had not been interviewed themselves (to open it up to more people who may be able to assist with recruitment) and lastly, if someone was referred twice, the first named referrer was included (as recompensing all here would be impractical).

4.5.2.4 Sample size, success rate and composition

The issue of sample size for most non-probability sampling methods (including purposive, or volunteer sampling) is debatable, and "there are no rules" (Saunders et al., 2019:315). There has nonetheless been various attempts to clarify with one author remarking that anywhere in between 20 - 30 qualitative interviews is normal (Warren, 2002:99). In fact, one study signals that 15 - 60 participants could be more accurate (Saunders and Townsend, 2016:849), albeit Mason (2010) revealed a mean average of 31 across 560 PhD studies in Britain and Ireland.

Bryman and Bell (2015:437) argue however that "if saturation is the criterion for sample size, specifying minima or maxima for sample sizes is pointless". Data saturation is reached when additional data offers little or no new information or themes (Saunders et al., 2019:315). This occurred at around interview 27 as the next 7 interviews did not appear to add anything new, and interviews 23 - 27 added little new data, especially in terms of themes and broad issues.

Although 43 potential participants registered their interest to take part in the study by way of the survey tool, only the 34 which went onto be interviewed have been included in Table 4.1 – 4 were excluded in accordance with the participant information sheet, 2 did not wish to be interviewed, 2 did not reply to the interview invitation, and 1 was not happy with the voucher that was being offered as a recompense of time, and thus did not participate in the interview.

In terms of the success rate of each aspect to recruitment – determined by dividing the sum of those that took part (in Table 4.1 below), by the sum of attempts made (detailed above) –

---

[36] The participant information sheet is discussed in detail in s 4.5.3 below.

posting hidden tasks on to Freelancer.com and Upwork.com proved most successful having worked 50 per cent of the time (albeit, it became too challenging to do after the 2 occasions). Emails were the next most successful having worked 27.27 per cent of the time (albeit, were difficult to find). While Plan B's LinkedIn messaging led to the highest number of participants, it only worked 5.07 per cent of the time (and yet, was essential). Facebook posts and tweets had the lowest success rates having worked only 2.4 per cent, and 0.14 per cent of the time. Lastly, from the 31 participants, the refer-a-friend scheme worked 9.68 per cent of the time[37].

Table 4.1: Obtaining access: The outcome of each strategy

Strategies: Plans A and B	Participants		
	Sellers	Buyers	Other (III)
Facebook messenger			0
LinkedIn messaging	22	0	
Twitter messages		0	
DLP assistance (I)		0	
Websites			0
Emails	3		0
Facebook groups	2		
Internet forums	0		
LinkedIn posts	0		
DLP posts	2		
Tweets		1	
In-person (II)	1		
Refer-A-Friend	2	1	

Key

    I.   While Peopleperhour.com and Freelancer.com had showed an interest in the study pre-COVID-19 (e.g. Freelancer.com was going to check to see if any of their "customers" were willing to participate), they stopped responding to the researcher's communications once the crisis had hit.

    II.   1 seller was met in-person (by chance).

    III.   An attempt was made to reach out to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the Confederation of British Industry, and the Freelancers Union.

Participant characteristics will now be described, first for sellers, and then for buyers. These line up with the sampling aims (as specified in s 4.5.2 above). The 32 sellers are made up of 25 males and of 7 females, with ages ranging from 22 to 60. 9 are from *Asia* (specifically 3 in India and Pakistan, and 1 in Palestine, Turkey and China), 4 are from *Africa* (specifically 1 in Egypt, South Africa, Tunisia and Kenya), 2 are from *North America* (specifically 2 in US), 1 is

---

[37] Excluding the 3 participants who came from the scheme.

from *South America* (in Argentina), 15 are from *Europe* (specifically 7 in UK, 3 in Romania, 2 in France and 1 in Ukraine, Croatia and Germany) and last 1 is from *Oceania* (in Australia)[38].

Of these, currently 14 use Peopleperhour.com, 12 use Freelancer.com, 20 use Upwork.com, 10 use Guru.com[39], and 5 specified use of others alongside these (see Figure 4.2 below). 19 stated, however, that they have used Peopleperhour.com, 23 have used Freelancer.com, 21 have used Upwork.com and 11 have used Guru.com and some have experience of others[40].

Figure 4.2: Digital labour platforms currently used by sellers
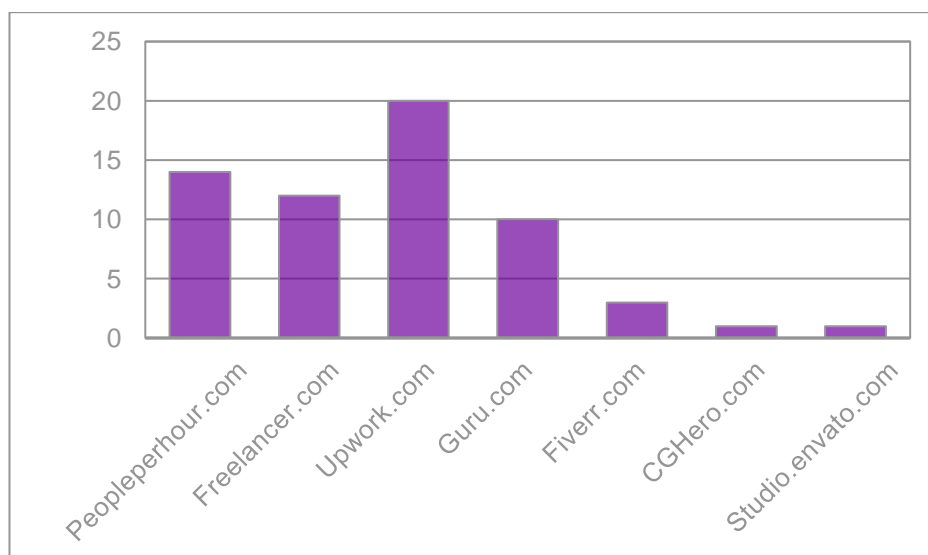
Concerning aggregate tenure, this ranges from 3 months to 17 years (see Figure 4.3 below).

Figure 4.3: Aggregate tenure of digital labour platform use for sellers
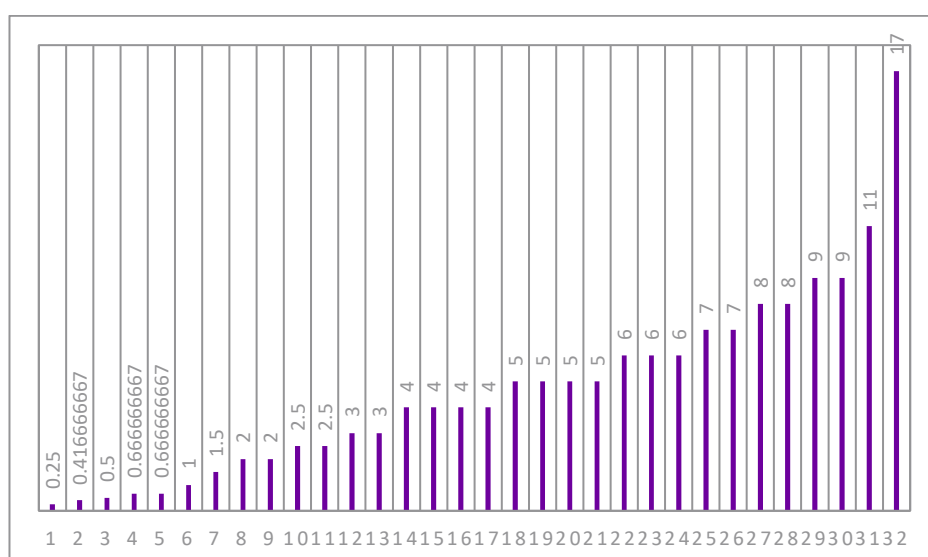
---

In terms of occupation and skills typically employed, occupations vary and approximately 48 (out of 131) different tasks, jobs or projects were identified. For visualisation purposes, these 48 were placed into classifications of occupation types (or online gig work) on DLPs, created by Kässi and Lehdonvirta (2016; 2018) and reproduced in Wood et al., (2019). This task was made easier since the 38 examples of corresponding projects given were used directly in the survey tool questionnaire for participants to select (see Appendix E). Figure 4.4 below shows skills typically employed by sellers and demonstrates that creative and multimedia skills, and software development and technology work are predominant. Next, is writing and translation, clerical and data entry, sales and marketing support and last, are the professional services[41].

Figure 4.4: Skills typically employed by sellers
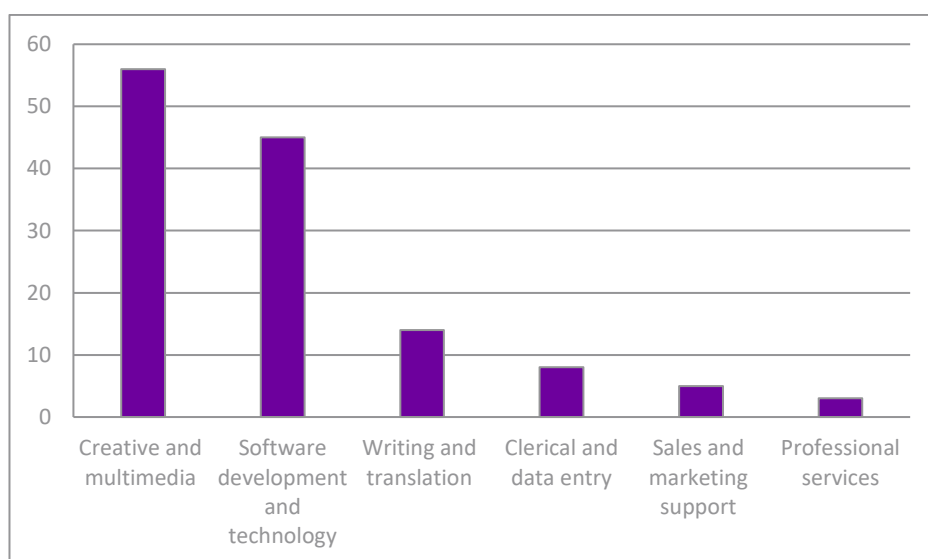
Finally, and as to use, 15 sellers specified their use of the DLP(s) as a means to obtain their main source of income, 16 sellers stated their use as a means to enhance their main source of income, and 1 seller specified no DLP use as they currently only deal with buyers directly.

With regard to the 2 buyers, one buyer is UK-based and the other buyer is Australia-based[42]. The former's organisation operates in the *textiles; clothing; leather; footwear* sector while the latter's operates in the *financial services; professional services*. DLPs used by the former are Fiverr.com, Peopleperhour.com and Upwork.com and the latter is Upwork.com. The former's aggregate tenure is 3 years and the latter's 5. The former usually post tasks, jobs or projects in need of animation, game development, logo design, photography, presentations, software development, video production, voice acting and web development skills and has experience of 20 sellers over 150 tasks, jobs or projects, and the latter generally posts for presentations and web development skills and has experience of 10 sellers over 10 tasks, jobs or projects.

---

[41] Notable, this weighting of skills mirror Kässi and Lehdonvirta's (2018) findings on where this market is emerging.
[42] Notable, these countries feature in Kässi and Lehdonvirta's (2018) list of top 5 buyer countries.

4.5.3 Conduct of interviews: Before, during and after

What actually transpired in the interviews is crucial, irrespective of how well the methodology is understood or how well designed the study is[43]. Moreover, communications that preceded the interviews may have affected how rapport developed (King et al., 2019:71, 77-78). Much of the technical matters of interviewing – especially activity and rapport and question origins, mechanics, types and format (see s 4.5.1.2) – and of introducing the project – by way of the letters, posts and tweets via LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, the posts on DLPs and forums, the web advert, and the participant information sheet, etc. (see s 4.5.2) – are detailed above, along with the rationale. Here we address the conduct of the interviews regarding the format, equipment, presentation and introduction, and the steps undertaken after they had occurred.

A remote video technique, in particular, Skype-to-Skype video calling was deemed to be the most suited. This was viewed as an attractive and viable option for a number of key reasons. First, interviewees were geographically dispersed in such a way that conventional interviews would not have been possible given the limited resources regarding time or budget. Second, an assumption was made (based on the DLP buyer-seller exchange), that individuals would likely have access to a personal computer (PC) or other device containing hardware usually built-in such as a webcam, speaker and microphone and have an internet connection. Third, researchers have shown remote video increases participation (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014) and lastly, Skype is usually referred to and utilised by researchers over other software (such as Ekiga, FaceTime, Jitsi, Messenger, Tox, Viber, WeChat, WhatsApp, and Zoom), it is free (King et al., 2019:121) and all manner of communication exchange encrypted (Skype, 2020).

Since the interviews were to be audio-recorded for transcription, analysis and to capture the interviewees' answers in their own terms (Bryman and Bell, 2015:488), good equipment and internet was important. Here a reliable university managed laptop (a Lenovo ThinkPad X280 with inbuilt webcam, speaker and microphone) and a digital audio recorder (an Olympus DS-9500 device with lock and 256-bit encryption) was used and reliable internet was accessible.

How a research project is presented, and how the researcher presents oneself, could impact on how rapport develops (King et al., 2019:77), and so care was taken over both written and verbal communications and self-presentation. Beyond the initial point of contact (notably, the letters, posts and tweets via LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook and posts on DLPs and forums, etc.), people had a choice to navigate to the web advert, which contained further information, and then had a choice to register their interest and/ or refer-a-friend. In doing so, they would then be presented with even more comprehensive details via a participant information sheet. This appeared as a 'read-only' OneDrive Word document prior to the questionnaire, and had clear and comprehensible information around the research, what their involvement would be, data protection and confidentiality, complaints, contacts, signing up and the referral scheme. Beyond these automated communications, persons were then contacted by the researcher's

---

[43] The interviews were conducted over 8 months between January and August 2020.

university email (or, on occasion, through LinkedIn messaging), in order to invite them along to a Skype interview. The emails (or messages) contained a request to exchange necessary information such as Skype details, a convenient date and time (to which was later confirmed with a calendar email invite) and to complete the participant consent form (see Appendix L). Further, communications also contained a refer-a-friend reminder and details of the scheme.

Moreover, it was suggested to the participants that the interview should take place in a quiet and private setting as far as possible. At first, the researcher ensured this their end by using the dedicated PhD interview rooms at the Alliance Manchester Business School. But, during the period of lockdown (due to COVID-19) this was not possible and so an interviewing area was created at the researcher's home but with the same equipment as was specified above.

While the written communications described above worked toward setting-up expectations in the interviewee-to-be, King et al., (2019:78) however, point out the danger of the assumption that no further explanations would be required at the point of interview, and refer to the harm done to the generation of rapport. Taken and adapted from Lofland et al., (2006:104) is a list of self-instructions at the beginning of each interview guide to mitigate this. This incorporates an explanation of the study's nature and purpose, assurances of confidentiality, expectations in respect of questions, answers and participant conduct, researcher background information and a request to audio-record the interview; explaining why the researcher wished to do this.

Soon after each interview, a case summary was written and the encrypted audio was sent to a university approved transcription service. The former step is suggested in Bryman and Bell (2015:488-489) and King and Brooks (2017:31). The latter authors advise that this should be carried out on the basis that "retaining a sense of participants' perspectives in a more holistic way can be useful". Noted here was where the interview took place, whether the interviewee was open or guarded, how well the aims of the research was understood, whether there was any aspects of the participants' physical presentation that was striking and any other feelings about the interview (Bryman and Bell, 2015; King and Brooks, 2017). The latter step created verbatim transcripts in a timely manner and were formatted in a way to facilitate the analysis.

4.5.4 Methods of data analysis

While a number of different versions of thematic analysis can be used in qualitative research (see King and Brooks, 2018), this work conducted QCA (see s 4.5.4.1 below) and a template style of analysis (see s 4.5.4.3 below). Seven *a priori* themes (in Table 4.2 below), which are based on the extant LP and crowd work literature, have been used across the data methods.

Table 4.2: The a priori themes

A priori themes	Descriptions
Skills	Includes: capital-labour struggles around use-values (e.g. skill that resides in the man [sic] himself, skill demanded by the job and the political definition of skill).
Labour indeterminacy	Includes: issues of mobility and effort power and how these relate to control.
Control over the LP	Includes: all references to the ability of capitalists and/ or managers to obtain desired work behaviour, forms and degree e.g. (direct) simple, technical and (indirect) bureaucratic control, and/ or responsible autonomy, concertive control and tyranny of teams.
Source of conflict	Includes: employment status (e.g. employee, worker and freelancer or self-employed and/ or falsely self-employed), characteristics and orientation (e.g. towards the DLP, the buyer, or both), and divergent interests.
Job autonomy	Includes: degree of control or discretion over what occurs on-the-job in terms of e.g. buyers and tasks, pay rates, employing (co/) workers, working times and methods.
Consent	Includes: all references to some level of agreement to a set of work relations.
Resistance at work	Includes: all references to appropriations of work, product, time and identity.

4.5.4.1 Digital labour platform content: Qualitative content analysis

QCA is usually executed over a sequence of 8 steps – these include *deciding on a research question*, *selecting your material*, *building a coding frame*, *dividing your material into units of coding* (or *segmentation*), *trying out your coding frame*, *evaluating and modifying the coding frame*, *main analysis* and lastly *interpreting and presenting the findings* (Schreier, 2012:5-6).

While there are a number of qualitative methods out there for analysing data and interpreting its meaning, various features of QCA influenced the researcher's choice as they are deemed well-suited to the needs of this study. Notably, QCA is *systematic*, *flexible*, and *reduces data*

(Schreier, 2012:5-8). Firstly, QCA is systematic in three key ways. To begin with, the method requires that all material relevant to the research question(s) be examined. This is to counter the risk of reading the material myopically. QCA is also systematic in that it normally requires a certain sequence of steps, irrespective of the research question or material. The method is also systematic in that it necessitates coding or assigning segments of material to the coding frames' (sub)categories twice, to check the quality of category definitions and consistency. A second core feature of QCA is its flexibility. The method combines both elements of concept-driven categories – and are based on the extant LP and crowd work literature (see Table 4.2 above) – and data-driven categories from the material itself (in line with interpretivism) within the coding frame. Finally, QCA reduces the amount of material in two ways. First, analysis is limited to aspects relevant to the research question(s). The method also reduces data in that the coding frame categories will typically be at a higher level of abstraction than the material.

4.5.4.2 Steps taken in qualitative content analysis

Having outlined the method, this section will set out the steps that were taken to analyse the DLP content. The approach to analysis largely draws on the sequence of 8 steps detailed in Schreier (2012). The analysis is based on the terms of services and related documents of 4 DLPs – Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com (see Appendix B).

Three approaches to QCA have been identified: *conventional*, *directed*, and *summative* (see Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The steps taken here largely correspond to a *directed* approach.

Having *decided on the research question(s)* (see s 4.4 above), the researcher got started by *building the coding frame*. This was broken down into steps of *selecting material*, structuring, generating, and defining categories, and revising and expanding the coding frame. Selection was carried out (and is important) in two key ways. To begin with, the data was broken down to circumvent 'cognitive overload'. "The most important criterion here is to select the material so that it reflects the full diversity of data sources" (Schreier, 2014:175). With this in mind the DLPs' main terms of services (i.e. excluding the related polices), were chosen as a subset to begin since these represent a good cross-section of the entire data set. Another step carried out as to selection was excluding irrelevant material with respect to the research question(s). Three policies were excluded here – Upwork Escrow Inc. (from Escrow Instructions), Privacy Center and Upwork's Virtual Patent Marking. The next steps carried out in building the frame were structuring (and generating sub)categories. Bearing in mind important requirements for coding frames – of unidimensionality, mutual exclusiveness, exhaustiveness, and saturation (see Schreier, 2012:71-78) – the researcher set about deciding on the structure of the frame and generating subcategories for each dimension. Here a concept-driven way (based on the extant LP and crowd work literature, see Table 4.2 above), was combined with a data-driven way to avoid leaving part of the material unaccounted for (Schreier, 2014:176). Subsumption was used when working in a data-driven way. This entailed reading the material for pertinent concepts, and if a concept was new, turning it into a new (sub)category, and if it was already covered by a (sub)category, passing over it or mentally subsuming it, and so on and so forth.

Once an initial coding frame had been produced, categories were defined, and the last steps here, of revising and expanding the frame were carried out by the researcher. Loose ends of the coding frame were tidied up through collapsing and reconceptualising (sub)categories for example, and the frame was then expanded by incorporating the remaining parts of the data.

Once these steps had been actioned, steps four to seven commenced: *segmentation*, *trying out your coding frame*, *evaluating and modifying the coding frame* and *main analysis*. These then paved the way for step eight, *interpreting and presenting the findings* (see chapter five). To start with, the researcher *divided the material into units of coding* and *tried out the coding frame*. These steps were carried out in parallel since a formal criterion for *segmentation* was favoured over a thematic type, to specify where one unit ended and another one began (see Schreier, 2014:178). The reason for the latter is that the method is particularly suitable when material (such as legal documents, in the case of this study, the DLP terms of services), has an inherent structure (Schreier, 2012:136). The terms of services (and related policies) were divided in such a way, that each unit fit into one (sub)category of the frame. *Trial coding* was carried out over three steps. To begin with, only part of the material was selected. As before, the DLPs' main terms of services were chosen here. The researcher then set about applying the categories from the coding frame to the material over two rounds of coding (at two points in time). Coding were entered into a coding sheet and examined in terms of consistency and validity for *evaluating and modifying the frame*. This is why *segmentation* was crucial since it allowed for a comparison, in that identical parts of material were coded (Schreier, 2014:178). Finally, the *main analysis* was carried out since only a few changes were made to the coding frame. To start with, the researcher set about dividing the remainder of the material into units of coding. The material was then coded by applying the frames categories to these units and the results of the main coding were again entered into a coding sheet (see Appendix M). The results of the main coding were double-coded/ checked again, over one-third of the data set.

4.5.4.3 Interview data: Template analysis

Template analysis is a process which is typically carried out across a sequence of 7 steps – these include *familiarisation with the data*, *preliminary coding*, *clustering*, *producing an initial template*, *developing the template*, *applying the final template* and lastly *writing up* (King and Brooks, 2017:3-4) – and while there are similarities across *methodology specific* approaches – such as grounded theory (see Corbin and Strauss, 2008), interpretative phenomenological analysis (CKA IPA) (see Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) – as well as other *generic* forms – for example framework analysis (see Ritchie and Spencer, 1994), matrix analysis (see Nadin and Cassell, 2004), and Braun and Clarke's (2006) version of thematic analysis – a template style for data analysis offer various distinct features (King and Brooks, 2018:221, 225) which influenced the researcher's choice as they are deemed well-suited to the needs of this study.

In general "template analysis is… a more flexible technique with fewer specified procedures, permitting researchers to tailor it to match their own requirements" (King, 2012:428). For this study, *methodology specific* approaches were ruled out since the wider requirements of their

methodologies – both philosophical and methodological – would need to have been adhered to for their use (King and Brooks, 2018:221). Concerning the other *generic* forms of thematic analysis, template analysis may be differentiated by a number of distinct features – including *flexibility of the coding structure*, the *use of a priori themes* and the *use of the initial template* (King, 2012:429-430) – considered apt for this study in various ways. First, template analysis encourages themes to be developed more extensively which enables researchers to capture the richest, most detailed aspects of the data (King and Brooks, 2018:225). Furthermore, the technique does not insist on distinguishing between descriptive and interpretive coding as "it is debatable whether there is ever such a clear distinction between [them]" (King, 2012:429). Second, regarding deductive versus inductive coding, template analysis allows for both, as it permits researchers to define a limited and tentative number of *a priori* themes in advance (a 'top down' approach) – and are based on the extant LP and crowd work literature (see Table 4.2 above) – and allows for a 'bottom up' approach (in line with interpretivism) in that themes can also be developed inductively from the data (King and Brooks, 2018:225). *A priori* codes were identified by the researcher above since there was an intention of focussing on specific aspects of the phenomena under investigation (King and Brooks, 2017:29). Finally, template analysis is arguably more efficient than most other thematic approaches because it does not require researchers to carry out each step of the analysis on the full dataset, and instead the use of an initial template (based on a subset of data) changes this process (King, 2012:430).

4.5.4.4 Developing the template

Having outlined the approach, this section will detail the steps that were taken to analyse the interview data. The approach to analysis largely draws on the sequence of 7 steps set out in King and Brooks (2017). The analysis is based on 34 face-to-face semi-structured interviews that were carried out over Skype between January and August 2020. Of which, 32 were with sellers and 2 were with buyers (see Appendix J), the mean average being 101 minutes long.

Beginning with the first step, although the template analysis commenced with the researcher reading through a subset of the data for *familiarisation*, the process of engagement with, and reflection on, the data began prior, since the accuracy of the transcription was checked upon receipt of the transcripts from the university approved service. Nevertheless, transcripts from Participants 3, 9, 13, 27, 31, 32 and Alpha were selected as a subset of accounts from which to begin since these represent a good cross-section of the entire data set. This was a crucial element because basing the initial analysis on a homogenous sub-sample can result in early versions of the template being hard to apply to subsequent data (King and Brooks, 2017:27).

Preliminary coding was then carried out on the subset of the data. Each section of text which seemed to offer something of relevance to the research question(s) was marked by hand. As noted in s 4.5.3, the transcripts were formatted in a way that facilitated the process, and later helped the researcher to find particular areas of interest again, when writing up. Codes were placed into Microsoft Excel using a numbering system to index them. Specifically, transcripts were presented double spaced, with wide margins, and transcript- page- and line-numbered.

When a section of text emerged that could be encompassed by an *a priori* theme (see Table 4.2 above), a note was made in the margin of the transcript. As detailed above, the 7 *a priori* themes were identified pre-coding and are based on the extant LP and crowd work literature.

Once the first two steps of the process had been actioned, steps three and four commenced. Notably, *development of the initial template* began by using the preliminary coding to identify and define a provisional set of themes that could then be organised into meaningful *clusters*. For the purpose of this study and following King (2012:430-431), themes may be defined as:

> *The recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts… that characterize perceptions and/ or experiences, seen by the researcher as relevant to the research question of a particular study.*

This was a very fluid process involving the use of Microsoft Word where each of the potential themes were added in what appeared to be meaningful clusters. The advantage of utilising a word processor was that themes could be moved about easily to explore different structures. Crucially, it was not assumed that the *a priori* themes would necessarily be top-level themes.

Once the initial template was constructed, the researcher then moved into steps five and six, *developing* and *applying the template*. This involved working systematically through the data set in order to identify any relevant segments of the text, and then marking them with one (or more) relevant code(s). Where the existing themes on the initial template did not incorporate new data, changes were made such as inserting, deleting, redefining, merging and changing the scope of themes. This was done on increments of 3, engendering a further 7 versions. In other words, for every 3 transcripts that had been coded a new template was produced. This process was documented – numbering and dating each iteration – to record its evolution. As in s 4.5.2.4, data saturation however, occurred at about interview 27 as the next 7 interviews did not seem to add anything new, and interviews 23 - 27 added little new data, especially in terms of themes and broad issues. Once the analysis and 'final template' seemed to account for all the pertinent data, and once "a rich and comprehensive representation of… [the] data" (King and Brooks, 2017:36) had been reached, a final version was considered satisfactory[44].

The final template displayed in Appendix N includes 5 top-level themes – of Control over the LP, Skills, Job Autonomy, Consent and/ or Resistance at Work and Source of Conflict – and includes 4 integrative themes[45] of Labour Indeterminacy, Structured Antagonism, LP Hinges on (Shifting) Context and lastly, LP Hinges on Tenure, Skill and Continuity. This version was then applied to the original data before interpretation and writing up (see chapters six to ten).

---

[44] "Arguably, 'final version' template is somewhat of a misnomer, as continued engagement with the data always has the potential to identify further potential refinements to coding" (King and Brooks, 2017:36).
[45] Integrative themes "pervade much of the data, cross-cutting many or all of the other thematic clusters" (King, 2012:432).

4.5.4.5 Philosophical positions and their implications for generic thematic analysis

QCA (see s 4.5.4.1 above), and template analysis (see s 4.5.4.3 above) – and other generic styles of thematic analysis more broadly – are not tied to any methodological approach, and so do not insist on any philosophical/ theoretical commitments (King and Brooks, 2018:221). Consequently, the onus is on the researcher to reflect on the adopted philosophical position, as this has implications for their use (King and Brooks, 2017:13). King and Brooks (2017:16-23) offer four ways while cautioning that there is a degree of blurring/ overlap between them. Here taking account of the epistemological and ontological assumptions of this work – social constructionism and realism and relativism (see s 4.2.1 above) – their implications for use of QCA and template analysis are the tentative use of *a priori* themes informed by theory (such as LPT, see Table 4.2 above), and also the need for reflexivity (King and Brooks, 2018:222). Crucially, "the emphasis is on the reflexivity of the researcher…, the attempt to approach the topic from differing perspectives and the richness of the description produced" (Wimalasiri et al., 2008 cited in King, 2012:427), which is in accord with this study's theoretical perspective.

4.6 Limitations

Having outlined and justified the main research design choices, this section will now critically reflect upon the limitations of the design. In particular, this section will discuss the limitations, suggest why these were justified and how their impacts were mitigated as much as possible.

Firstly, while strategies were designed and implemented to mitigate limited data access (see s 4.5.1.3 above) and the sampling population being difficult to reach (see s 4.5.2 above) – in particular, during COVID-19, which is discussed in s 12.4 below – there are some limitations. For instance, there is a secrecy and opaqueness to how buyers choose to use DLPs making access to them a problem. To mitigate, buyer organisations were listed (established from the platforms, another's work, and through the survey tool, see Appendix A), and targeted with a mass mailing, and tweets, and support was also requested from the DLPs themselves (see s 4.5.2.1 above). A refer-a-friend scheme mitigated further here (see s 4.5.2.3 above). While a recompense of time was offered (an Amazon.co.uk eGift Voucher, or an equivalent Gift Card from their home countries' respective website), an offer of a report that would summarise the findings was also made to enhance any chance of access. Furthermore, the online platforms used to publicise a need for participants, including LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and DLPs, all have restrictions, and were mitigated on an ad hoc basis (see s 4.5.2.1 and s 4.5.2.2 above).

Secondly, while Skype interviewing was deemed to be an attractive and viable option (see s 4.5.3 above), it was not without its limitations – similar to what other researchers have found (e.g. Deakin and Wakefield, 2014:613). For example, in some cases, technological or signal issues made recording, and building rapport problematic. To mitigate, some interviews were rescheduled or switched to audio only (since video can reduce sound quality). The option of conventional interviews was not possible because of geographic, time or budget constraints.

Thirdly, while QCA and template analysis were deemed well-suited to the needs of this study (see s 4.5.4.1 and s 4.5.4.3 above), there are some limitations – reported in King and Brooks (2017:86-88) – that to some extent apply to the research. For instance, generic forms of data analysis (including, QCA and template analysis) are not tied to any methodological approach which poses the challenge of appropriately tailoring their use to the philosophical/ theoretical position of any given study. To mitigate, the researcher took extra care to think through what the adopted philosophical position implied for the way the data analyses methods were used (see s 4.5.4.5 above). Furthermore, with such approaches to analysis, there is a risk that the holistic sense of individual people can become lost in a set of themes that apply across a set of participants by the fragmentation of accounts. Case summaries were produced to mitigate and allowed some holistic sense of participants to be retained by the researcher (see s 4.5.3 above). Moreover, there is a danger that procedure can become prescription at one end or a risk that there can be too much flexibility on the other end. In terms of the former, while steps were followed (to mitigate the researcher's lack of experience), aspects of the methods were adapted to suit the needs of the study, and in terms of the latter, the researcher kept in mind the research objective, and the limited time available. Notably, the most detailed coding was kept to areas of relevance to the research question(s) and/ or importance to the participants.

Finally, and more broadly, limitations of qualitative research – in Bryman and Bell (2015:413-414) – relate to this work's research methods. While these have been outlined here, they are also discussed in s 12.4 below. To begin with, are subjectivity issues, the findings rely on the researcher's unsystematic views and on the relationships with people studied. Relatedly, are replication issues, the unstructured nature and reliance on the researcher's ingenuity leaves this work difficult to replicate. To mitigate – and while there is a lack of transparency in much qualitative research – this chapter has included as much detail as possible, to avoid difficulty in establishing what was done or how conclusions were arrived at. A reflexive approach was also taken (as indicated above). Following, are problems of generalisation, meaning that the scope of the findings of this work is restricted to theory. Yet the findings of this study are not meant to be generalised to populations and are instead intended to be generalised to theory.

4.7 Ethical considerations

As a starting point, a principles-based approach was considered from the UK Economic and Social Research Council's *Framework for Research Ethics* (ESRC, 2020). This advises that:

1. *Research should aim to maximise benefit for individuals and society and minimise risk and harm.*
2. *The rights and dignity of individuals and groups should be respected.*
3. *Wherever possible, participation should be voluntary and appropriately informed.*
4. *Research should be conducted with integrity and transparency.*
5. *Lines of responsibility and accountability should be clearly defined.*
6. *Independence of research should be maintained and where conflicts of interest cannot be avoided they should be made explicit.*

These 6 principles not only revolve around 4 areas in which ethical concerns usually arise – whether or not there is *harm to participants*, *informed consent*, an *invasion of privacy* and/or *deception* involved (Diener and Crandall, 1978 cited in Bryman and Bell, 2015:134) – but go further in that they include ethical considerations around data protection legislation (in terms of *data management* and *copyright*), *reciprocity and trust* – that research should be mutually beneficial – and last, *affiliation and conflicts of interest* for instance (see ibid, 2015:134-149).

Although principles-based frameworks are argued to be insufficient – for qualitative research particularly – (Birch et al., 2012:1; Boddy, 2016:206), the ESRC (2020) recommend that their *Framework for Research Ethics* be treated as a general guide to be used in conjunction with "self-critical, imaginative and responsible ethical reflection" on issues in the projects lifecycle.

4.7.1 University-specific procedural aspects

More university-specific procedural aspects have also been observed. In fact, the conduct of this study has largely been guided by Manchester University's ethics policies and guidelines, which highlights what is and what is not regarded as ethical. In particular, the *Ethical Review Manager* – which is an online system for University ethical approval – was used to submit an application to the Alliance Manchester Business School based committee. This comprised of 6 sections including filter questions, contact information, compliance and monitoring, general information/data protection, shared template for ethics review and lastly, required signatures.

Once the review had been conducted and the requested revisions had been made, the study was awarded "a favourable ethical opinion" by the school panel upon delegated authority "on the basis described in the application form and [the] supporting documentation as submitted" (see Appendix O). These documents included the data management plan (see Appendix P), the letters of permission (AKA the introductory letters), the advertisement (notably, the social media recruitment and web advertisement text), the consent form, the participant information sheet and finally, the additional docs (containing the interview guides and the questionnaire).

4.8 Concluding summary

This chapter has now explained the research design and methodology of this work. To start with, the importance of meta-theoretical assumptions were discussed, before describing the epistemology (constructionism), ontology (realism and relativism), and axiology of this study. This chapter next outlined the theoretical stance of this work (interpretivism), and suggested that this philosophy will thread through the design, conduct and presentation of the research. The research gap/ problem, objective and questions were then recapped, prior to discussing techniques and procedures used. For instance, the methods of data collection were outlined – containing, publicly available DLP content, and semi-structured interviews – sampling and recruitment were described – involving, purposive sampling strategies across Plans A and B – the conduct of the interviews were addressed – including: format, equipment, presentation and introduction – and the methods of data analysis were outlined – involving, the QCA and template analysis. This chapter lastly critically reflected upon research limitations and ethics.

Here, issues concerning data access, collection and analysis, as well as issues of qualitative research more broadly were discussed. And a principle-based framework was considered to start with from the ESRC, before more university-specific procedural aspects were observed. Chapters five to ten (next) will present findings to address the subsidiary research questions. Following this, chapter eleven will provide a discussion structured by the themes of the data.

Chapter 5: Digital labour platform terms of services - establishing the basis for control (subsidiary research question 1)

5.1 Introduction

The findings will be reported across the next six chapters. This chapter will present findings from the QCA (see s 4.5.4.1 above) – to scope the variability of the DLPs' terms of services (and related documents) with reference to LP issues, and to set up what is to come. Notably, chapter five addresses subsidiary research question one – *do DLPs' terms of services differ in approach to LP issues?* As discussed in chapter three, one way platforms attempt control over labour is through tightly defined terms of services, which specify governance structures and ensure that all transactions adhere to contractual requirements (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:30). The chapter will firstly offer an overview of the findings that follow, and will indicate the main contribution. Specifically, as yet, the DLPs' terms of services have not been interrogated in the extant literature with respect to LPT. Secondly, it will then report the findings on registration, verification and approval, employment status and control, and scope for collective identity and voice. Lastly, this chapter will provide a concluding summary. From there, the remaining empirical findings chapters (six to ten), will present the findings from the template analysis (see s 4.5.4.3 above) of the interview data, to address the remaining three subsidiary research questions. The two data points will then be integrated in chapter eleven.

5.2 Control over the labour process: (Not entirely) present

The findings on this theme point to a number of challenges and tensions, which contribute to knowledge as to control, among other LP issues. First, in spite of the registration, verification and approval found on all DLPs, no guarantees were provided by platforms. Second, despite the predetermination of (self-)employment status located on all but one DLP (and aspects of autonomy that go hand in hand with that [Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:3]), platforms use (or afford to buyers) various mechanisms for control and yet, also offer several routes for sellers to engage autonomy. And last, (limited) scope for collective identity and voice was identified.

5.2.1 Registration, verification and approval: No guarantees

On all DLPs surveyed, two main types of (potential) platform user information were found to be requested, collected or processed in two distinct ways, for various different reasons. The evidence here shows that while all DLPs' terms of services (and related documents) specify registration, verification and approval for (potential) platform users, they offer no guarantees to their users as to other users, concede limits to their control and acknowledge potential for misbehaviour (see chapters six and eight), and labour indeterminacy (Smith, 2015:230-231).

Account registration was found to be a main point where information as to potential platform users is requested, collected or processed by DLPs. Here the terms of services (and related documents) described how platforms require that potential DLP users – who are planning to be a buyer and/ or a seller(/s) or an agency – undergo registration, subject to approval. This

involves potential platform users providing (and updating) DLPs with accurate and complete personal information so as to obtain full access to the websites, or range of services offered:

> *You must register for an account to have full access to our services, and your registration is subject to our approval… You must provide accurate personal information when you sign up and you must update your account if your personal information changes. (Upwork – User Agreement)*

> *Buyers and sellers must register for an account in order to buy or sell seller services and/or items… We may, at our absolute discretion, refuse to register any person or entity as a user. (Freelancer – User Agreement)*

> *To access the full… [Peopleperhour.com] site, users have to register for an account, provide accurate and complete information, and keep their account information updated. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)*

> *To become a registered user and to access services you must register for an account. You agree to provide true, accurate and complete information as prompted by the registration form and all forms you access on the website, and to update this information to maintain its truthfulness, accuracy and completeness. (Guru – Terms of Service)*

In fact, on all platforms surveyed, two main types of information were found to be requested, collected or processed at the point of registration and thereafter, in two distinct ways. These include *'personal information'*, which one knowingly volunteers to the DLP, and *'website use information'*, which is automatically collected or processed as one interacts with the website. For example, at user registration and periodically thereafter, the platforms' terms of services (and related documents) specify how DLPs require platform users to volunteer and keep up-to-date *'personal information'*, such as account, contact, location, identity or financial details. Specifically, DLPs will request, collect or process one's username, password, profile picture, email address, telephone number, physical or billing address, time zone, full name, proof of identity or address, photograph, credit card, bank transfer or payment processor details and tax numbers, among others. Platforms will also automatically collect or process *'website use information'* as one interacts with the services, such as metadata, device, location or activity details. Specifically these include one's IP address, computer and connection data, referring webpage, standard web log information, language settings, time zone, device identifier, type or plugins, hardware capability, global positioning system position, wireless fidelity (CKA Wi-Fi), pages visited and time visiting them, buttons clicked and words searched, among others:

> *When you visit Guru.com you provide two types of information: personal information you knowingly choose to disclose that is collected by Guru.com and website use information collected by Guru.com as you interact with the Guru.com website. (Guru – Privacy Policy)*

The personal data that we collect or obtain may include: your name; age; date of birth; gender; e-mail address; home address; country of residence; lifestyle and social circumstances (for example, your pastimes); employment and education details (for example, the organisation you work for, your job title and your education details); your IP address; your browser type and language; your access times; complaint details; details of how you use our products and services; details of how you like to interact with us and other similar information. (Peopleperhour – Privacy Policy)

While you use our products and services you may be asked to provide certain types of personal information… We [also] maintain records of the interactions we have with our users, including the products, services and customer support we have provided. This includes the interactions our users have with our platform such as when a user has viewed a page or clicked a button. (Freelancer – Privacy Policy)

When you use the service, you may provide us with information about you. This may include your name and contact information, financial information to make or receive payment for services obtained through the Upwork platform, or information to help us fill out tax forms. When you use the service, we may also collect information related to your use of the service. (Upwork – Privacy Policy)

User information was found to be amassed by DLPs for various reasons. The main reason described by all platform terms of services (and related documents) for requests, collection and processing of information, was to provide DLP users the service, or product requested; to process transactions, provide support, or address enquiries, for example. Other reasons included marketing and advertising or to detect, investigate, prevent or respond to possible breaches in the DLP terms of services[46] or other illegal activity, among others, for example:

The information we request, collect, and process is primarily used to provide users with the product or service they have requested. More specifically, we may use your personal information for the following purposes: to provide the service or product you have requested; to facilitate the creation of a user contract…, to provide technical or other support to you; to answer enquiries about our services, or to respond to a complaint; to promote our other programs, products or services which may be of interest to you…, to allow for debugging, testing and otherwise operate our platforms; to conduct data analysis, research and otherwise build and improve our platforms; [and] to comply with legal and regulatory obligations; if otherwise permitted or required by law, [among others]. (Freelancer – Privacy Policy)

[The information we request, collect, and process is for] providing the service, including to process your transactions, address your enquiries, provide assistance to you in using

---

[46] For example, all DLPs surveyed were found to use session identifier and persistent cookies. *'A cookie is a piece of data stored on the [platform] user's computer tied to information about the user'* (Guru – Privacy Policy). *'[These] small data file[s are]… transfer[red] to… [a] computer's hard disk for record-keeping purposes [via the DLP, and the latter]… track[s]… [non-]compliance with the… terms of service[s]'* (Upwork – Privacy Policy), among other things.

the service, and in connection with Upwork[.com]'s enterprise compliance and other premium offerings. Fixing and improving the service. Personalizing content. Marketing and advertising. Administer promotional activities. Communicating with you. Preventing, detecting, investigating, and responding to possible fraud, unauthorized access/use of the service, breaches of terms and policies. Legal and investigative purposes, such as responding to lawful subpoenas or other requests for information, in order to investigate compliance with, enforce and/or comply with the law. (Upwork – Privacy Policy)

Verification and approval (at registration and periodically thereafter) of information regarding platform users was found to be a chief concern for all DLPs surveyed. The terms of services (and related documents) specified how platforms can request/ re-request identity verification, where certain steps are required of DLP users and non-compliance may result in disciplinary action. Platforms can also request that their users take part in an online video call to validate information in terms of identity or background or skills, and to enforce their terms of services:

You authorise us, directly or through third parties, to make any enquiries we consider necessary to validate your identity. You must, at our request: (1) provide further information to us, which may include your date of birth and/ or other information that will allow us to reasonably identify you; (2) take steps to confirm ownership of your email address or financial instruments; or (3) verify your information against third party databases or through other sources… We also reserve the right to request a video interview with you to validate this information, your identity, your background and your skills. We reserve the right to close, suspend, or limit access to your account, the website and/or Freelancer[.com] services in the event we are unable to obtain or verify to our satisfaction the information which we request[ed]. (Freelancer – User Agreement)

Before a freelancer can complete registration on the service, or at any time thereafter, we may request or re-request identity verification. Without limiting the manner in which we request identify verification, we may require freelancers to participate in a video call after submitting their government issued ID [identification] to enable us to confirm that the freelancer is indeed the individual in the ID. We may record such video calls and take screenshots of the user during the call. Upwork[.com] may use the information obtained from identity verification for purposes of verifying your identity, enforcing our terms of service and other agreements, and preventing fraud. (Upwork – Privacy Policy)

DLPs, however, were found to offer platform users no guarantees as to other platform users. Despite the registration, verification and approval described by all platform terms of services (and related documents), DLPs specify that they either do not review and monitor purported content, or they are unable to verify its accuracy, truthfulness, or validity. As such, platforms are unable to guarantee the ability or willingness of their users, whether buyers or sellers, to fulfil the agreed economic exchange, bringing about circumstances for labour indeterminacy:

By using the services, you may encounter content or information that might be inaccurate, incomplete, delayed, misleading, illegal, offensive or otherwise harmful. Upwork[.com] generally does not review or monitor user content. You agree that we are not responsible for user content. We cannot always prevent the misuse of our services, and you agree that we are not responsible for any such misuse. (Upwork – User Agreement)

We cannot and do not confirm each user's purported identity on the website. We may provide information about a user, such as a strength or risk score, geographical location, or third party background check or verification of identity or credentials. However, such information is based solely on data that a user submits and we provide such information solely for the convenience of users and the provision of such information is not an introduction, endorsement or recommendation by us. (Freelancer – User Agreement)

We use techniques that aim to verify the accuracy of the information provided by our users, however user verification on the internet is difficult… [Peopleperhour.com] cannot and does not confirm, and is not responsible for ensuring, the accuracy or truthfulness of users' purported identities or the validity of the information which they provide to us or post on… [Peopleperhour.com]. (Peopleperhour – Terms of website use)

Guru.com has no control over and does not guarantee the quality, safety or legality of any services performed or deliverables created, advertised, the truth or accuracy of job listings, the qualifications, background, or abilities of registered users, the ability of freelancers to perform services, the ability of employers to pay for services, or that an employer or freelancer can or will actually complete a job. (Guru – Terms of Service)

5.2.2 Employment status and control: (Self-)employment and limited discretion

Self-employed or freelancer, as opposed to employee, or worker is predetermined on all but one DLP surveyed as to employment status. The findings here show that while core aspects of job autonomy relate to self-employment (Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:3), as discussed in chapter three, such as autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, work times and methods, the platforms' terms of services (and related documents) show various ways DLPs or buyers could achieve control over sellers, but specify several routes for sellers to engage autonomy.

On all but one platform, independent contractor was found to be the only option available for how DLP users could engage one another. This stands in contrast to the extant literature on issues of employment status (as discussed in chapter three), because one platform afforded flexibility to DLP users in this regard. Notably, the terms of services (and related documents) of Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com and Guru.com, detailed how they require DLP users to acknowledge and agree their relationships to be that of independent contractors. As such, forming partnerships, joint ventures, agencies or employment relationships will breach these

terms of services. In contrast, the terms of services (and related documents) of Upwork.com specified that buyers not the platform are responsible for determining how to engage sellers:

> *All kinds of work can be posted as a project on Peopleperhour[.com]. There are just a few things that aren't accepted [such as] offers of permanent employment, partnerships, franchises or joint ventures. Peopleperhour[.com] is a marketplace for freelance services only. (Peopleperhour – Project posting policies)*

> *Each user acknowledges and agrees that the relationship between buyers and sellers is that of an independent contractor. Nothing in this user agreement creates a partnership, joint venture, agency or employment relationship between users. (Freelancer – User Agreement)*

> *Employer and freelancer each acknowledges and agrees that their relationship is that of independent contractors. The freelancer shall perform services as an independent contractor and nothing in these terms of service shall be deemed to create a partnership, joint venture, agency, or employer-employee relationship between freelancer and employer. (Guru – Terms of Service)*

> *Clients, not Upwork[.com], are responsible for deciding whether to engage freelancers as employees, or independent contractors. Client is solely responsible for and assumes all liability for determining whether freelancers should be engaged as independent contractors or employees and engaging them accordingly. (Upwork – User Agreement)*

While core characteristics of job autonomy are associated with self-employment (Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:3), various means for achieving control were found on all DLPs surveyed. Here, the terms of services (and related documents) detailed how platforms use (or afford to buyers) mechanisms for directing, evaluating, rewarding and disciplining sellers. First, DLPs require platform users to agree to, and abide by, a terms of service (and related documents), whereby consent is provided either physically, by DLP users clicking accept when prompted, or is assumed through use of service. These contain a code of conduct (among other things) which detail the rules on: bidding, payment, user content, personal behaviour, confidentiality, communication, or fraud, for example. Breaching such rules could lead to disciplinary action:

> *You understand that by using the Upwork site or site services… and by clicking accept when prompted on the site, you agree to be bound by all agreements which constitute Upwork[.com]'s terms of service… We may revoke or limit access to the services… if… you breach… any portion of the[se] terms of service. (Upwork – User Agreement)*

> *You must read and accept all of the terms in, and linked to, this user agreement, the code of conduct, the Freelancer[.com] privacy policy and all website policies. By accepting… [the] user agreement as you access our website, you agree that… [the] user agreement will apply whenever you use the website… We may close, suspend or*

limit your access to your account if we determine that you have breached, or are acting in breach of this user agreement. (Freelancer – User Agreement)

By using our site, you indicate that you accept… [the] terms and conditions, and the referenced policies, and that you agree to abide by them… [Peopleperhour.com] reserve the right to restrict your access, temporarily or indefinitely block your account, stop any projects you have in progress, warn other buyers and freelancers of your actions or issue you a warning if… you breach the letter or spirit of these terms and conditions or the referenced policies. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)

By visiting or using the services available from the domain and sub-domains of www.guru.com..., you agree to be legally bound by… [the] terms of service... We may issue a warning, or temporarily suspend, indefinitely suspend or terminate your account or a job, and refuse to provide any or all services to you if… you breach the letter or spirit of any terms and conditions of these terms of service or the linked policies and information incorporated herein by reference. (Guru – Terms of Service)

Chief among those identified were rules regarding communication and payment. Specifically, the terms of services (and related documents) described how platforms require DLP users to use their inbuilt communication and payment tools provided (whether for first-time, repeat, or follow-on work) to communicate[47], request, receive and make payment exclusively[48]. As part of this, platform users are not permitted to offer a means of direct contact via DLPs. Keeping communications confined to the platform is regarded to be important (by Peopleperhour.com for example), in order: *'to keep both parties protected in case of a dispute'* (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions) or: *'for the purpose of investigating fraud, regulatory compliance, risk management and other related purposes'* (in the case of Freelancer.com for instance – User Agreement), for example. And keeping payments restricted to DLPs is considered important (by Upwork.com for instance), as: *'a substantial portion of the compensation… [received] for making the site available… is collected through the service fee'* (Upwork – User Agreement):

You can't go around us. In particular, you can't talk to another user or ask for or share a way to get in touch - a means of direct contact - outside of Upwork[.com] before you've agreed to a service contract. This means you can't add your contact details to a job post, your profile, communications or other content. (Upwork – Terms of Use)

You must only communicate with users via the website. You must not, and must not attempt to, communicate with other users through any other means including but not limited to email, telephone, Skype, ICQ, AIM, MSN Messenger, WeChat, SnapChat, GTalk, GChat or Yahoo. (Freelancer – User Agreement)

---

[47] Guru.com is an exception here, as the content analysis did not detect any communication rules in this regard.
[48] Upwork.com differs to the other DLPs surveyed, as their terms of service (and related documents) specify a non-circumvention period of 24 months in terms of payment, whereas the others appeared to be indefinite in this regard.

All payments for work completed must go via… [Peopleperhour.com]. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)

As a freelancer [or employer], you agree to use [the] Guru[.com] billing and payment services to receive [or make] all payments from employers [or to freelancers] identified through the website, whether first-time, repeat, or follow-on. (Guru – Terms of Service)

In fact, optional and non-optional, wide-ranging fees, charges and taxes for DLP users were located on all DLPs surveyed. For example, the Fees and Charges policy of Freeancer.com, for instance, illustrate this. Notably, for buyers these may include, but are not limited to: *task, job or project fees*, *membership plans*, *featured*, *urgent* and *private* posts, *full time* (for hiring a full time/ commission-based post), *recruiter* (for assistance with recruitment and selection), *non-disclosure agreement*, *intellectual property agreement*, *sealed* (to decline open bidding), *priority* (to fast track moderation), *extend* (for increasing bidding/ contest period), *top contest* (for automatic invites to highly rated sellers) and *highlight* (to make a contest stand out). For sellers these may include, but are not limited to: *task, job or project fees*, *membership plans*, *sponsored bid* (to feature a bid at the top of the bid list), *highlight bid* (for making a bid stand out), *sealed entry*, *highlight entry* (concerning contest entry fees), *directory sponsorship* and *taking an exam*. And lastly, for both buyers and sellers, these might also include, but are not limited to, *transaction*, *arbitration*, *withdrawal* and *maintenance fees*, and *taxes*. Taxes, such as Value Added Tax (CKA VAT) in Europe among others, not set by DLPs, could be applied.

Certain uses of platforms found in the terms of services (and related documents), which are not allowed, include: posting unacceptable content, acting in a misleading or fraudulent way, treating other DLP users unfairly, or abusing the rating and reputation systems, for example. In particular, platform users: *'can't offer, share, support or try to find [unacceptable content]'*, *'can't misrepresent… [themselves, their] experience, skills, or professional qualifications, or that of others..., must… be honest about who's doing the work… [and must not] fraudulently charge a client'* on using DLPs. Platform users *'can't have multiple accounts... [or] sell, trade or give… [their] account to anyone else'*. *'Everyone should be treated fairly and legally'*, and *'[each user] must use… [the] feedback system honestly and fairly'* (Upwork – Terms of Use). For instance, users declare (or agree to) as follows by clicking accept or is assumed by use:

I am responsible for the content I post on Freelancer[.com] and: I will not post content that infringes upon any copyright or other intellectual property rights; I will not post content that violates any law or regulation; I will not post content that is defamatory; I will not post content that is obscene or contains child pornography; I will not post content that includes incomplete, false or inaccurate information about any person, product, or service; I will not post content that contains any viruses or programming routines intended to damage any system; [and] I will not post content that creates liability for Freelancer[.com] or harms its business operations or reputation. (Freelancer – Code of Conduct)

All registered users represent, warrant, and agree… that they will not use the website or its services to defraud or mislead any person or entity, including without limitation Guru.com or any register[ed] user. (Guru – Terms of Service)

Everyone should be treated fairly and legally on Upwork[.com]. You can't use Upwork[.com] to: express an unlawful preference in a job post or proposal; unlawfully discriminate against someone; incite or encourage violence; post personal identifying information or other sensitive, private data about another person; spam other users with proposals or invites…, make or demand bribes, or payments for anything other than the work; ask for or demand free work…, request a fee in order to submit a proposal; [and] request or provide services that primarily concern making purchases on behalf of another. (Upwork – Terms of Use)

Users must not falsify feedback, manipulate or coerce another user by threatening negative feedback or offer incentives in exchange for feedback. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)

Second, and relatedly, all DLPs were found to request that their users adhere to a regulatory process. Specifically, this is regarding the ways in which buyers hire sellers or sellers submit proposals (or competing entries[49]) to buyers, their ensuing economic exchange and potential disputes and related services. To start with, platforms entail predefined routes, where buyers access sellers and vice versa (see 3.3.2 above). On acceptance of a proposal, DLPs require buyers to deposit funds into a neutral third party holding (AKA escrow) and to commit the job requirements (which become binding), to the platforms' mandatory communication channels. For larger projects, work may be divided "into a series of phases, due dates, or deliverables" (Upwork.com, 2021) or 'milestones' (for review), where payments are made (upon approval). Some DLPs (such as, Upwork.com impose or) afford to buyers' mechanisms for surveillance that: *'automatically… [gather] information about work… such as number of mouse clicks and keyboard strokes, and regularly taken screenshots (which may include a webcam picture)[50]'* (Upwork – Privacy Policy), for example. Finally, once the work (or a milestone) is completed, sellers can raise an invoice which buyers either accept or reject. Rejecting an invoice obliges buyers to provide sellers with feedback and an opportunity to make the revisions (that sellers must observe in Peopleperhour.com). Accepting an invoice triggers payment and a feedback request, ending the exchange. Alternatively, dispute resolution and/ or arbitration services or processes, must be used or followed. Payments or refunds are often at the DLPs' discretion:

On commencement of a project the buyer pays funds into the escrow account, and the buyer must confirm their requirements upfront in the WorkStream. The freelancer must provide regular progress updates and respond within one (1) working day to all

---

[49] On Freelancer.com only, buyers can also 'start a contest' where sellers submit competing entries of finished/ near-finished work.
[50] For budget type of per hour rather than fixed price.

messages from the buyer, in the WorkStream. Freelancers must deliver work within the delivery times either defined in their offer, or agreed with the buyer upfront in the WorkStream for custom projects. Freelancers' rankings will be penalised for late delivery. Freelancers must fulfil their projects and buyers agree to pay for work delivered. Users will be penalised for cancellations or refunds caused by them, without just reason. Freelancers must provide, and be given the opportunity by the buyer to provide, at least two further iterations on the work delivered if the buyer is not initially satisfied. Once the project has been completed the freelancer will raise a request to receive payment, including the release of funds held in the escrow account. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)

Platform users are obliged to police one another, by agreeing to DLP terms of services (and related documents), on all platforms surveyed. For example, DLPs require platform users to report breaches (or potential breaches) of the terms of services (and related documents) on issues of circumvention in terms of communication or payment, requesting upfront payment, unauthorised access or security breach to one's user account, or to the DLP itself, and false feedback, or manipulation or coercion through making threats or offers concerning feedback:

As an employer, you agree to notify Guru.com immediately if your freelancer solicits payment from you outside the website. As a freelancer, you agree to notify Guru.com immediately if your employer seeks to pay you outside the website. If you are aware of a breach of the foregoing prohibitions, or any potential circumvention of the Guru[.com] billing and payment services, please submit a confidential report to Guru.com. (Guru – Terms of Service)

For projects, the freelancer must not request a release of funds from the escrow account prior to project completion… Buyers must report such cases immediately. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)

You must immediately notify us upon becoming aware of any unauthorised access or any other security breach to the website, your account or the freelancer services. (Freelancer – User Agreement)

You agree to notify Upwork[.com] of any error or inaccurate statement in your feedback results. (Upwork – User Agreement)

Last, access to buyers and tasks was found to be regulated in two core ways. To begin with, the terms of services (and related documents) described how software algorithms, based on user-generated content, are primary here. This relates to algorithmic control which has been identified to be a key function of DLPs (Wood, 2019:112), as discussed in chapter three. For example, feedback information or proposal content are fed into the platforms' searching and matching systems, to influence selection likelihood, by ranking or recommending DLP users:

We use automated decision when helping matching users to jobs. The primary way this occurs is through how we rank users. These rankings are produced by analysing user-generated content, user activity and the outcome of jobs; in this context, user-generated content will include reviews that users receive when completing jobs… Automated decision making is also used to recommend potential jobs to our users and as a part of our marketplace security systems. (Freelancer – Privacy Policy)

Using historical data, our data science team have created machine learning models that try to predict which proposals a buyer will most likely want to accept. We can therefore organise proposals into different categories: A. recommended proposals, the proposals that a buyer will very likely want to accept; B. low relevance proposals, the proposals that a buyer will very likely not want to accept; [and] C. everything else... By choosing the default 'recommended' sort option, the proposals higher up in the list are the ones a buyer will most likely want to accept. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)

The restrictions DLPs placed on sending proposals were also found to be central in terms of regulating access to buyers and tasks. Here Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Guru.com and Upwork.com provide a limited number of free *proposal credits*, *bids*, or *connects* – 15, 6, 10 and 10 respectively – to sellers per month (prior to purchase, subject to a cap, depending on membership). The Terms and Conditions of Peopleperhour.com explained that this is: *'for quality control purposes'* for example. While 1 *proposal credit/ bid* equates to 1 proposal sent on Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com or Guru.com, on Upwork.com, *connects* vary by job:

Each membership program includes a certain number of "connects", which reserve monthly capacity for you to submit proposals for clients' posted projects. (Upwork – Freelancer Membership Policy)

Free members receive initially 6 bids per month. (Freelancer – Freelancer Fees and Charges)

Freelancers have an allotment of fifteen (15) proposal credits per month for free. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)

Each membership option includes a certain number of "bids". (Guru – Terms of Service)

Several routes however, were found to be afforded by platforms to sellers where they could engage autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, work times and methods. For example, the terms of services (and related documents) detailed how DLPs offer sellers various ways to engage autonomy over buyers and tasks or pay rates through purchasing optional extras to increase the likelihood of securing work and by avoiding or reducing fees through zero or reduced service fee schemes, by referring new buyers or through continuity of engagement:

Freelancers may… choose to purchase "connects" or other features, premium services or options on Upwork[.com]… The service fee rates decrease as the total freelancer

fees you have charged to your client for the engagement relationship meet certain thresholds. (Upwork – Fee and ACH Authorization Agreement)

Optional bid upgrades may be purchased to promote a bid… Freelancer[.com] project commissions charged for freelancers who refer new employers that do not have an existing account on Freelancer.com and who join and create a new account, will be reduced from 10% to 0%, for all future projects performed by the referring freelancer for the referred employer. (Freelancer – Freelancer Fees and Charges)

If a freelancer decides to purchase optional features to further increase their chances of winning work on… [Peopleperhour.com] they will pay a feature fee… The zero service fee scheme enables freelancers to apply the benefit of the tools available on… [Peopleperhour.com] to the work with their existing client base for no service fee. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)

In the case of Upwork.com, the terms of service (and related documents) were found to offer sellers autonomy over employing others in addition to, or in place of, themselves, work times and methods, when being engaged as independent contractors. In particular, they described how sellers here can employ (co/) workers, and how they should enjoy features of autonomy which are associated with their *'independent contractor freelancer'*, employment status. This platform also offers their users an option to opt out of the non-circumvention period for a fee:

Independent contractor freelancer(s) may hire employees or engage contractors or subcontractors… to assist with providing the freelancer services. (Upwork – Any Hire Terms)

The manner and means of performing the freelancer services will be determined and controlled solely by freelancer, which is engaged by client as an independent contractor. (Upwork – Optional Service Contract Terms)

You may opt out of the non-circumvention agreement if you pay a fee. You may opt out of the obligations… with respect to each Upwork[.com] relationship only if the client or freelancer pays Upwork[.com] a conversion fee which is a minimum of $1,000 USD [United States Dollar] and up to $50,000 USD for each Upwork[.com] relationship, unless client and freelancer have had an Upwork[.com] relationship for at least two (2) years. (Upwork – User Agreement)

5.2.3 Scope for collective identity and voice: (Limited) opportunities and possibilities

On all platforms surveyed, (limited) scope for collective identity and voice was identified. The evidence here shows, according to the terms of services (and related documents), that DLPs provide mechanisms and practices for voice. These might offer scope for sellers to *articulate individual dissatisfaction* (albeit dispute resolution and/ or arbitration services were subject to eligibility), or to *contribute to management decision-making* (although located in Upwork.com only) or allow scope for *expression of collective organisation* (see Dundon et al., 2004:1152).

First, in terms of scope for voice as *articulation of individual dissatisfaction*, mechanisms and practices were found. To start with, the terms of services (and related documents) described a number of dedicated/ non-dedicated communication channels such as online forms, email, post, and fax, on all DLPs, whereby platform users may access DLP support (or a third party dispute resolution provider in some cases), in respect of concerns over personal information, copyright infringement or (with regard to Upwork.com only), online accessibility, for example:

> *To exercise any of your rights, or if you have any other questions about our use of your personal data, please contact us [by email]. (Peopleperhour – Privacy Policy)*

> *If you believe that your intellectual property rights have been violated, please notify us via… [the] link on our website and we will investigate. (Freelancer – User Agreement)*

> *In the event that a user with a disability experiences accessibility issues with our website or mobile application, please notify us by sending an email… or sending a letter. (Upwork – Upwork Digital Accessibility Statement)*

> *Please feel free to contact Guru.com to resolve a complaint regarding any aspect of service relating to the website by writing to… [us], or contact[ing] us [by email]. (Guru – Terms of Service)*

Grievance procedures as to dispute resolution and/ or arbitration services were also found to be offered by all DLPs. Differences and similarities in approach were identified. For example, to start with Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com and Guru.com encourage platform users to sort any issues between themselves first, without the need for mediation. If no resolution can be achieved here, the dispute can then be moved to paid (by DLP users), predetermined (by platforms), in-house (or occasionally third party, in the case of Guru.com), dispute resolution (only, concerning Peopleperhour.com) or arbitration services (regarding Freelancer.com and Guru.com). Here, a binding award is determined by DLP support, or an arbitrator, unilaterally rendering a decision on the issues. Similarly, Upwork.com also encourages platform users to resolve any disagreement among themselves first. In contrast however, the in-house dispute assistance program is non-binding, and varies by contract type. For example, non-resolution can range from DLP users being encouraged to pursue a dispute independently (concerning hourly contracts, or hourly direct contracts), the release of escrow funds in equal amounts to platform users (respecting fixed price direct contracts), to the DLP referring the dispute on to a paid, predetermined, third party arbitration service (regarding fixed price service contracts):

> *[Peopleperhour.com] encourage our freelancers and buyers to try and resolve any disagreements between themselves. However should that not be possible…, [Peopleperhour.com] customer services can provide dispute resolution. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)*

> *Our dispute resolution system is designed to allow both parties to resolve issues regarding milestone payments amongst themselves without arbitration. After 4 days of*

a dispute being filed (or 7 days if the dispute is filed by the freelancer) either party may elect to move the dispute to paid arbitration. (Freelancer – Freelancer Fees and Charges)

In any case where the employer and a freelancer cannot mutually agree on the distribution of the funds in SafePay, you expressly agree to and acknowledge that Guru.com or a third party chosen by Guru.com will arbitrate the dispute in accordance with… [the] terms of service and the website. (Guru – Terms of Service)

For disputes arising between clients and freelancers, you agree to abide by the dispute resolution process that is explained in the escrow instructions that apply to your particular service contract or direct contract. If that process does not resolve your dispute, you may pursue your dispute independently. (Upwork – User Agreement)

Yet, obtaining access to dispute resolution and/ or arbitration services for platform users was found to be contingent on all DLPs surveyed. In particular, the terms of services (and related documents) specify an eligibility criteria. Some aspects taken from platforms include whether or not, for example: a seller's contract type applies, the dispute was filed correctly, deadlines have been met, those involved in the dispute qualify as trusted members, non-circumvention rules have been observed and the fees related to the dispute have been paid, among others:

Upwork[.com]'s dispute assistance program… do[es] not apply to any hire contracts. (Upwork – Any Hire Escrow Instructions)

All claims filed or brought contrary to the dispute assistance program will be considered improperly filed. (Upwork – Fixed Price Service Contract Escrow Instructions). The dispute assistance program is not available for disputes filed or initiated past the dispute assistance deadlines. (Upwork – Fixed Price Service Contract Escrow Instructions and Fixed Price Direct Contract Escrow Instructions)

To raise a dispute, the freelancer is required to pay a non-refundable fee… Disputes are available to freelancers that have qualified as trusted members of the… [Peopleperhour.com] community… In the event of having to make a resolution decision…, [Peopleperhour.com] will use only the communication in the WorkStream as sole evidence. (Peopleperhour – Terms and Conditions)

In rendering its decision, the arbitrator shall only be obligated to consider the following: (i) the job agreement, (ii) the parties' course of dealings, as evidenced by activity on or communications through the website, (iii) the job itself and (iv) any information or communication that the employer and the freelancer submit for review. (Guru – Terms of Service)

Second, in terms of voice as *contribution to management decision-making*, mechanisms and practices were located on Upwork.com only. For example, the terms of services (and related documents) here define the use of suggestion schemes for instance, how they are regulated

and encourage sellers to seek improvements via: *'[providing] suggestions, comments, ideas, or know-how…, related to… products, services or technology'* (Upwork – API Terms of Use). The Privacy Policy of Upwork.com describe how they: '*use this information to… improve the service and how… [the] site functions, and develop new products and features'*, for example:

> *We'd love to hear your thoughts on improving Upwork[.com]. Here's what happens when you share them. You can send us comments and suggestions about our services and ways to improve them. If you do, you're agreeing your ideas are free and unsolicited, and you don't expect or ask anything in return, unless we've specifically asked you for your ideas and offered something in return… You agree we're free to use, change and share the idea as we like, without being obligated to give you anything for it. And if you do send us an idea, you also agree that this doesn't affect our right to use similar or related ideas – including those we already have or get from others. (Upwork – Terms of Use)*

Last, while platform user contact was found to be regulated and constrained in various ways, scope for collective identity and voice as *expression of collective organisation* was identified. For example, although sellers are not permitted to provide a means of direct contact through DLPs, they can still use the communication tools provided (albeit inside of a job[51], which are monitored). Some platforms (such as Upwork.com and Freelancer.com), also offer a way for sellers to contact each other indirectly, through public forums or blogs (which are monitored):

> *Freelancers, agencies, and clients may communicate with each other through the service. For example, freelancers, agencies, and clients may wish to discuss client needs and freelancer work proposals… We may offer public forums or blogs. If you participate, your comments and questions will be publicly displayed… You may choose, through such features or otherwise, to submit or post questions, comments, or other content… Please note that certain information, such as your name and profile may be publicly displayed on the service along with your user forum content. Please note that your use of community forums is subject to the Upwork[.com] forum rules and our terms of service. (Upwork – Privacy Policy)*

> *Communication with other users on the website must be conducted through the text, audio and or video chat functionality, along with message boards, public clarification boards, project message board, direct message sending and other communication channels provided on the website. You must not post your email address or any other contact information (including but not limited to Skype ID or other identifying strings on other platforms) on the website. (Freelancer – User Agreement)*

---

[51] The content analysis did not detect any communication tools, where contact between sellers could occur directly, outside of a job.

5.3 Concluding summary

This chapter has presented findings from the QCA, to scope the variability of the platforms' terms of services (and related policies) around LP issues, and to set up what is to come. In particular, it has addressed subsidiary research question one – *do DLPs' terms of services differ in approach to LP issues?* The platforms' terms of services have been investigated in terms of LPT (which is lacking in the extant literature), and the findings here contribute new insight on how platforms attempt to regulate core dimensions of the LP. First, in spite of the registration, verification and approval found on all DLPs, no guarantees were offered by the platforms. Second, despite the (self-)employment status predetermination located on all but one DLP (and aspects of autonomy that go hand in hand with that), platforms use (or afford to buyers) various mechanisms for control and yet, also provide several routes for sellers to access autonomy. Reflectively, such new evidence has given a more rounded and nuanced appreciation of the uneven patterns of autonomy and control, which signal a need for further empirical exploration. And last, (limited) scope for collective identity and voice was identified. This chapter has some limitations as it offers surface level data only. Therefore, chapters six to ten will delve deeper into the qualitative data of people's experiences of working via DLPs.

Chapter 6: Searching and matching on digital labour platforms - skills mismatch and labour indeterminacy (subsidiary research question 2, part 1 of 3)

6.1 Introduction

Chapter(s) six (seven and eight) will present on subsidiary research question two – *how can LPT help understand challenges and tensions of skills (autonomy, consent and resistance at work) when using DLPs?* Due to the level of data that emerged, the findings on this research question have been reported over chapters six (skills), seven (autonomy) and eight (consent and resistance). While dimensions of LPT do not easily untangle and so there is a degree of overlap, the importance of these aspects have warranted the treatment of them on their own. Part one of three will address issues of skills (and their mismatch), and labour indeterminacy (Smith, 2015:230-231). Skills mismatch is viewed to be a discrepancy between "the skill that resides in the man [sic] himself… [and] the skill demanded by the job" (Cockburn, 1983:113). Firstly, the chapter will begin by providing an outline of the findings to come, and will indicate the main contribution. Secondly, it will then report the findings on platform RSS, defining and differentiating skills, tactics for survival (in connection with skills), ratings and reputation, and posting, rating and reviewing work. Lastly, this chapter will close with a concluding summary.

6.2 Searching and matching undermined: Potential for skills mismatch and indeterminacy

In spite of the registration, verification and approval on DLPs and the various ways platforms provide to convey, search and match skills (see chapters three and five), the findings on this theme signal a number of challenges and tensions, which contribute to knowledge regarding the searching and matching of skills, and their mismatch[52] and indeterminacy. These include problems of: (limited/ non-existent) barriers to entry, skill personalisation, bogus user activity (in relation to skills), five-star ratings being the norm and buyers lacking technical know-how.

6.2.1 Digital labour platform reviewing, screening and sifting: (Limited or non-existent) barriers to entry

We begin with issues of platform RSS. DLP RSS at registration, verification and approval of potential platform users (see s 5.2.1 above), or how users capitalised on the (variable) ways in which platforms were RSS, was found to undermine searching and matching in two major ways. While DLPs (at times) largely had limited/ non-existent entry requirements, some also (at times) had barriers to entry. The findings here show how such policies and practices can bring about circumstances for skills mismatch and indeterminacy for both buyers and sellers.

First, limited/ non-existent verification of seller suitability of skill(s) and level(s) of skill, and of buyer and seller identity documents was often described by sellers. Here, the lack of barriers to entry on platforms can be explained by their *scaling at speed*, a core part of their business

---

[52] In certain cases, either sellers bid for work that did not match their skill, or buyers/ DLPs invited sellers with skill that did not match the skill required by the job (see s 6.2.5, s 7.2.2 and s 8.2.2 below).

models, as included in chapter three (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:29) (see s 9.2.1 below). Lax entry requirements was a problem for buyers and sellers, since they undermined searching and matching through producing conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

> *It's an open marketplace for anyone to put up a profile and anyone to put in a job… [For example], Upwork[.com]… do not ensure that the [buyers' profile or] requirement is a real [profile or] requirement… Similarly there are many [sellers'] profiles… [where they] do not have the skills and [yet], they still have a profile. (Participant 1)*

> *I did encounter clients that tried to scam me… [For example], I stumbled upon this client… [who] sounded impressed by whatever it… [was] that I told her about… [myself]. I actually accepted her project on Freelancer[.com]. So when you do that… [buyers are] able to… close the project and leave you… awful feedback… She said that I couldn't complete the project, even though we never actually started [it]… She asked [me] for money… and then when I said no, she left that awful [rating and] review. (Participant 7)*

> *From what I['ve] found, no one's really screening you… It… means the industry gets slightly weird idiots, you know? People [who are] claiming to do things [that] they just cannot do, which is one of the main problems I've found across the board, with all of these sites… Anyone can join, anyone… And that's where the flooding comes from, flooding of people claiming [that] they can do something [which] they can't. (Participant 19)*

> *[Buyers think] that Upwork[.com] did all the… [checks] for them. That's… a reason why sometimes clients are disappointed in [a] freelancer's work because they rely on Upwork[.com] to kind of check if the freelancer is really good at what they say they're good at, or not. But it's actually on… [the buyer] to check if the freelancer is a good fit. (Participant 32)*

Second, where barriers to entry were found, sellers adapted to circumvent DLP rules[53]. This also undermined searching and matching by creating circumstances for skills mismatch and indeterminacy. Here some DLPs curtailed the number of sellers (at times) by barring access to some sellers with certain skills, owing to oversupply or under demand. As a counter tactic some sellers gained entry either by selecting skill label(s) which would allow them access or through buying/ renting user profiles, where the skill "matched" their own (see s 6.2.3 below):

> *I know that on Upwork[.com] it's getting harder to register in this data entry section… when you're a new freelancer… I needed to also add the description of my draughtsman services to make sure I can get [on]to the [digital labour] platform. Because they say there are too many freelancers in data entry and we think that you need to do something else, and basically… we can't allow you [on] here because every job posting will get*

---

[53] See s 5.2.2 above for an overview of DLP rules.

more than 50 proposals and it's hard for clients to select somebody when you have a huge list of people. So they're trying to control it. (Participant 29)

[Guru.com] wouldn't let me on… They just said they don't believe that there's anyone demanding my skill set out there, or I can't offer anything specific that they're potentially looking for right now. So it left me a little bit slack-jawed, because… of all the interest I get from all the other [digital labour] platforms. (Participant 17)

6.2.2 Defining and differentiating skills: Problems of skill personalisation

Issues of skill personalisation were found to undermine searching and matching in three key ways. In particular, the ways in which DLPs regulate and constrain what sellers were able to convey regarding skill (labels, levels and in portfolios), set conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy via: simple or broad skill labelling, and search feature issues, seller discretion over skill labels and levels and issues of subjectivity and portfolio format or layout limitations.

First, in terms of skill labels, some DLPs were found to be overly simplistic/ too broad in their approach which undermined searching and matching. Simple/ broad skill labels were viewed by sellers to restrict the scope of skill that buyers were able to search – who may be required to select relevant predetermined skill(s) for matching upon posting, or could be automatic (as outlined in chapter three) – and of skill that they were able to search as well as demonstrate:

[With some digital labour platforms] it's like saying I can drive a vehicle. Now, the question is if the vehicle is a boat, a canoe, or if the vehicle is a cruise ship or the vehicle is an 18-wheeler or the vehicle is an airplane. Well, just saying I can drive a vehicle, technically that is true, but you are far too course in your granularity as to what vehicles you can actually drive. They all make you go forward or reverse to some extent, but there can be a tremendous difference between one and another, and the customer may need to know which ones you can actually drive… And just as broad as there are vehicles, such as the airplane, cruise ship and 18-wheeler, when you're doing programming there are situations where that granularity is absolutely essential. (Participant 14)

Relatedly, DLP search features were reported to yield numerous, and inappropriate returns/ options. One reason for this was that some platforms kept skill labelling simple/ broad – and another was that some DLPs had little in the way of search filters, for example – to portray a large number of returns/ options while searching given the business models[54] (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:29). This set an environment for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

I think… PeoplePerHour[.com] can be quite guilty of just spewing out… a lot of stuff… [which] you're really having to sift through. (Participant 20)

---

[54] As discussed in chapter three, the business models of DLPs are based on attracting a large number of users (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:29).

I don't think… [it's] a very good search engine that they use [on digital labour platforms] because a lot of projects that I see are not even remotely relevant to my skill set, but perhaps they just want to show you any project that even weakly matches your skill set. (Participant 4)

The [digital labour] platform… flags some jobs that are prescribed to… my expertise. They'll say… someone needs a paper review from space physics and it flags up with me… [Yet] the requirements of the actual job does not fall within my experience, or scope of practice. (Participant 11)

I used to get… [invitations] sometimes four or five a week, but in most cases they… [were] not so good [at] matching to my skills and so I usually would have to filter them and usually after screening them maybe four out of five, I would just say, sorry, this doesn't match [my skill set]… I have set some… [Really Simple Syndication Feeds on Upwork.com] and I am funnelling… [posts] through some filtering so at the end I get maybe a selection of two to five projects that are very close to my profile each day that are sent into my email inbox. (Participant 31)

Second, seller discretion over skill labels and levels was found to undermine searching and matching. How sellers were able to convey skill on DLPs was summed up by Participant 17, who described DLPs to be like: *'The Wild West'*. Inappropriate unintentional (and intentional, see s 6.2.3 below) use of the system was reported. Here issues of subjectivity on the part of the sellers underpinned this, and produced conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

On some [digital labour] platforms, depending on your skill level, you get applied to a different sort of grouping. Highly skilled people will be shown tasks for high skilled… jobs, and lower skilled people…, [for] lower skilled jobs… Just saying I know Python doesn't make me a master at Python. I may have only been using Python for two weeks and I can legitimately say I have a Python skill in my profile, but that doesn't mean I can really perform for a client who needs someone who's experienced in Python… It's truly subjective… The more you know, the more… you understand… [what] you don't know. People who are very new at things may feel that they're very competent in what they've learned, but when they start getting out into the deeper water they understand that there is far more of an ocean out there than they thought there was. Initially they rated themselves very high, four or five out of a five, and then they realise that they were just getting their toes wet in the swimming pool… I never like to rate myself as a flat out I'm the master of something, because things are always changing, always updating, and I tend to mark myself somewhere in the upper range when I feel very confident of something. (Participant 14)

Finally, portfolio format or layout limitations on DLPs were reported to make it challenging for sellers to convey their skill(s) and level(s) of skill to potential buyers. Sellers were free to add examples of completed work in to their portfolios but described how format/ layout limitations

constrained what they could showcase, and the interface on the platforms meant that buyers faced having to sift through a mass of information. This undermined searching and matching as buyer RSS was hindered, which formed conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

> *[Like] Guru[.com]..., if I put my portfolio onto… [Peopleperhour.com], it's all in one thing, you know. If someone wants to see what's at the arse end of my portfolio they've got to click and go all the way through 50 pictures. That doesn't seem to make sense… I think designers lose work, because buyers can't be bothered to sift through… I'm up to about 53 pictures, which is way less than [what] I want to put up there…, but I can't, because it's just… having a portfolio of 200 pictures, and the only way to see them is to click next, no one's going to do that. (Participant 19)*

> *There are issues in the way of showing my portfolio… on the website… [For example], I say I am working as a graphic designer and architectural designer, and I am also working in motion graphics and animation… [But] when the client… checks my portfolio, they [can] only see my logo designs, they can't see my architecture projects because of the interface of… Freelancer.com. (Participant 10)*

6.2.3 Tactics for survival: Bogus user activity and skill

A degree of bogus user activity was found as to skill(s) and level(s) of skill conveyed in user accounts. Notably, eight key tactics were reported to undermine searching and matching by setting conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy. User profiles, or aspects of profiles including: skill labels and ratings – in terms of the more intentional, rather than unintentional (subjective) inappropriate use of the system, see s 6.2.2 above – portfolio, test results, rank, ratings, reviews and endorsements and declaration of (co/) workers were found to be bogus.

First, the buying, selling, or renting of user accounts was found to undermine searching and matching. Here barriers to entry on some DLPs (see s 6.2.1 above) resulted in some sellers adapting to circumvent DLP rules by buying/ renting established user profiles where the skill "matched" their own to gain entry. This set conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

> *It is really hard to get an account now [on some digital labour platforms]. There are people… who try to [rent or] buy accounts from… Upwork[.com], for example, because it's so hard to get one… So, if you are a programmer, I think, like HTML [HyperText Markup Language] or WordPress or whatever, I don't think you can make an account [on] there. There were people who offered me £200 per month to give them my account, so they can use it… [and] I had like four or five people who wanted to buy my account. (Participant 25)*

Second, we have seen that DLPs allowed sellers' discretion over their skill labels and levels, which resulted in intentional (and unintentional, see 6.2.2 above) manipulation of the system to gain (entry or) work. Third, participants further reported that sellers adapted to circumvent

DLP rules by adding images of plagiarised work in portfolios to get work. These undermined searching and matching through producing conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

Every beginner should 100 per cent pretend that they're good, they should write that they [have] already… created thousands of brand identities for clients all around the world, and then really create those. (Participant 32)

People can say [that] they've got those skills and can just post some happy pictures up, you know, look what I made, isn't that brilliant, and you think wow, yeah, let's get onto them. And then you find out that they can't do it. (Participant Alpha – A buyer)

[Portfolios] can be faked. Because there are some guys who will gather images from some portfolio websites and they put them [on] there and say… I can do that. And then when you ask… for results, you get some weird looking stuff. (Participant 25)

Fourth, cheating on DLP-specific tests was found to undermine searching and matching. For example, when faced with tests, and to avoid a lack of skill, one seller adapted to circumvent DLP rules by using Google search (a search engine) to find the correct answers and another seller explained how some sellers did so by requesting other sellers take the test for them as a job over a different DLP. This set out circumstances for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

You were able to cheat on them, I must admit. You could sit there with two browser windows open and just Google the question. (Participant 17)

I've… seen on… Upwork[.com], there are some tests you can do. So you can do a HTML test, and JavaScript test. I've seen on PeoplePerHour[.com], people posting jobs asking for people to do those tests for them… Yeah, there's a bit of a shady side to it all. (Participant 27)

Fifth, evading the legitimate means of improving one's DLP ranking was reported. One seller explained how sellers adapted to circumvent DLP rules through replicating the rank awarded by DLPs (which is normally obtained via tenure/ activity history), through using Photoshop (a photo editing and manipulation software), in order to get work for example. This undermined searching and matching by producing an environment for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

There was one time I came across a profile… image, [and] he had made it such that he had overladen it with some kind of banner that said… top one per cent… or top seller, and he had done it in the colours of the website… so it looked like it was an official stamp of authority from PeoplePerHour[.com]… But it wasn't, he had just done it with Photoshop… And it annoyed me because… he would pop up in the same recommended section as I would pop up [in], and I didn't have some made-up banner saying top seller or top one per cent. (Participant 17)

Sixth, purchasing fake ratings and reviews was found to undermine searching and matching. Participants described how some sellers adapted to circumvent DLP rules by creating more

than one user account, and then allocated work (or had others allocate work) to themselves from that same profile to obtain fake ratings and reviews (usually accrued by tenure/ activity history), in order to get work. This provided conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

> *Basically…, because there isn't that much policing, I'm certain this happens…, it's like buying likes on Facebook… [People] set up an account, they'll set up bogus accounts, assign jobs to those bogus accounts, and those bogus accounts give them reviews. So after a few days, you've got a profile that's got some amazing reviews, and then, you can start bidding on proper jobs. (Participant 27)*

> *To give you a gist of what happens…, you open a profile on the [digital labour] platform and you have a friend sitting in the UK. What you say is, I'll… [deposit] $2,000 into your account and what you have to do is… become a client of Upwork[.com and] post a job. I'll pretend that I'll be working for the next 15, 20 days [on that job], and what you do is pay the $2,000 back to me… Say 20 per cent of $2,000 is deducted… by Upwork[.com], but… for [your] $200 you have got [a] five-star rating and… [good] feedback. So, that's how you cheat the system… It is being done for each and every company… [here] in India, and it is [also] being done for each and every country of the world. (Participant 1)*

> *There's always a lot of false reviews out there on the internet about anything. For all I know the review that they're directing… [me] to could be by their grandmother… You really don't know what you're going to get until you've got it, it can be that worrying. You think… here's the project, oh Christ, what have they done, you know. (Participant Alpha)*

> *We are just solely relying on the reviews and customer mails of other people, and, kind of, taking it for what it is. Like, we just assume that the [digital labour] platform is able to screen and accurately show us the people that we want. (Participant Bravo – A buyer)*

Seventh and similarly, sham endorsements intended to add extra emphasis to adjacent DLP content in seller profiles (used to facilitate buyer RSS), undermined searching and matching:

> *On PeoplePerHour[.com] there's an endorsement section [where] you can get endorsed by people. And I keep getting endorsed by these guys in India… that I've never worked for, never had anything to do with. (Participant 27)*

> *You can… give a testimonial for people. And I've had two or three from people [that] I've never heard of, and never worked for. And I'm like, you know, who are you, what [are] you doing? (Participant 28)*

Finally, the eighth tactic found to undermine searching and matching was the non-disclosure of (co/) workers on DLPs and to buyers. Here while buyers usually selected sellers based on their user profiles and activity histories, some sellers were found adapting to circumvent DLP or buyer rules (see s 8.2.2 below). This set conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

I guess… what the clients worry [about] is that they're not buying the person [that] they're speaking to, they're buying somebody else along the chain. (Participant 23)

There is no way to ensure that the person you're talking to does have the skills to deliver. Just for example like myself, I probably do not have the skills of being a data scientist or [of] being an app developer, but at the end of the day I'm getting lots of projects which are into app development and into data science and I am just the client-facing person. (Participant 1)

I did… [subcontract work] four times… because… I was… lazy and… tired. I didn't want to work those days so I… gave… [the jobs] to other people that I didn't… know. I just… posted the project[s] and waited for people to bid… I can't be 100 per cent sure of the outcome and I wasn't really happy at all with the outcome of their work. Let me just say two of the four people that I… had… work for me, like their outcome wasn't as I expected. So yeah, it was not good… Obviously… [buyers don't know that I subcontract work]. That would be a disadvantage because… they could just hire somebody else if you don't have the time for it, or if you're lazy and you don't want to do it. (Participant 7)

6.2.4 Ratings and reputation: Five-star ratings are the norm

Five-star ratings being the norm manifested in three key ways, which undermined searching and matching. In particular, DLP users evading negative (or obtaining positive) feedback set out circumstances for skills mismatch and indeterminacy in: platform users defaulting to five-star ratings, DLP user discretion over feedback, and four key tactics of sellers, covered next.

First, buyers (or sellers) defaulting to five-star ratings was found to undermine searching and matching. Here, unless sellers (or buyers) were viewed to do something wrong by buyers (or sellers) on-the-job, they were generally given a five-star rating (the top grading), and reviews were usually skipped. This established circumstances for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

A lot of people tend to be lazy, and unless they have a bad interaction with… the other… [side] of the process, they simply give five-stars, no description, and move on. It's a poor technical analysis of each of them. Everyone tends to be perfect unless they did something bad, and there's nothing in the middle. (Participant 14)

The kind of rating that I get from my clients on Upwork[.com]… has been a five-star for the last ten years. (Participant 1)

I think on PeoplePerHour[.com]…, out of 55 people, I've never had less than a five-star rating… Whatever that means. (Participant 17)

Second, where buyers (or sellers) did not default to good feedback on completion, they were reported to have discretion over ratings and reviews on some DLPs. Here sellers (or buyers) had the option to accept or decline feedback via DLP features and support. This undermined searching and matching through producing a situation for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

There are [digital labour] platforms which gives you an option of whether you want to choose to publish… [your ratings and reviews] or not… I just choose not to publish my bad [ratings and] reviews. (Participant 2)

*I have 100 per cent [in] good rating[s]… One person once put a four-star rating on [my] PeoplePerHour[.com profile]… I was like hey, I have one… [shi*ty] client… can you take that one down. Because one bad rating kills a five-star… [And] they did. (Participant 16)*

I [once] gave… a [buyer] very bad feedback... [but] he was… very cunning… [and] requested through Upwork[.com] that I relook at the feedback and change it… So I actually changed my feedback from one-star to five… You can see that this entire system is flawed, because if… feedback can [be] change[d], then how does it stand ground as… proper honest feedback on any [digital labour] platform. (Participant 1)

I… [can choose] to publish… [ratings and reviews] on my profile or not… I think on [the] one hand it's advantageous that I let you see what I actually want you to see, but on the other hand from the client side, it's not really that beneficial. Because if you're only seeing what I'm allowing you to see, you're actually at a disadvantage. (Participant 13)

Finally, sellers evaded negative (or obtained positive) feedback via four tactics (in addition to purchasing fake feedback, see s 6.2.3 above). Here sellers often adapted to circumvent DLP rules which undermined searching and matching by setting out conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy. The first tactic found was a readiness to sustain financial loss via options of redoing and discounting or refunding work (at the end of the job) or jumping ship (part way through). The second tactic relates to buyer-seller continuity (see s 7.2.1 below) where some sellers received sustained positive feedback through repeat buyers. The third tactic was how some sellers just outright asked for good feedback, and the fourth was where some solicited positive feedback by coercive means, through holding work hostage, or bribery, for example:

If the client's demands are not met [then] they have a couple of options. The first one is they would ask to get [a] refund for the money they have paid us, and if we don't do that [then] they will have the opportunity to write feedback about us… If a client's demands are not met [then] we simply give them [a] refund or we try again and again until the demands are met. (Participant 5)

My feedback is more important [to me] than the payment. So I['ve] had… [my] fair share of cancellations, and annulments just to protect my profile. (Participant 26)

Generally I… want to stick with… client[s] because if you have a good relationship with a particular client, then it can actually give you… sustained good [ratings and] reviews. (Participant 4)

Most of the freelancers want good [ratings and] reviews… from the client by… [requesting it directly] or even by using… [the work] as leverage... [Some finish] the job but… [won't submit] it before [it] gets a [good rating and] review. (Participant 8)

Relatedly and exacerbating the above issues, sellers were found gaining additional feedback for a single job. For example, one seller described obtaining a number of ratings and reviews for the same job, where an automated process determined that feedback was to be provided at time of payment(s), which brought about conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

> *One thing that is a bit weird is that if you have an ongoing project and you get paid, say, two-weekly or every two weeks…, [then buyers] have to leave a [rating and] review… every time they pay, even though I'm the same person, they're the same person and it's the same project. (Participant 17)*

6.2.5 Posting, rating and reviewing work: Buyers lack technical know-how

Buyers lacking in technical know-how was reported to undermine searching and matching in two main ways. In particular, conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy came through problems of buyers (which lacked in technical know-how) posting, rating and reviewing work.

First, unintentional (or intentional) miscommunicated job posts (and how DLPs regulate and constrain first contact between platform users, see s 7.2.2 below), were found to undermine searching and matching. Here sellers often described how mistaken, unclear, or inadequate information on job posts was occasionally down to buyers lacking in technical know-how (or was at times owing to a deliberate act, to get consent, see s 7.2.2 below). Relatedly, buyers are required to select relevant predetermined skill(s) for matching upon posting, or could be automatic (as outlined in chapter three) and yet, was a problem for buyers lacking technical know-how in terms of choosing the right skill labels or levels, or for automation to take place based on their input. This established an environment for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

> *Usually, we… don't actually fully understand some of the things that we are hiring for. (Participant Bravo)*

> *The people who run the company, they don't really know what it is that's happening in the back room. They just hire people to do it. They're the business people, but they don't have technical understanding. It's like putting out a job listing asking for 30 plus years of experience on something that has only been around for ten years, and the person who's written that and given it to their HR team to disperse, they don't understand what they're doing, they don't understand what they need. (Participant 14)*

> *When… [buyers] post a job… they are [often] in the wrong categories. (Participant 29)*

> *[Buyers] have no idea how to interpret the set of skills or the labels you have on a given [digital labour] platform or the feedback in order to help them to choose the perfect worker. Or they have no idea in most cases about the magnitude of the job. (Participant 24)*

Second, inappropriately applied feedback on the part of buyers was also found to undermine searching and matching. Notably, DLP rating and reputation systems hinge upon the buyers'

ability to suitability apply ratings and reviews to services rendered and yet, sellers repeatedly described how buyers which lacked in technical know-how were generally not the best judge of work carried out. This brought about circumstances for skills mismatch and indeterminacy:

> *When… [some seller] says, yeah, I'll manipulate this piece for you, I'll put that person into the picture, they do it, but it's nothing like it should be. And I can see that, but the person who's hired them, just looks at it, and thinks, oh yeah, that's really nice. Not having a clue, a, how bad it is, and, b, how nice it could have been. (Participant 19)*

> *What… [buyers] see is just screenshots of my screen and it's like a professional software, so what do they understand of it. It's hard to explain after the project is halfway done where… those hours… [went], why did I spend two hours just scrolling through images, are they really related, do you really need to prepare [for] the project. Yes, sometimes. (Participant 32)*

6.3 Concluding summary

This chapter has addressed part one of three of subsidiary research question two – *how can LPT help understand challenges and tensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work when using DLPs?* Part one of three has dealt with issues of skills (and their mismatch) and labour indeterminacy. The findings reported in this chapter add new knowledge on skills (and their mismatch) by suggesting that searching and matching is undermined on platforms over five patterns and point to indeterminacy. Notably, the data on DLP reviewing, screening and sifting, defining and differentiating skills, tactics for survival (regarding skills), ratings and reputation, and posting, rating and reviewing work, has shown issues apropos: (limited/ non-existent) barriers to entry, skill personalisation, bogus user activity, five-star ratings being the norm and buyers lacking technical know-how. These problems produced conditions for skills mismatch and indeterminacy for platform users when searching and matching via DLPs. The next two chapters present findings on autonomy (chapter seven) and consent and resistance (chapter eight) so as to address the remaining two parts of subsidiary research question two.

Chapter 7: Constraining worker autonomy in the platform economy - unpicking bogus

self-employment (subsidiary research question 2, part 2 of 3)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will present on part two of three of subsidiary research question two – *how can LPT help understand challenges and tensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work when using DLPs?* The evidence on this research question has been presented across three chapters owing to both the volume of data and the importance of these LP dimensions. Chapter seven (part two) deals with autonomy and (false) self-employment. Autonomy refers to the extent workers can exercise initiative and discretion (Kalleberg et al., 2009:101). Since key aspects of autonomy relate to self-employment (Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019) – a status sellers are purported to be, as in chapter three – including, autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, work times and methods, the two have been integrated together. The chapter first provides an outline of the findings, and will indicate the main contribution. Second, it will then report the findings on sellers *tendering for different contracts*, *negotiating prices for services*, *employing workers in addition to, or in place of, themselves*, work scheduling autonomy, and work method autonomy. Finally, this chapter will close with a concluding reflective summary.

7.2 Autonomy and (bogus) self-employment: (Bounded) freelancing

Participants often perceived the employment status of themselves or those working through DLPs as self-employed or freelancer, as opposed to employee, or worker. As Participant 31 echoed: *'I don't consider… [myself to be] a worker or employed by Upwork[.com] or anyone else. I'm self-employed, definitely'*. This finding agrees with Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019:3).

The evidence on this theme, however, contributes further knowledge regarding a number of challenges and tensions around five patterns, which signal bogus self-employment: a status echoed by the autonomy found to be experienced by sellers. Bogus self-employment occurs when working arrangements have limited or no features of self-employment or they possess many characteristics of direct-employment (Behling and Harvey, 2015:970), and the findings largely reflect this. They also contradict the claim that DLPs could reduce potential for bogus self-employment (Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:29; 2021:1389), as included in chapter three. These involve challenges of: tendering for different contracts and continuity of engagements, negotiating prices, employing (co/) workers, work times and methods or obeying instructions.

7.2.1 Tendering for different contracts: Limited or non-existent autonomy over buyers and tasks

Constraining factors were reported concerning sellers *tendering for different contracts* – one activity of self-employment (Behling and Harvey, 2015:970), as discussed in chapter three – which limited autonomy over buyers and tasks and therefore signals bogus self-employment. Problems of: deskilling, and degradation, tacit knowledge and preferences (regarding buyers

and sellers), and (issues or opportunities of indeterminacy as to) buyer-seller continuity, and seller-owned initiatives have been reported here. Other elements[55] are presented elsewhere.

First, deskilling, and degradation was reported to constrain autonomy over buyers and tasks. Similar to what Thompson (1990:100) theorised, buyers were found to use DLPs and sellers for the elimination or reduction of existing skill, as well as dividing aspects of conception and execution. Buyers requested that sellers teach them their skill or automate work for example, and some sellers reported skill being undermined/ made redundant through such processes:

> *It's strange because at any one point in time there always seems to be two or three clients that… want to learn for themselves. They want me to teach them on Skype… So they'll have a project in mind… but really what they want… [is] to gain [the] skills necessary to create the end goal themselves... Because they don't want… to have me in the background. (Participant 17)*

> *I am working currently with an American… recruiting company... They have 100 employees who are recruiters… and I'm automating part of their work. (Participant 31)*

> *I've been doing… [what I do] for… six years [now]. So initially you'd actually get a lot of drafting work [where] someone says, I have a sketch on paper [and] I need you to draft it in CAD [computer-aided design]. But… someone can actually do that… from their phone [these days]. They [can just] download an app. (Participant 13)*

Second, tacit knowledge and preferences also constrained autonomy over buyers and tasks (pay rates, working times, and methods). To start with, user profile activity history was found to be considered by buyers upon RSS. Notably, user profiles featuring limited activity history caused a *chicken and egg* situation where short-tenured sellers needed experience for work but needed work for experience, due to buyer preferences. Consequently, beginners usually faced a challenging start, by having to pay one's dues, to overcome this barrier to autonomy:

> *What I really struggle with, is how to get away with the fact that you need to have tracked history on the [digital labour] platform. That for me is the tricky aspect and the most difficult one. Because it's like the chicken and the egg, you need history so people trust you, but then how do you gain trust if no one hires you because you have no history? (Participant 21)*

> *If you are a beginner… and you are exclusively working from these digital [labour] platforms, then you are at the mercy of the hirer. If you must take any jobs [that] you are offered, then you are out of luck… It's hard to manage those situations… You are a digital slave at this level. So you need to… obtain the rank, or the status of freedom. (Participant 24)*

---

[55] To avoid repetition, other factors reported elsewhere include: issues of skill personalisation (see s 6.2.2 above), labour competition, DLP fees, regulated and constrained first contact, post types, subcontracting (see s 7.2.2 below), and role conflict (see s 7.2.4 below).

Profiles displaying negative activity history constrained autonomy for sellers as poor ratings and reviews usually resulted in less work, due to buyer preferences and algorithmic ranking:

> *On Upwork[.com] you can filter people based on their ratings and… reviews and how much they have earned. So, we only look at people who have earned above a certain amount and who have reviews that are… above 90 per cent. (Participant Bravo)*

> *I need to keep my numbers high because many people… [or] projects, they require freelancers with at least [a] 90 per cent success rate… So this one person who left… [me] bad feedback, [they] brought down my success rate to 80 per cent, which [now] means that… I don't… qualify to apply for certain projects [as a result]. (Participant 15)*

In a similar vein, buyers were found to have preferences for RSS (based on tacit knowledge) regarding selecting or avoiding certain countries or languages. Such discriminatory practices often constrained (or enhanced) autonomy over buyers and tasks (and pay rates) for sellers:

> *[There are] some requirements that I can't meet. For example…, [buyers] always have some specific requirements on the regions or your language. (Participant 9)*

> *I'm not going to say… [subcontracting is] down to any particular country or region but you kind of learn where that's going to happen… [And] you can't be xenophobic, you can't just stick to people… who are based in England…, [but] I'm only fluent in English. (Participant Alpha)*

> *There is an elitism and a preference for UK-based English speakers where there is a premium placed on the fact that you speak English and you've had an education in England… So I might not be cheap but I come with an immediate status symbol because I happen to be English. (Participant 23)*

> *[For] non-native [English] speakers…, it's hard for us to get work. So we have to accept almost anything, just to put a dollar on another dollar. (Participant 26)*

(In)sufficient tacit knowledge of sellers was constraining. On the one hand, for short-tenured sellers, an inadequate understanding of DLPs was reported to hinder their ability to get work. As Participant 32 explained: *'Beginners are lost on the [digital labour] platform, they have no idea why they're not getting hired'*. On the other hand, for more tenured sellers, an adequate understanding was found to hamper their ability to get work in preferences they had built-up:

> *The one [digital labour platform] I found, where I can kind of level out those positives and negatives, is PeoplePerHour[.com], because Guru[.com] I found [to be] confusing, [and] Freelancer[.com], a bit calamitous. (Participant 19)*

> *I've learned through… [Peopleperhour.com], clients to touch, and clients not to touch… I've learned, and I gauge clients now, and determine how I choose based on that. (Participant 28)*

*Canadians are the nicest ones… Singaporean clients are the most with the money…
All of my bad clients were from [the] UK… [So] if someone from [the] UK writes [to] me,
I'm like, oh, should I take this client? (Participant 32)*

*I don't take by the hour jobs because you get into all sorts of messy situations where…
[buyers are] not convinced that a certain task would have taken… that long. (Participant
23)*

Last, issues (or related opportunities) of indeterminacy (that are reported in chapters six and
eight), were found to constrain autonomy over buyers and tasks for sellers in two main ways.
Here participants commonly reported there to be *substantial continuity of engagement with a
single employer* – a characteristic of direct-employment (see Behling and Harvey, 2015:970)
– over a number of buyers. Issues of indeterminacy were repeatedly regarded to be the core
motivator here, to circumvent the uncertainty around entering into new working relationships:

*If somebody finds a good freelancer on the website, [then] they usually will want to stick
to that person… There were at least two clients telling me that it's very hard to find
reliable people on Freelancer[.com], because they think that it's usually hard to skim
through all the people and find the person with the right skill set… To be honest, I also
find that… a lot of [the] bids are just copy/paste and a lot of those people actually have
no skill set at all related to that project. (Participant 4)*

*When we try to hire people on Upwork[.com], we try to make sure that we can hire them
long-term for our needs, because we don't want to keep changing people… [It's] a
safety issue. Like a security thing. (Participant Bravo)*

*Because now I'm working with a… [buyer] who's been… in contact… [with me for] a
long time…, you develop that level of trust and relationship when he knows that
whenever I'm given a task I will do it to my best, [and that] I'm not going to try and rip
him off. (Participant 21)*

On the one hand, issues of indeterminacy often translated into opportunities of continuity for
sellers – being a key concern for them (Schörpf et al., 2017:89) – but took buyers-sellers off
the market to some extent. As one buyer described: *'Once you've found someone that does
what you like and the way you like it…, they'll become your go-to guy'* (Participant Alpha). In
fact, sellers commonly prioritised existing working relationships. As Participant 18 explained:
'The only issue [if choosing to take on additional work], would be… any [pre/]existing clients'.

On the other hand, indeterminacy, through tactics for engaging autonomy – by misbehaviour
(see s 6.2.3 above and s 8.2.2 below), if framed "as an *active* set of practices that attempt to
recover a degree of autonomy at work" (Fleming, 2001:191), (as discussed in chapter two) –
was frequently reported to be constraining. Here sellers described problems of differentiating
their user accounts from the perceived scale of such seller-owned initiatives, since: *'[Buyers]
don't know if you're presenting real things or a lie'* (Participant 12). As Participant 17 echoed:

> *There's lots of snake oil salesmen on the internet… How do you differentiate yourself from those [individuals], as someone who… is [a] just more genuine and [b] does actually have the necessary skills and abilities?*

7.2.2 Negotiating prices for services: Limited or non-existent autonomy over pay rates

Constraining factors were found concerning sellers *negotiating prices for services* – another activity of self-employment (Behling and Harvey, 2015:970), as discussed in chapter three – which limited autonomy over pay rates and therefore signals bogus self-employment. Issues that are reported here include: labour competition, DLP fees, regulated and constrained first contact, post types and changes, and subcontracting. Other aspects[56] are shown elsewhere.

First, labour competition was reported to constrain autonomy over pay rates (and buyers and tasks) in three key ways: contextual (dis/)advantage (through labour arbitrage), underbidding practices and overpopulation. Here, sellers were found either locked to a price, limited to the highest bid, driven down on their standard pay rates (or pushed out on price). The first came through one's contextual (dis/)advantage on pricing. For this reason, buyers practiced labour arbitrage since: *'Most people go on… [DLPs] to find an economical solution'* (Participant 27), and: *'It will be cheaper [for buyers] than the local worker[s in their countries]'* (Participant 12):

> *I'm from Africa…, [and so I] have cheaper prices… It's actually an advantage. (Participant 13)*

> *You are locked in boxes. The part of the world you are coming from puts you in a given box, and you very, very rarely can obtain a wage outside of that given box… The clients are picking you from Eastern Europe or India or other parts of the world… because you can do the same work as a UK freelancer for half or a third of his wage. (Participant 24)*

> *When… [buyers] compare between my price and the price of the freelancers in Pakistan, or India, they will find a difference…, so I have to decrease my price so I can take the project from my competitors. (Participant 10)*

Underbidding practices put downwards pressure on pay rates in two ways. Here, while some short-tenured sellers undercut others on price/bid (seen over DLPs if open bidding selected), to overcome the *chicken and egg* situation (see s 7.2.1 above), and competition, others went low on price/bid to avoid competition and regulated and constrained first contact (see s 8.2.2 below). This practice constrained autonomy over pay rates (and buyers and tasks) for others but also for those beginners partaking whose activity histories were used as a basis for RSS:

> *I just undercut everybody. That's how you get started. (Participant 16)*

> *If a person started [on a digital labour platform] for $15 per hour, after three months… [buyers] expect… [that same] person to charge $15 per hour and not [later charge] $20*

---

[56] To avoid repetition, other aspects reported elsewhere include: tacit knowledge and preferences (see s 7.2.1 above), and specificity of work (see s 7.2.5 below).

per hour. If they're quoting… [$20, buyers] do not… [go] to… [them because] there are other options where they [can] get [the work done] again [for] $15. (Participant 3)

PeoplePerHour[.com] don't like me doing this, but what I tend to do is I'll message… [buyers] or I'll send the proposal… and I'll put the lowest amount possible… [just] to get [them] to… reply to me, and then I['ll]… offer them an initial Skype call. (Participant 17)

[It can be] frustrating in a way, because… you're trying to make a liveable budget… but when you see 50 or so other applicants who apply, [and] they're offering the whole thing for £1 or something like that, it can become really unrealistic. (Participant 20)

Last reported here was seller overpopulation. This was caused by problems of (limited/ non-existent) barriers to entry (see s 6.2.1 above). Here, an excess supply of labour constrained autonomy over pay rates (and buyers and tasks) for sellers, since this over-supply of sellers handed buyers the advantage of price negotiations, and caused prices to go down. Notably, buyers having access to a crowd that spans geographic and economic contexts (Kuek et al., 2015:7), as discussed in chapter three, normally left sellers with very little bargaining power:

Freelancer[.com] is useless, it's just too difficult to actually find a job there. The problem with most online [digital labour] platforms, the most popular ones, is… [that they're] overpopulated, there are too many people actually on the platform[s]. (Participant 11)

There is nothing much you can do… [to] negotiate… because there are so many people. Say for a [certain] project there are about 50 to 70 people bidding…, so there is no room to negotiate the rates [of pay]. (Participant 1)

As and when you need it, there is that huge call of labour, which competitively tenders against itself for the same project and you're free to choose the lowest price… [Sometimes] I'll just go for the highest priced freelancer…, you'll rate them against the… lowest price[d freelancer] and come to somewhere in the middle. (Participant Alpha)

At times it's a matter of how many of you [there are], maybe say… [the buyer has] ten bidders, and maybe five of you look to be at the same [skill] level, they have to go with the lowest bid. So they… say, no, we have someone else bidding… [lower], so I think you might have to compromise…, so you actually… might not have… leverage at that point. (Participant 13)

DLP fees were the second problem found to constrain autonomy over pay rates (and buyers and tasks). Two central issues were reported. The first came by the charges sellers incurred on submitting proposals and the success rate of them given the extent of labour competition. *'[DLPs] say… [that paying for bids will] keep the amount of proposals that the clients receive down'* (Participant 16) and yet, competition was still such, that even with a limited number of free bids, buying more was key, since they depleted quickly. The second issue to negatively affect earning potential was the disproportionate nature of fees taken on completion of work:

[Upwork.com] have totally screwed everybody over. Now you have to pay to send out a proposal. Even if I get a job the numbers don't really add up, because to get a job you… have to send out… twenty proposals and [you'll only] get one or two. (Participant 16)

I think… [Peopleperhour.com] taking 20 per cent of every transaction is just greedy. (Participant 19)

The third problem reported to constrain autonomy over pay rates (buyers and tasks, working times, and methods) was how DLPs regulate and constrain first contact of their users. Three core issues were found. The first came through buyer-seller communication barriers. Prior to proposal submission, and acceptance, sellers described how they had no (legitimate) way of clarifying details on a given job post, on some DLPs. A second came from offer phraseology. Offers were found to be treated as bids (or as firm offers) by DLPs, as opposed to estimates, or quotes. And the third came via proposal acceptance. This was reported to secure consent through obliging sellers to undertake work or otherwise risk negative consequences, such as receiving poor feedback (see s 10.2.2 below) or losing money already invested on DLP fees:

Sometimes there is not even the possibility to communicate with a client directly to ask some additional questions. You have a brief and that's it. (Participant 32)

When you're filling that box in to quote, [or] to make the bid [rather, on the digital labour platform], it's always in the back of your mind… [that a buyer] could turn [a]round and [hold you to it]. (Participant 27)

Sometimes, it can become a problem if… [buyers have] accepted a job that you didn't really want to get… and then they're unhappy. In that position, you've got to adapt to the idea that you might get some bad feedback, even though it was never your fault, it was just purely because [of] the way the system works. (Participant 19)

If you couldn't finish the project, you will have a very bad [rating and] review… The [digital labour] platform [Freelancer.com, also] cuts the fee before you earn. [In other words], you pay upfront. So you… [have] to feel eager to work, [and] eager to finish, to get the pay, [and] the money you paid. (Participant 8)

Fourth, and relatedly, intentional (and unintentional) miscommunicated job posts were found to constrain autonomy over pay rates (buyers and tasks, working times, and methods). Here, sellers explained that mistaken, unclear, or inadequate information on job posts was at times owing to a deliberate act, to get consent, as discussed in chapter three (Felstiner, 2011) – or was occasionally down to buyers lacking in technical know-how (see s 6.2.5 above). Posting in this way was a problem for sellers especially given the ways in which DLPs regulated and constrained first contact. Even on the platforms where enquires could be made, buyers were not getting back to them. Sellers came to be locked in arrangements with buyers, where firm offers were made, on work details they were unable to clarify but were compelled to take on:

Occasionally, and this is a genuine post, you'll see something like, I need two pictures edited. Full stop, that's it. When I see that, I don't bid, I don't bother. Because what they've got underneath, is you can ask questions before you bid. But, the problem with that is, if you ask the buyer a question, they've already posted the job, and they might not come back until… [someone has] accept[ed] the job. So you're never going to get an answer. So, I'm not going to sit and waste my time, asking a simple question like, what pictures? I mean, you'd think it's common sense, I need pictures. Send the pictures. But they don't… [And] a lot of buyers will say, I need a picture edited, it shouldn't take long. And when I see that sentence, it makes my blood boil. This person who has no experience of design, has an idea of how long it's going to take? So, you kind of have to go back to that person and say, you're trying to say it's not going to take long, [be]cause you don't think it will, so you don't have to pay more, but this is going to take two hours. You don't know it, but it's going to take two hours. (Participant 19)

If I did not read the brief correctly or the client was very insisting on their idea, and then the brief changed because their idea… [did] not work, [then] that's on me. I need to take all of the financial responsibilities for that as well as… [the] overtime and all [of] the [additional] work, all of that is on me. (Participant 32)

[The buyer has the final say], even if it is [the] wrong way, even after I suggest the best way, he says, no, we [need to] do [the work] like that. Then I have to say, okay, the end decision is this. If I say no, then it's like I dropped the project. (Participant 8)

In terms of job post changes, a reluctance to (re)negotiate was found to constrain autonomy over pay rates (and working times) for two key reasons. Here, sellers described how buyers had a tendency to deviate beyond the initial job posting by adjusting/ adding work/ changing their minds entirely and sellers went along with this out of fear of losing new/ existing buyers. The first barrier was the potential for buyers to leave sellers poor feedback. Here, budget (or budget type) were set while posting/ bidding (if bidding, as detailed in chapter three), or were sometimes negotiated after, and sellers (on a budget type of fixed price rather than per hour) described how the prospect of buyers rewarding (or disciplining non-)compliance produced a reluctance to (re)negotiate, and compelled them to undertake additional work. Second, while disagreements can be escalated to DLP dispute resolution and/ or arbitration services, some sellers reported concerns over damaging their relationships with buyers, since as Participant 8 explained: *'[Opening a dispute] destroys all… communication, [and] friendship, everything'*:

In some cases… [the buyer] wants something that he didn't describe at the beginning… [And] I say… what is this? I won't earn anything if I do those [changes], the time loss will be huge… [But sometimes] the client doesn't want to drop it, doesn't want to work with anyone else because this means starting from zero. And he doesn't want to pay more as well. This is really stressful. (Participant 8)

I actually do things that I wouldn't do in the first place, just so I wouldn't get a bad [rating and] review on my profile. Like for example… [if a buyer] asks for other stuff, and… I say no, then he [would] probably… leave me an awful [rating and] review. So then I have to do that and work more in order not to have… negative feedback on my profile. (Participant 7)

When it's like small changes I'm just doing it without negotiation, because I don't think [the] client reacts… [well] to that [if you don't]. (Participant 29)

If it['s] going to be [a] small [amount of] additional work [for free], I don't mind because it's just another service that I am providing and I'm going to get a good rating [and review]. And I'm very concerned about building my client list. (Participant 3)

The last problem found to constrain autonomy over pay rates (buyers and tasks and working times), was subcontracting. Two major issues were reported. The first was how this practice (potentially) occurred ad infinitum. This generated a downward spiralling of pay (since DLPs, consultancies, agencies, or sellers, all took their cut) – exacerbating problems of exploitation (P. Edwards, 2018:5) – constraining autonomy over pay rates, more and more, especially as one came further down the subcontracting chain. The second was how this practice resulted in miscommunication. Inadequate communications here was reported to affect one's income (ability to take on extra work, and ability to schedule, sequence or time activities, on-the-job):

[Consultancies or agencies] can't [really] say, oh, my team, which is what you tend to hear a lot of, because their team is basically PeoplePerHour[.com]…, Fiverr[.com]… or Upwork[.com]… They're just white labelling and rebranding when the finished… [work] comes through…, doubling the money and handing it on… [With regard to sellers employing others], I think that's probably about 90 per cent of the cases. There's a few out there who will start a job and finish… [it] themselves, but there's several others who… [won't]. So for example, if you're having a website built…, everybody says that they're experts, [but] invariably they're not, [and so] they will go to some sort of college kid… and try and get it back… for less money. (Participant Alpha)

There was a corporation and they hired a consultant, and the consultant hired me... This project should have been finished… in a month, so I was planning my income in one way. But then because of miscommunication, this project… ended after four months… So… the income… was much less than [what] I had anticipated it to be. And I couldn't take [on] more clients because I didn't know if I will receive any feedback from the client or not [on possible changes]. If yes then I have tonnes of work to do, if no I am in a gap basically. (Participant 32)

7.2.3 Employing workers in addition to, or in place of, themselves: Limited, variable or non-existent

Three groups of sellers were found in terms of employing (co/) workers. Specifically, the first group were those sellers that were currently engaged in *employing workers in addition to, or in place of, themselves*, the second group of sellers were those that have had experience of employing (co/) workers, and the last group were those which have never had experience of employing others. While some employed (co/) workers for (part/ all of) the work on the DLPs, others did so outside of them. This practice allowed sellers to engage autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times and methods, and took place on various different scales:

> *I have hired freelancers [via Upwork.com] to collaborate with me. I hired developers for websites…, motion designers for some logo animations…, [a] UI [User Interface] designer for a consultation to kind of understand am I going in the right direction… I have hired copywriters for brand books, because English is not my native language so I make a lot of mistakes. (Participant 32)*

> *I remember contacting one of my friends to help me out because… [I had] a lot of work [to do] and I didn't have enough time to finish it myself, and that was actually helpful. And I've… [also had it where] the other person requested me for help. (Participant 21)*

> *I have a couple of contractors in Romania mostly and that is… [how] I can provide this range of products. (Participant 25)*

> *When I started working as a freelancer I was a single person… doing everything. But… when I started getting more projects, I had to hire other people to make a team... So… I acquired… a couple of guys… [and] we [all] work from the same office. (Participant 5)*

Yet, constraining factors were reported regarding sellers employing (co/) workers – one final activity of self-employment (Behling and Harvey, 2015:970), as discussed in chapter three – and thus signals bogus self-employment. Problems of: perceptions of buyers or sellers as to quality, demands and expectations are reported here. Other barriers[57] are shown elsewhere.

First, perceived buyer demands and expectations, or buyers being thought to prefer for work to be done personally, was a barrier to working with (or contacting) others. For some buyers, this matter was raised when RSS, as Participant 7 echoed: *'In… a job description… [buyers will] be asking for individuals to work for them and not… an agency'*. While some adapted to circumvent this – by not declaring (co/) workers on DLPs or to buyers (see s 8.2.2 below) – others complied, like Participant 3, who explained: *'I work independently... [as] some clients are… overprotective about their work'*, and thus avoided working with (or contacting) others.

---

[57] To avoid repetition, other factors are reported in s 9.2.1 below.

Second, perceptions of fellow sellers regarding their quality, demands and expectations was a barrier to working with (or contacting) others. Sellers described how the risk of poor-quality and losing their reputation or client base in working with (or contacting) others was too great:

> *Well, the ones that I hired…, I wasn't really satisfied with the outcome that… [some of them] gave… I'm not saying that… my skill is any better from any other freelancer out there that I know, but I just kind of don't really trust anybody at this point because those clients that I have, I don't want to lose them. So I want to make sure that whatever it is that I send them is my work. (Participant 7)*

> *I've only ever… [subcontracted] once or twice and I didn't like it… I realised my reputation as a writer was in somebody else's hands and my ability to fulfil the criteria for what I think makes me someone you should hire was out of my control. So I don't do that now. (Participant 23)*

Concerns were also reported over demands on time, including Participant 6: *'I can't afford to manage another co-worker'*, and expectations of providing work (see s 9.2.3 below), such as Participant 3: *'[Co-workers] expect that you… [will] have some work [available]'*, for example.

7.2.4 Work scheduling autonomy: Lack of control over working times

With reference to work scheduling autonomy, sellers reported a *lack of control over working times* (scheduling, sequencing or timing), or *obeying instructions in everyday routines* – two further characteristics of direct-employment (see Behling and Harvey, 2015:970) – and thus, signals bogus self-employment. Role conflict was one main issue reported (among others[58]) and for some meant working irregular and unsociable hours, overwork and insufficient sleep.

Parsons (2013:189) defines role conflict as "the exposure of the actor to conflicting sets of… role expectations such that complete fulfilment of both is realistically impossible". Kühne and Leonardi (2020:94-95) identified two types. The first, inter-role conflict, occurs between roles where people take up conflicting social roles, and the second, intra-role conflict, arises within the same role due to incompatible requirements. Here the evidence shows how incompatible demands and expectations of DLPs, buyers (and families) led to intra-role conflict on-the-job and inter-role conflict whereby work responsibilities interfered with familial responsibilities (or vice versa). The personal choice of sellers was also reported to be a contributing factor here.

Firstly, how DLPs (en)forced engagement with themselves or buyers, was found to generate (inter- and intra-)role conflicts. Notably, a lack of control over working times (and buyers and tasks) was for two key reasons. Contradictions and conflicts stemmed from sellers taking on more work. The first came by DLPs monitoring, rewarding (and disciplining non-)compliance as to their terms of services (see s 10.2.1 below). This usually compelled sellers to find work (whether they wanted to, or not), as activity (or compliance) was rewarded, and inactivity (or

---

[58] To avoid repetition, other aspects reported elsewhere include: tacit knowledge and preferences (see s 7.2.1 above), regulated and constrained first contact, post types and changes, subcontracting (see s 7.2.2 above), specificity of work (see s 7.2.5 below), and mechanisms for control (see s 10.2.2 below).

non-compliance) was punished. A second came by (digital) 'positional striving' (see s 10.2.2 below), where sellers felt pressured "to keep up with or outwork others" (Eastman, 1998:51):

> *You can't go… [onto digital labour platforms] just for a weekend…, find something quickly…, do a very quick job and switch off back to like normal office work. It's very time-consuming… They want our time and us being involved with them [deeply. They want] us… sending proposals, buying those connects, buying those monthly memberships… [They want us] doing all [of] these unnecessary things. (Participant 32)*

> *[I'm] trying to maintain… [my profile] so that I'm always within the top 20 of ranked writers. So even if I've got a lot of work on, I try and make it so that my earnings on the platform rank me in the top 20 to keep me a credible choice… So I look like a continuous presence and not somebody that's amateurish…, you know, dipping in and dipping out. So there is that pressure there to maintain your profile and… credibility. (Participant 23)*

> *The [digital labour] platform potentially drives me to it… You want to get your rating higher. So to get your rating higher, you do more work… Obviously, psychologically, you feel that you need to be… a five, so you have to work [to get] that. (Participant 28)*

Secondly, demands and expectations of buyers over seller scheduling, sequencing or timing of activities on-the-job were reported to engender (inter- and intra-)role conflicts. Here, a lack of control over working times (and buyers and tasks) can be seen in four major areas, where contradictions and conflicts came from sellers juggling a number of different buyers. The first was how buyers typically unilaterally set urgent deadlines. A second was where buyers often required sellers to carry out the work on specific days or at specific times. The third was how buyers generally demanded and expected sellers to be contactable, on-call or standby, 24-7. And a fourth was where sellers could not refuse work, where they had continuity with buyers:

> *So I always ask… [buyers] what's your deadline on this? And the answer… 90 per cent of the time [is] as soon as possible… You have a collection of clients who all want things as soon as possible. (Participant 17)*

> *So for certain clients, they expect you to work on strict timelines, so maybe they want you to work tomorrow between… eight and… twelve noon. (Participant 13)*

> *Practically I have a job which is 24-7. I have got no control over my work hours because all my clients are from various countries, from Japan to the US. So I have to be there available for the entire 24-hour shifts so I can attend to my clients. (Participant 1)*

> *A few months ago I had four projects… [on the go], I was very… [stressed because] another client… found me a job… that I… [couldn't] refuse. I… [didn't] know how to do it… [but the buyer] said, I trust you…, you can solve it. And I got that job as well. I was [then] working on five jobs… [in] one week… [and] it was very stressful. I couldn't sleep because of the stress. (Participant 8)*

Thirdly, demands and expectations of families were found to give rise to (inter-)role conflict. For example, a lack of control over working times (and buyers and tasks) was described by some sellers whereby their familial responsibilities interfered with their work responsibilities:

The organisation to my work is around nap time, so that's been intense… I must not be the only mum on this [digital labour] platform. I used to be able to record when she was sleeping and then edit when she was playing, but now she's too… active [and so] I can't do anything at all, ever, unless her dad's around. (Participant 16)

As I work as a voiceover mostly…, to maintain a quiet environment…, I need to… stay up all night… I live with my family. And so I have to make sure that they're not around. (Participant 7)

Finally, (inter-)role conflict was also reported to come down to personal choice. For example, some sellers explained that the decision to undertake the work on/at specific days/times was of their own choosing, and were often motivated by feelings of passion, guilt, fear, or anxiety:

When… you work remotely… it can be very difficult to put work down and walk away, especially for someone who's a programmer. That's their passion, and they'll work until the late hours of the night just because that's something [that] they want to do. (Participant 14)

[I'm] able to set my [own] hours… [but] the hours that I work, no company would get away with… I mean, I'm up at eight o'clock in the morning, and then I'll work straight [through] until two or three, the next morning… When I stop working, that's when the guilt comes. You think, well I'm someone who works from home, I should be working, I must work all [of] the time. (Participant 19)

I suppose it's the curse of the freelancer… There's a constant panic that you're under-delivering and… you're your own worst boss, you are always making yourself work what would probably be deemed excessive hours. (Participant 18)

7.2.5 Work method autonomy: Limited discretion over on-the-job procedure

With respect to work method autonomy – and *obeying instructions in everyday routines* (see Behling and Harvey, 2015:970) – sellers reported some constraining factors[59], which limited discretion over on-the-job procedure for them, and therefore signals bogus self-employment.

Participants commonly reported that buyers were occasionally very specific in relation to the ways they wanted work to be done. This limited autonomy over working methods (times and pay rates), and left little room for subjective contributions or opportunities for self-expression. This was found to be due to four reasons. Specificity of work was an attempt to tilt the wage-

---

[59] To avoid repetition, other factors reported elsewhere include: tacit knowledge and preferences (see s 7.2.1 above), regulated and constrained first contact, post types (see s 7.2.2 above), and mechanisms for control (see s 10.2.2 below).

work exchange in the buyers' favour, to ensure sellers follow brand guidelines, to circumvent uncertainty of a new work relationship, or to impose what one is accustomed to, for example:

You have to be very, very, very, very specific in what you're asking for, bullet points, not too weighty on the pros when it comes to emails, you're not telling a story here. You're saying I want this, it must have this, it needs to be done by then, I just want a yes or no out of you. And you take that attitude with them. (Participant Alpha)

I have had it in the past where a client might say, oh, you can get a template to do this. Certainly, in the case of animation that happens a lot. You can go off a template and that will save X amount of hours… So, in terms of animations… I have had it before where they say, we like this animation, we just literally want the same thing… More often than not it would be something [that is] quite… mundane, like sticking to a brand label; so, making sure the corporate guidelines are followed. So, kind of like corporate colours, logos; the correct logos being used in the correct places. (Participant 18)

This one last client that I am working with, he didn't just say yes from the very beginning, he sent me multiple videos [in order for me] to learn how to work on the project… [He told] me so many things [in terms of methods, for example] on how [he wanted] the angle of the mic and the way I should speak… and at what time..., or so on. (Participant 7)

Some customers, they are used to having an employee… to accomplish things as they are used to. Some of those customers are going to be overbearing. Some of those customers are going to expect… you to use the tools that they provide or they require, and they're going to expect you to use a set of libraries, images, documents, et cetera that they require. And everything follows through them. There's a high amount of frustration that comes with a client like that. (Participant 14)

7.3 Concluding summary

This chapter has addressed part two of three of subsidiary research question two – *how can LPT help understand challenges and tensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work when using DLPs?* Part two has dealt with autonomy and (false) self-employment. The findings add new knowledge as to a number of challenges and tensions around five patterns which point to bogus self-employment. In particular, Behling and Harvey (2015:970) suggest that bogus self-employment occurs when working arrangements have limited, or no features of self-employment. This has been reflected by problems of: tendering for different contracts, negotiating prices or employing (co/) workers. The authors (2015) also put forward how false self-employment possesses many characteristics of direct-employment. This was evidenced on issues of: continuity of engagements, working times and methods or obeying instructions. The next chapter presents on consent and resistance (chapter eight) to address the last part of subsidiary research question two. Following, data reported on collective identity and voice and control (chapters nine and ten), addresses subsidiary research questions three and four.

Chapter 8: The nuances of worker misbehaviour - consent and resistance in a digital crowd (subsidiary research question 2, part 3 of 3)

8.1 Introduction

This chapter will report on part three of three of subsidiary research question two – *how can LPT help understand challenges and tensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work when using DLPs?* The findings on this research question have been presented across three chapters because of both the level of data and the importance of these LP dimensions. Chapter eight (part three) will address consent and resistance. As considered in chapter two, worker activity could represent consent – that "implies some level of *agreement*" (Thompson, 1989:176) – and/ or acts of resistance/ misbehaviour – "anything you do at work you are not supposed to do" (Sprouse, 1992 cited in Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:2), that affect the LP (P. Edwards, 2010:39) on account of four appropriations (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:25). The chapter will firstly offer an overview of the findings that follow, and will indicate the main contribution. Secondly, it will then report findings on appropriation of work, of materials used in work, and of time spent on work. Lastly, this chapter will close with a concluding summary.

8.2 Consent and/ or resistance at work: Tactics for survival

The evidence on this theme reveals a number of tactics for survival, which took the shape of covert, informal and individual[60] workplace (mis)behaviours. Such activity challenged DLP or buyer authority and power by tempering or moderating it, and allowed sellers higher degrees of autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times, and methods. These initiatives come under appropriating: *work* (fiddling), *product* (making out or fiddling), and *time* (escape and fiddling) (and *identity*, see chapter nine), which typify consent and/ or resistance at work.

8.2.1 Appropriation of work: Fiddling

Two primary ways were reported where sellers appropriated work. These include responses of: lying (in one way or another) and soldiering, which can be classified as fiddling in respect of the effort bargain and output restriction (P. Edwards, 1986) as opposed to (in)direct forms such as the theft of goods or time (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:24; Noon et al., 2013:241). The upcoming findings can be interpreted as consent or resistance, or both (ibid, 2013:260).

In terms of lying (in one way or another), sellers were often found to deviate once into a task, job or project from what was originally requested or agreed with buyers through the telling of lies or making "false statement[s] with the intent to deceive" (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2020:1).

Ackroyd and Thompson (1999:26) propound that "there is almost always active manipulation of the wage-work exchange – secondary adjustments to the effort bargain". This gave sellers capacity to engage autonomy over pay rates, working times and methods. Indeed, one seller

---

[60] As well as collective workplace (mis)behaviours (see chapter nine).

described how he adapted to circumvent DLP (or buyer) rules[61] through deceiving buyers (in one way or another) of on-the-job procedures which subsequently made work easier for him:

> *Oftentimes part of the services… [buyers] want is for me to actually suggest things and to advise on processes and approaches. I mean, there's been instances in the past where if I really wanted to, if I was being slightly underhanded, I could convince them to do things that were easier for me. (Participant 17)*

In a similar vein, at times when buyers were considered to lack in technical know-how (see s 6.2.5 above), some sellers were found to be telling lies regarding unnecessary or extra work:

> *What… [some sellers] rely on, and this seems to be a common thing across the board, is some… designers… know that the person who's hiring them has no experience. It's like a car mechanic, oh your radiator's gone love, yeah, I'll top it up, [and] you've got to get a new wheel. You know? You don't know. (Participant 19)*

> *[Changes are] very difficult… not [to] approve… in a lot of ways because… [sellers are] giving you a lot of… technical information of what you… originally asked for [and why it] can't be achieved without greater cost. (Participant Alpha)*

Appropriating work was also evident as to natural/ systematic soldiering, or output restriction (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:15). Here, work production was reduced by one seller due to her dislike of the work, where she explained a tendency to take it easy on-the-job. Moreover she, and one other seller, reported restricting their outputs in response to post changes (see s 7.2.2 above) or where they felt that their efforts would not have led to higher remuneration:

> *If I don't like the project or if I'm already a little bit tired of the project, like, it's going on and on and on, and the feedback is coming all the time, then I can be less productive. (Participant 32)*

> *If [t]he [buyer] needs revisions…, then I say, this will take some [extra] days, could you give [me] more [pay?]… If… [the buyer doesn't] care [about] my demands… my morale goes lower, [and] the project finishes late, [because] the process is slower. (Participant 8)*

8.2.2 Appropriation of materials used in work: Making out (or fiddling)

There were various attempts to appropriate materials used in work by sellers. These may be classed as making out (or fiddling). Sellers (often along with buyers) engaged in "beating the system, finding the angles, working out dodges or discovering loopholes", on DLPs (Noon et al., 2013:236). The evidence here shows mutually beneficial acts of game playing for sellers, buyers and DLPs (not necessarily all at once) while working within, bending (or breaking) the rules, signalling consent, and acts which undermine control to satisfy seller (and often buyer)

---

[61] See s 5.2.2 above for an overview of DLP rules.

self-interests, by bending (or breaking) the rules, indicating resistance. These tactics include: (among others[62]), cutting DLPs out, bogus user activity and/ or lying (in one way or another).

Regarding cutting DLPs out in part and/ or fully, sellers frequently reported that they adapted to circumvent DLP rules – while working within, bending (or breaking) them – to bypass: fees (normally being disproportionate in nature, see s 7.2.2 above), portfolio format/ layout issues (see s 6.2.2 above) and communication or payment tools' limitations. Such tactics were seen to provide a means to engage autonomy over buyers and tasks and pay rates, covered next.

Three ways were reported where sellers (and buyers) attempted to avoid DLP fees. The first main tactic sellers described was how they would normally take the working arrangement off the DLPs with buyers. Most sellers that sidestepped DLPs with buyers were usually found to do so, only after having worked through the DLPs first, to overcome issues of indeterminacy:

> *Because… so much of your wage goes to PeoplePerHour[.com]… there are times when I've said [to the buyer], look… we'll do the first job through PeoplePerHour[.com], every other job after that, let's take it away [be]cause I need to get paid, you know? I need to make a living. (Participant 19)*

> *I tend not to… [ask buyers if they] want to work off the [digital labour] platform [on the first job]. I'm [like], let's do one job on the platform [first] and then see. I think that works for both [the buyer and I because] that… builds up… trust. (Participant 28)*

> *If it's not a first-timer and they wanted to work as a contractor for us [off the digital labour platform], we might explore that. (Participant Bravo)*

A key tactic here was circumventing the DLP communication technologies. Sellers described various ways they were able to evade the automatic topic detection when creating proposals or using the chat features, allowing for outside bargaining, and avoiding the terms of service:

> *The [digital labour] platforms don't allow you to put email or phone numbers, stuff like that, they block it, and you risk breaking their policies… The client very subtly suggested how can we go directly, and [I said] okay, that's easy, just go to my blog and post a comment. (Participant 21)*

> *Usually… [buyers] will search [for] my name or I will search [for] them [online] and we will find each other on… LinkedIn[.com] or Facebook[.com] or whatever. I will find them somewhere else and we will talk there. So, this is how I avoid getting accounts suspended. Because… [buyers] will ask you on the [digital labour] platform, do you want to work off the site and you cannot say yes, because you want to keep your account... I am sure to… [make certain that] all [of] my artworks are signed with my name, [and] I*

---

[62] To avoid repetition, other tactics reported elsewhere include: bogus user activity (see s 6.2.3 above), and avoiding poor ratings and reviews (see s 6.2.4 above).

have my name on the website so… client[s] can… locate me very easily [offsite]. (Participant 25)

On Freelancer[.com]… if you speak [in] a different language, for example, if you speak in Arabic and you say to a client, hey, could we take this conversation to Skype, for example, they wouldn't notice that. (Participant 7)

[When] typing in… my e-mail address… the system is obviously programmed to skim through and go, okay @ signs, dot. But by actually typing at… within brackets… and dot, you know that you are going to skim through the system. (Participant 18)

A second tactic deployed by one seller was selecting and working via DLPs where fees were at their lowest. She reported that she adapted to circumvent DLP rules by finding an external buyer to which she then manoeuvred onto and across DLPs where fees were at their lowest:

Upwork[.com] introduced this new tool that allows me to work with non-Upwork clients. And the whole reason I'm using these [digital labour] platforms is because I want a safe way to guard my… money transactions… But also…, when I first… started…, my reason was to build a reputation… I use that [tool] because… it charges me only 3.4 per cent [in] fees, so that's [a] really good percent[age] compared to the 10 per cent on Freelancer[.com] and the 20 per cent on Upwork[.com]… I joined various groups that ask for freelancers… [and once I found a buyer], I actually dragged him to my profile on Freelancer[.com] and we worked there for quite some time. And then when Upwork[.com] introduced that tool, I dragged [him there]… One good thing about it too is that it doesn't charge clients any percentage at all, so it's… [beneficial] for the clients as much as it is for me. (Participant 7)

The third and final tactic reported here was shifting a buyer's DLP entry point. As one seller's choice of DLP did not charge fees where buyers connected offsite, he adapted to circumvent DLP rules by advising buyers (that had already connected to him through the DLP), to create new DLP accounts, in order to reconnect with him via his own webpage (via a DLP approved embedded widget), which allowed him to shift their entry points, avoid fees and reduce rates:

PeoplePerHour[.com], they take their pound of flesh at the start… [but] they'll offer you the chance to put embedded widgets… on another site… If someone follows your profile… through that widget… and it has your tracking link in it, then they don't charge you any commission. So I have another website… and some of my clients come through there… [and] if I'm not paying any commission on my end, obviously I save 20 per cent… On occasion, I've said… [to buyers], if you start a new account but you go through this link, I['ll] get it commission-free, so I can perhaps offer you a better rate. (Participant 17)

In terms of portfolio format/ layout issues, sellers described how they adapted to circumvent DLP rules through creating and utilising personal online space to convey skill(s) and level(s)

of skill. These included a webpage, a blog, or profile on a social media page that were often made available from user profiles, and gave some advantage in refining applied skills labels:

I have a website for my portfolio. So I will share my portfolio website to the client… so they can see what my past work experience [is], what certification I… [have and] what skills I have… I think a website is more flexible. You can insert anything in your website, but some of the [digital labour] platforms… [are] limited. (Participant 9)

The best way to… build up a portfolio is to have a website or a blog or something like that to actually demonstrate some of your work. (Participant 11)

Finally, for communication and payment tools' limitations, participants reported that adapting to circumvent DLP rules by cutting DLPs out in part was normally unavoidable, because they were regarded as problematic, and considered to make work through DLPs in full unfeasible:

It's illegal to some extent but we cannot… not talk to client[s] at all just because the Upwork[.com] connection is bad. It was already happening several times when we tried to connect… and then just transferred to Zoom and… had an amazing conversation there. (Participant 32)

[At the risk of being] kicked off…, it… [is] a lot faster to just send a big file from your email address, because the [digital labour] platform's attachment capability isn't that good. It won't accept files up to a certain size, or it takes too long to load it up onto their server. (Participant Alpha)

Guru[.com], it was just confusing, just the pricing structure, the proposal structure, it just confused me too much. (Participant 19)

Trying to invoice people through PeoplePerHour[.com] is just a nightmare, you can do all your invoicing through there, but… it comes up time and time again with people, nobody can ever understand it. (Participant 27)

Regarding bogus user activity and/ or lying (in one way or another), sellers often adapted to circumvent DLP and/ or buyer rules – while working within, bending (or breaking) them – as a way of engaging autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times, and methods. Six tactics are reported here (excluding, yet partly accounting for those found in chapter six), including: sellers attempting to secure work where they did not have the skill required by the job, submitting fake bids, creating more than one user account, changing IP address, failing to disclose (co/) workers, and buyers falsely putting the job on hold for sellers, covered next.

First, two types of seller were found attempting to secure work where they did not have the skill demanded by the job. One included short-tenured sellers who were faking it until they made it (see s 6.2.3 above); and another type were more tenured sellers who were saying "yes" - then learning how to do the work later. Within this, there was also found to be some who were rewriting the post to fit their skill set. This was either sellers bidding for work that

did not match their skill(s) or level(s) of skill, or buyers (or DLPs) inviting sellers with skill(s) or level(s) of skill that did not match the skill required by the job. In either case buyers were being taken in by, or making mistakes on, user profiles and activity histories upon RSS and sellers were found to be lying (in one way or another) to get work. This was probably due to problems of (limited/ non-existent) barriers to entry (see s 6.2.1 above), skill personalisation (see s 6.2.2 above), bogus user activity (see s 6.2.3 above), five-star ratings being the norm (see s 6.2.4 above) and buyers lacking technical know-how (see s 6.2.5 above) for example:

> *I was told before that I could lie [about my skills], but I don't really do that much [now], maybe I did it at a certain point, like in the very beginning of it all, but I don't do that much [anymore] because now I guess I have the experience to actually say it, you know, but I didn't really have it back when I first started. (Participant 7)*

> *When there's a project that's described as being, for example, some kind of… advanced deep learning or some neural net set-up whereby they're trying to create a deep learning artificial intelligence [AI]… I look at the people who make proposals and they're often listed as being, like, web developers, and proficient in JavaScript and HTML and stuff like that…, but they don't seem to… be at all qualified to be pitching for machine learning and AI style jobs. (Participant 17)*

> *There are a lot of times when I blag, where I don't know whether I'm qualified for the job but I presume I'm intelligent enough to work it out. (Participant 23)*

> *[Sellers will] tell you [that] they can do it and they may well try… [or] say, well, here's what I think… you should be asking for, and try and rewrite the brief to fit their skill set. (Participant Alpha)*

Second, submitting fake bids (if bidding), followed with negotiation allowed sellers to engage autonomy over buyers and tasks and pay rates, given the pre bid challenges reported (see s 7.2.2 above). Here, sellers adapted to circumvent DLP rules by entering a dummy price, and adding an instruction to the proposal, not to accept the bid until further communications were had, or by stipulating that the bid being offered was an estimate or a quote, rather than a bid:

> *I actually write in the message and I say, look, I've put a dummy amount in, be aware of that, but it's just so it enables us to have a conversation. (Participant 17)*

> *So many times I've said [on Peopleperhour.com], and this has happened actually with Guru[.com] as well… I've said, don't accept the bid, you haven't given me enough information. Once you tell me everything I need to know, then we'll talk about the fee, but I have to… bid… for you to know [that] I want the job. (Participant 19)*

> *What happens a lot [of the time] is that there isn't enough detail in the job description to give an accurate price. So I try and give [buyers] a ball park figure, and then say, if you want to discuss it, then we can firm up some details, and [then I can] give a detailed price. (Participant 27)*

A key tactic in this regard was various pricing strategies. Lying (in one way of another) when pricing a task, job or project regularly underpinned such methods. For example, sellers often explained that they frequently avoided expenses (such as DLP fees), potential post changes (see s 7.2.2 above) and pricing error, by including these into prices through the telling of lies:

> There are always some additions that… [buyers] come up with which have [a] slight deviation from the initial requirement. And the rework also costs. So whenever I quote a cost, I know how it works… I charge for… the time that will be spent for the brief, and… [also for] any [anticipated] additional revision[s] or… other changes. (Participant 3)

> I actually… [charge] for the amount of time I've spent, and maybe other surplus, that's… a contingency in case the work hours get to exceed… [And] because [of] the fees charge[d] on the site, I'd actually want to [re]cover that… from the project. So I'll have to put in that additional hour [when pricing] to actually come up on that. (Participant 13)

> When I calculate the price, I know what fee will be taken… I do not say to the client here is my fee and here is X that you need to pay, because it seems very strange to me… I don't believe… [in] saying here is the price but you need to pay something additional, just include that into the price and don't show it. (Participant 29)

> I'm estimating, okay, this project will take X hours and let's add some more hours just to be sure. (Participant 31)

Third, creating more than one user account allowed sellers to engage autonomy over buyers and tasks and pay rates. Here sellers reported that they adapted to circumvent DLP rules by creating other user profiles as either buyers/sellers. This was made easier given the lax DLP RSS (see s 6.2.1 above), as Participant 32 echoed: *'Most… [digital labour] platforms are not screening your identity so you can create multiple accounts on [them]'*. For some sellers, this was used as a way of faking ratings and reviews (typically accrued by tenure/ activity history, see s 6.2.3 above) and for others, this was used as a means of contacting other sellers (due to DLP communication barriers, see s 9.2.1 below), or as a way to research or control prices or work (given limited tacit knowledge, or labour competition, see s 7.2.1 and s 7.2.2 above):

> To be honest, I don't have any way of communicating with… [other sellers], other than actually starting a fake project and trying to communicate with them over the chat, with one being a freelancer and the other being an employer. (Participant 4)

> I did talk to one girl on PeoplePerHour[.com]. There was one client that was giving me a really hard time… I got in touch with her, [and] I sent her a message [as a buyer], I was like, have you worked with this guy and did you ever get paid, and she was like avoid, avoid. So when I needed to I could get in touch with somebody. But I think you're not really supposed to do that. (Participant 16)

I… [posted] a fake project once. When I first made an account on Freelancer[.com], I started a job about [a] character concept. I said, okay, I need one-character concept, give me your samples and your prices, and then I made kind of a price range for good quality. It was a research project, it wasn't a true project, right. So, whoever applied, applied just to give me the information for free but I never hired anyone. (Participant 25)

So you could have one person with about 20 or 30 different accounts on there… They could pitch from the highest to the lowest price… [And] they can control… [85] per cent of the category for the work that you need. So there's like a six to one chance that you're going to choose them because they have swamped the category just through different aliases. (Participant Alpha)

Fourth, the changing of one's IP address (or location of device) commonly allowed sellers to engage autonomy over buyers and tasks and pay rates. Here, sellers adapted to circumvent DLP and buyer rules by engaging in bogus user activity, and by lying (in one way or another) to buyers by swapping their IP addresses (switching user profile locations) to more desirable ones through virtual private networks to avoid any liability of foreignness (see s 7.2.1 above):

Location… from what I understand… is fairly easy to dip by use of certain IP providers. You can switch that around so you don't have to necessarily tell them where you are. This is certainly something I've heard of people using more and more… The benefits of which perhaps being something like in the case of you want to appear that you are a provider based in the United Kingdom or maybe in the West somewhere, like in the US. But actually you might be based in Pakistan or you might be based in China somewhere. Then it makes it more appealing to a Western-based buyer, who will have a higher budget. (Participant 18)

A lot of jobs… say, we want somebody based in the UK, or we want somebody from the UK. And because… [the digital labour platform] put me [down] as France, that… was inhibiting my chances of certain work… And I didn't want to be discriminated against, like, oh you're in France, we'll ignore you then. I can't afford to be ignored… So the… [virtual private network] is used… primarily to say we're in the UK… [to avoid] certain elements of technology. (Participant 28)

Fifth, failing to disclose (co/) workers on DLPs and to buyers often allowed sellers to engage autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times and methods (see s 7.2.3 above). While employing others is a feature of self-employment (Behling and Harvey, 2015:970) – a status sellers are purported to be, as discussed in chapter three – buyers normally preferred for work to be done personally (see s 7.2.3 above). Here, sellers reported how they adapted to circumvent DLP or buyer rules, through not declaring (co/) workers on DLPs, or to buyers:

Generally because there is only one profile in the [digital labour] platform, we talk as "I". (Participant 8)

The client just sees me as the developer or the person who is going to deliver. But I have at least 15 people working behind the [digital labour] platform. (Participant 1)

[Subcontracting is] like a business, you actually don't know [that] they're doing it. Every now and again, it slips out… that somebody has accepted your gig and they've just passed it onto somebody else because they'll say something like, oh, I'm waiting to hear from [my colleague]. And you think…, what the… [f*ck] I've paid you to do this, what do you mean you've handed it over to somebody else. (Participant Alpha)

Finally, buyers were also reported to be accomplices when it came to bogus user activity on DLPs. One seller reported how he (or a buyer) adapted to circumvent DLP (and buyer) rules by falsely putting a job on hold to deal with a personal family problem but continuing to work:

It isn't always necessarily that you're circumventing because of malicious means… You're simply trying to get the job done… One way of getting around things is say that you're required to have your screen… visible to the client while you're working. If you're up in the air that's simply not feasible. That's going to be [a] considerable expense. You the developer can either eat that out of your own pocket, which in the end probably means [that] you're going to end up making zero dollars on the project, or you can pass it along to the client and they're going to say I'm not willing to pay $40 an hour for internet access while you're flying on a plane. I understand [that] your mum died. So let's simply do something like this. We'll tell the [digital labour] platform that we've put the project on hold for a week, even though it's not actually on hold. That way the requirement for looking over a shoulder doesn't exist, you can still accomplish things and you can communicate in some other fashion, and then when the week is over turn it back on. (Participant 14)

8.2.3 Appropriation of time spent on work: Escape and fiddling

Sellers described a number of ways in which they appropriated time. These may be classed as escape and fiddling (of time). These tactics include: 'physical escape', or 'quitting the job' (as well as 'mental escape'[63]), and lying (in one way or another) regarding fiddling time. The evidence below can be interpreted as consent or resistance, or both (Noon et al., 2013:260).

In terms of escaping, this occurred in two main ways. Noon et al., (2013:256) argue that this applies to physical escape (and mental escape – "by withdrawing into one's own thoughts" – see s 9.2.3 below for cynicism). Physical escape, or quitting the job emerged temporarily (by sellers being absent from work) and permanently (by sellers leaving the buyer). For example and regarding the former, one seller explained how he went absent from work in response to buyers deviating beyond the scope of the original job post (see s 7.2.2 above), and where he felt that his effort would not have resulted in greater remuneration. And concerning the latter, some sellers described that they left buyers permanently if dissatisfied with them (or the job):

---

[63] To avoid repetition, another tactic reported elsewhere includes: mental escape (see s 9.2.3 below).

What has happened is… [the buyer kept] on asking me to do other things…, but keeping the rate constant. In that case… I just stop responding to them, and for weeks… I just kept myself low and I didn't respond. That's… [what] I do in case[s when] someone is getting very demanding or they're not paying me well. (Participant 2)

There's occasions… where it just wasn't working [out] with the client[s]. They were just so difficult, and I was able to say, right, it's not worth it, I'm stopping working for you. (Participant 27)

With regard to the fiddling of time, three tactics allowed sellers to engage autonomy over pay rates, and working times. Lying (in one way of another) underpinned such methods. The first (and second) tactic(s) involved agreement over timings, which sellers knew to be false. Here sellers explained how they frequently exaggerated deadlines needed for the work requested, typically finished the job ahead of schedule (and were usually able to do so given their levels of experience), and would then normally withhold it upon completion to justify their pay rates:

The skills that I have, they are gained… [over] a lot of years, so if I do something in one hour…, it is not because it takes one hour. Because, if you try to do it, it will take you one month… If I estimate a project [as] being full-time seven days, I will not submit it earlier… I will take the time, even if I finish it faster, I will take the time to keep the image of [it] being so many hours. (Participant 25)

If I… know that… [a project can] use four hours…, but I actually maybe do that same work in an hour, what I still charge for… [is] the four… [I] say [to buyers], come back to me after six hours [for example], then… if I do… [that same work] within an hour, I'll still be comfortable giving it to… [them] after [the] six. (Participant 13)

You wouldn't want to devalue… [the work] where… you'd start a [large] project and then deliver it [too early]. If it was like a particularly high-priced project, you wouldn't deliver it the next day, for instance, because that totally devalues… [it]. (Participant 18)

You can offer a degree of creativity when filling in timesheets, because I've had a lot of experience and… you get quicker as you do things more often. So I can bang out 1,000 words in about 40 minutes, but I would still charge an hour for that. (Participant 23)

The second tactic described was how sellers would agree on timings with buyers which they knew to be false, and similarly, would regularly exaggerate deadlines needed, but instead of withholding the work on completion, would submit it early to under-promise and over-deliver:

I would always promise to deliver it a day later than me actually delivering it. So, you are always kind of delivering ahead of schedule. (Participant 18)

I tend to under-promise and over-deliver if I can rather than the other way round. (Participant 17)

The third and final tactic as to the fiddling of time was where buyers requested an update on a job. Here sellers explained that they adapted to circumvent DLP (and buyer) rules by often misleading buyers regarding the progress made about the work they were hired to carry out:

> *[The] client says, how's it going? This is the biggest management sentence because if I… [haven't] do[ne] anything [yet], I say [that], I am about to finish. I should not say, I didn't do anything… I [would then start and] do [the work] quickly. (Participant 8)*

> *The standard answers you'll get back [from sellers] is [that] somebody's passed away in the family… there's been a family emergency… or I've had a cold. Because you work with so many of them, you kind of get to know… the responses… I've sent so many, "I'm really sorry to hear that" emails. (Participant Alpha)*

8.3 Concluding summary

This chapter has dealt with part three of three of subsidiary research question two – *how can LPT help understand challenges and tensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work when using DLPs?* Part three has addressed, and contributes new insight on, issues of consent and/or resistance at work. Notably, reflecting on the findings reported in this chapter in regard to three appropriations, the data can add to debates concerning a number of seller tactics for survival, manifesting as covert, informal and individual workplace (mis)behaviours, regarding fiddling, making out and escape. These initiatives can be seen over three domains of contention including *work*, *product* and *time* (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:25), and typify consent and/ or resistance at work. Here such seller-owned initiatives challenged platform or buyer authority and power by acting as a counterbalancing force, and allowed sellers greater autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times and methods. Chapter nine (next) reports on collective identity and voice to deal with subsidiary research question three. From there, chapter ten presents the data on control to address subsidiary research question four.

Chapter 9: Collective identity and worker voice - a(n impersonal) social endeavour

(subsidiary research question 3)

9.1 Introduction

Having addressed issues of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work (over chapters six to eight), chapter nine will now present findings on collective identity and voice. This is in reference to subsidiary research question three – *how do DLPs impact the collective identity of sellers?* Some authors suggest that collective identity can act as a counterbalancing force against employer power (Irani and Silberman, 2013:616; Gray et al., 2016:138; Panteli et al., 2020:477). Some also advocate that it "may provide a vehicle for organising and expressing worker voice" (Panteli et al., 2020:482). These areas are explored within the coming chapter. The chapter will begin by outlining the findings to come, and will signal the main contribution. Secondly, it will then present findings around *online task* crowd work as an impersonal social endeavour, articulation of voice (over three stands, see Dundon et al., 2004), and *online task* crowd work as a social endeavour. Finally, this chapter will offer a brief concluding summary.

9.2 Collective identity and voice: Online task crowd work as a(n impersonal) social endeavour and (unheard) voice

The findings on this theme signal a number of challenges and tensions in terms of collective identity and voice. And yet, despite the issues, a solidarity was evident among sellers chiefly to the work via network alliances. At times this identity transcended into covert, informal and collective workplace (mis)behaviour. The data here contributes knowledge as to: *online task* crowd work being an impersonal social endeavour, articulation of voice (going unheard, and lacking seller support for union voice), and *online task* crowd work being a social endeavour.

9.2.1 Online task crowd work: An impersonal social endeavour

Remote gig work was found to be an impersonal social endeavour for some platform users. Importantly, Dundon, Stringer and Mustchin (2020) put forward that social interactions from work and employment have deep psychological and philosophical effects on us as humans, and suggest that remote gig work can frustrate this. In a similar vein, the findings presented next indicate a lack of physical connectivity due to: DLP tactics and communication barriers that impeded to some extent group collective identity or solidarity among sellers developing.

Relatedly, findings of 'mechanistic' dehumanisation (Haslam, 2006:257-258) were manifest. In particular, sellers were regularly likened to objects or automata, were treated as a means to an end and denied emotion, warmth, and individuality for instance, by DLPs (and buyers). For example, DLPs were perceived by participants to view the work relationship with sellers, as something that is not important or not valued in and of itself. Rather, as something that is useful in meeting their aims regarding their business models (as discussed in chapter three):

These digital [labour] platforms…, they want to cash in, you know? They don't care. They want people to post projects and other people to bid on them and to contribute to their revenue. (Participant 24)

It's very much a cold service…, you pay us, [and] you can go on our [digital labour] platform and promote yourself, if you get business, great, [but] if you don't, so what, you're still paying us. (Participant Alpha)

I think from the point of view of a digital labour platform, workers are just a number, in terms of income, basically. The more the better. (Participant 21)

At the end of the day, it is a business and that's why I think their lack of involvement really does demonstrate the fact that this is purely just a money-making machine. (Participant 18)

The impact of such dehumanising attitudes had negative consequences for sellers as it had a knock-on effect on the way sellers came to be seen or treated by buyers (and each other). DLP tactics of *scaling at speed*, and avoidance, change, and ambiguity of the law (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:30), for example (discussed in chapter three), meant a surplus of sellers who received low pay (see s 7.2.2 above), no benefits and job (in)security down to a lack of legal protection. As Participant 16 explained: *'I have zero workers' rights. Nobody's looking out for me'*. In fact, buyers commonly viewed sellers to be disposable commodities[64]:

These guns for hire…, they're purely on a per project basis, so I would regard them as… disposable labour. You can have it as [and when] you need it, but I wouldn't say it's labour in the sense that you employ, [but rather] it's an asset that you can bring in as part of the toolkit… So the skill sets that we don't need 24-7, it's a lot easier to buy them in as and when we need them without taking on the fixed costs of employment. So it almost becomes like a zero hour disposable labour function, we know we need it, we know we need it at certain times, but we don't want to take on the asset… full time. (Participant Alpha)

It does feel like you are kind of commodifying a person to an extent… It feels like a product, sort of thing, like, oh this person gets five-stars… It's a bit odd… The more I think about it, they do seem like products on display on the website. (Participant Bravo)

I think, to a certain extent, when you're a freelancer, you're a commodity. Nobody [is] really… watching out [for you], and caring about you. It's just a service. (Participant 27)

[Buyers] become inhuman because they think that once they have… funded… the project [then] they own the person… If… [sellers] are from countries like India, Pakistan,

---

[64] While substantial continuity of engagement between buyers and sellers was evident, participants reported how these relationships usually occurred on an ad hoc basis, typically being on the buyers' terms (see s 10.2.3 below).

Bangladesh, the Philippines, [and] Vietnam…, [then buyers] sort of take it for granted that these people are… [their] workers…, [or their] slaves, like in a tree. (Participant 1).

Scaling at speed was viewed to be status-reducing for many sellers as to skill since it meant a surplus of sellers that offered the same skill(s) or level(s) of skill. As Participant 18 echoed:

From my impression, I would think that the unanimous kind of view would be that we're disposable to a certain extent. That there are just simply so many [sellers] out there now… that it's less about… going online and finding… someone with a niche skill set to be able to fulfil your project. It would just be a case of [that] you're just one of many people that can do this.

DLP communications technology made for impersonal work relationships. First, buyer-seller relations were found difficult to forge. As one seller articulated: *'On an online platform…, it's not easy to know each other'* (Participant 3). And one buyer reported how: *'It is very easy to forget that there's a person there'* (Participant Bravo). This is because DLP communications *'tools are impersonal'* (Participant 25), and mandatory (see chapter five). As a consequence, sellers were denied human recognition, which caused difficulties as to building relationships:

There's [not] much of a relationship… It's very task-orientated. [It's] like once you get the task done that's it… Kind of like an Uber driver I guess. They take you somewhere and then drop you off and then that's it… You never see them again… The [digital labour] platform… kind of dehumanises the experience to an extent, because… [it makes things] a bit more artificial. (Participant Bravo)

Clients… treat us as… [an] unnamed person who is doing something, and is [bought-and-] paid-for…, [but] I am a person, I have feelings. (Participant 32)

I have… [been in contact with] clients for years now and I never got online with them on Skype, for example. They are just [like], I need this okay, deliver this… [They pay] me and that's it… We never exchange any… words other than that… The cold ones, they are continuously through the [digital labour] platform. (Participant 25)

About 80 to 85 per cent of… [buyers] do not come to make relationships or build relationships; they just understand their project, they understand delivery and they understand payment, that's all. (Participant 1)

Second, relationships among sellers were also challenged. As Participant 12 explained: *'It's impossible to communicate with other freelancers [via DLPs]'*. DLPs did not typically provide sellers with a way to contact others directly outside of a job. DLP and buyer disapproval was perceived to be one reason for this. As Participant 16 described: '*I'm pretty sure it's frowned upon'*. Communication barriers were commonly found to reduce opportunities for organising and expressing voice and depressed a climate of collective identity among sellers via DLPs:

I think… [Peopleperhour.com] probably keeps you all apart because… [of a] divide and conquer… mentality. If we could all talk to each other then we would probably pick and choose jobs and talk about clients and do all that kind of stuff which is probably what they don't want. (Participant 28)

I don't think the [digital labour] platform would want me to get into contact with other freelancers, because we can create a deal and raise the prices. (Participant 26)

[I don't contact other sellers because] this is a really strange and isolating experience in as much as you don't see them as co-workers, really… They're other anonymous people at the end of an internet connection, so you just don't. I suppose there would be strength in forming a cooperative but you don't. (Participant 23)

I believe [that] there should be a more humane kind of experience with the [digital labour] platform… [in terms of contacting other sellers]. Freelancers should be able to… chat with a person if they have some issues with a client. (Participant 32)

While web communities on DLPs were found to exist, the technology and system of working tended to mitigate against any group collective identity or solidarity developing, where some sellers explained avoiding communicating with other sellers via the DLPs itself. For example, one seller described how she thought this action risked creating a 'us-versus-them' dynamic between buyers-sellers, which she believed could engender conflict in buyer-seller relations:

I believe that [communicating with other sellers via digital labour platforms], it's really making like a war field on Upwork[.com] and me and another freelancer would be on opposite sides from the client, because maybe we have had a call before the meeting or something and we decided that this will be our strategy and we'll push that strategy forward. And that can be overwhelming for the client…, so I try not to connect to other freelancers… [via digital labour platforms] to… set boundaries. Sometimes when you're on Upwork[.com] you understand how the [digital labour] platform works, you know that that freelancer is not the best, or maybe it's he said or she said, or I'm saying I spent 10 hours on that and I actually spent one… It might be weird if we… [communicated] in that way… when the client is in the loop. (Participant 32)

Fierce competition among sellers seeking earning opportunities via DLPs, influenced tactics, and had implications for collective identity. For example, irrespective of the possible reasons for downwards pressure on pay rates (see s 7.2.2 above), geographical distinctions in terms of who was judging who were evident. Notably, those in high income countries often blamed those in low income ones and commonly got conflated with bogus user activity, whereby the same group perceived the other group as not having the necessary skill (see s 6.2.3 above):

What tends to happen is that for every single job you always find loads of people and I'm going to look racist but it's the reality, lots of Indian people, you find them in the

[digital labour] platform who can apparently do the job in record time and for the minimal amount required. (Participant 21)

For the majority of the designers who, I think live in India, [the] cost of living is so much cheaper there, so they will charge what's slave labour over here. They won't be able to do the job, but they will charge way less than [what] I will charge over here, because they can afford to [do so]. (Participant 19)

Because it's a worldwide platform, or at least it doesn't discriminate necessarily, you can apply from any country. So there just [so] happen[s] to be countries in the world whereby the cost of living is just relatively cheap, and so… [there are sellers that] are able to undercut proposal costs by quite a lot. But then I think what people have found is that oftentimes you kind of get what you pay for. (Participant 17)

Further barriers were described where seller coalescing was avoided entirely. These include perceptions of buyer demands and expectations, and of fellow sellers regarding their quality, demands and expectations that compelled some to avoid contacting (or working with) others (see s 7.2.3 above). One seller chose not to contact other sellers since he judged them to be competition trying to gain a competitive advantage. One seller considered his participation in web communities a time drain, and another seller regarded herself as not freelancer enough:

As I understood something like [on] Freelancer.com, you're in competition with the other people on the [digital labour] platform… You're not colleagues, you're competition. And if you reach out to competition you might expose yourself and your rates or what you're offering so the other person might gain a competitive advantage… That's why I don't reach out [to other sellers]. (Participant 11)

I know they have a forum where Upwork[.com] freelancers are discussing this or that. I am not participating there and I don't have any direct contact... Time participating in any kind of social media [or otherwise] is a huge time drain. (Participant 31)

It's like the imposter syndrome. I feel like I'm not a correct enough freelancer [to go to meetups]. I feel like the web designers… or the software people are more like the real [freelancers]. I feel like I'd be like the weird actress. (Participant 16)

Last, economic necessity often outweighed social activity for some sellers and homeworking was found to leave some feeling isolated, alone and disconnected, as Participant 19 echoed:

Right now [with COVID-19], it's perfect timing to be someone who works from home… I've been self-isolating for five years, I'd say… It can get a bit lonely, [but] there's no getting around that… I think that's probably the hardest part for a lot of people… as a self-employed freelancer, you're isolated… You don't leave the bloody house... You're so focused on work, and getting paid and having that stability that you don't go out much… And I kind of miss it. I would like to go out more.

9.2.2 Articulation of voice: Unheard by digital labour platforms and limited support for collective organisation

In terms of articulation of voice (see Dundon et al., 2004), (unheard) voice occurred over two strands, namely, as *articulation of individual dissatisfaction* and *contribution to management decision-making*. Support for voice as *expression of collective organisation* seemed minimal.

Mechanisms and practices of the previous two strands were frequently found embedded into DLPs, and occasionally overlapped as to the purpose and articulation of voice. The scope as to improving policies and practices through its application – underpinned by economic, moral and pragmatic rationale – however, was repeatedly described to be limited, and engendered a range of outcomes. For example, on the one hand, some sellers regarded the possibility of change led by themselves as impossible and acted as a barrier to *articulating dissatisfaction*:

> *I can have my say [about digital labour platform fees], but I don't think that much can be done… My single voice will not make that much of [a difference]. (Participant 2)*

> *Over time the [digital labour] platforms do raise their fees, so you really just have to adapt… You really don't have any say on some of those changes… I've actually never even… [tried]. It would be like trying to stop the rain from falling. (Participant 13)*

On the other hand, other sellers were found aiming to instigate change through *articulating individual dissatisfaction* to DLPs, but had proven unsuccessful. For instance, some sellers reported that they voiced concerns over problems of (limited/ non-existent) barriers to entry (see s 6.2.1 above), skill personalisation (see s 6.2.2 above) and bogus user activity (see s 6.2.3 above) for example, and yet, this endeavour left some with feelings of disillusionment:

> *Having spoken to co-workers, we've all raised the same issues with the [digital labour] platform… [For example], the fact that it's now totally funded by… a lot of people who are presenting themselves as sellers but are unable to deliver what they are offering. (Participant 18)*

> *[One seller had a] made-up banner saying top seller or top one per cent… So I brought it to… [the] attention [of Peopleperhour.com] because it just… [p*ssed] me off, pardon my French. But they came back and said, well, there's nothing we can do about it. There's nothing we're going to do about it… And I said to them… is that your genuine response? You genuinely can't see what he's trying to do and you're happy with that…? So I've been quite disappointed with things like that. (Participant 17)*

Staying with the same strand, sellers frequently reported that DLP dispute resolution and/ or arbitration services normally showed a bias in favour of buyers, which limited voice. Notably, sellers considered that platforms attributed a greater level of importance to buyers based on what they contributed economically to the DLPs in fees, which was seen to sway any award in the buyer's favour, and acted as a barrier to *articulating dissatisfaction* as a consequence:

You can file a dispute… but… it will not be successful because the [digital labour] platform wants to keep… clients more than… freelancers, right? Because that is where the[ir] money… [comes] from. So, if you have a dispute with a client, probably the client will win. There is not much you can do. (Participant 25)

I think the client is more privileged than the poor freelancer… The client… has bigger fees and [so] is offering more to the [digital labour] platform than what… [we] can… [As such], we are… [treated] like… slaves… [while buyers] have… better relationship[s]… Client[s]… [are] on [a] first-level [basis], and… [we are] just submissive. (Participant 26)

I've heard that… [Peopleperhour.com] tend to… fall on the side of the client… I've read [in a number of] forums whereby freelancers have said, oh, you know, it's a bit annoying that these [digital labour] platforms always tend to side… [with] the clients. (Participant 17)

What Upwork[.com] does is generally support the client. (Participant 1)

Contribution to management decision-making was also often evident through various means to seek improvements and yet, sellers gave no indication that these contributions were taken on board by DLPs. In fact, one seller described how his input (together with the contributions of others involved) – respecting miscommunicated posts and disproportionate DLP fees (see s 7.2.2 above) – went unheard by one DLP, having participated in a quality circle style event:

I do speak to PeoplePerHour[.com] quite regularly. [For instance], I went… [to] a market research [event] to get them to improve… They asked a bunch of designers… to give their thoughts on their process and their work… There were things that we felt… need[ed] to change. [For example], all the designers… said when a buyer posts a job…, they [should] have to… give us [all] the information. If you don't fill in these boxes [then] you can't post a job… [And the digital labour platform] takes 20 per cent… [in fees which] we told them… [is] just too much... [But] nothing… [has been] done… [So] I sent another email… with some more feedback, saying you're asking… if I want to recommend… [you] and I gave them a five. And they came back… [asking why]. So… I said, well this needs to change, this needs to change, [and] this needs to change. And I said, I did mention this, along with all the other designers, over a year ago, and still nothing's been done. (Participant 19)

There can be better policies. I already suggest[ed to] Freelancer[.com] some features. I do that if I happen to think of some… I [make] suggest[ions] to [the] development team. (Participant 8)

So I'm always communicating with… [the digital labour platform], and sometimes I give them ideas or my comments about a new function in the website, because I have… [a lot of] experience… and I can help them. (Participant 12)

I have probably done this with every [digital labour] platform that I've worked with. [Where] I've encountered issues… [I've] sent them notes on how to fix it because it may be free advice or free work… but if I'm using their platform it affects me, and I want my tools to work better so I'm happy to provide a little bit of free time for them. (Participant 14)

Finally, mechanisms and practices of voice as *expression of collective organisation* were not embedded into DLPs. Here, two barriers were found concerning union recognition, collective bargaining and industrial action, and reduced opportunities for voice as a means of providing a countervailing force against DLP/ buyer abuse. Firstly, was the seller-seller communication barriers (see s 9.2.1 above) and secondly, was the limited support for voice as *expression of collective organisation*, among sellers. For example, some sellers saw union membership as something that may place them at a disadvantage to others when attempting to secure work, either through being negatively perceived by buyers or having to participate in their activities:

So, I think… you'd… always want to appear as amicable as possible with a customer, which I suppose is just common anyway throughout any industry. So, something being visibly backed by a trade union might suggest that you might be… more trouble than you're worth. (Participant 18)

A lot of people when they hire… think that when someone has… a membership in a particular group, union or otherwise, that they [are going to] have certain expectations which are probably going to be higher than someone [else] who is not. (Participant 14)

If you are a freelancer, it's in the name, you are supposed to be free and not have anyone to control you or dictate or anything that could affect your behaviour. I think that defeats the purpose, actually. If I consider myself freelance, I wouldn't… join any of the unions. (Participant 21)

I imagine that if I were in the union and I were working on this [digital labour] platform it would be really frowned upon [by the union], because they have minimums that you're supposed to charge, and the minimums here in Argentina are really… [low]. So I think that the unions would not be pleased with me or the system or any of it. (Participant 16)

Furthermore, some sellers were found to have been conditioned to think a certain way about unions via experiences and environment which negatively influenced thinking and behaviour:

I'm aware of trade unions, [but] I've tried to steer clear of them. In South Africa, there's a lot of political involvement of trade unions manipulating the market to their role, I'm not a big fan of them. (Participant 11)

I know that… [trade unions] exist but I['ve] never considered… [being a] part of any of those. I think [of] trade union[s]… [as being] associated with [a] Soviet communist state in my head, but… [that's] just… because I'm from [a] post-Soviet country. (Participant 32)

Lastly, limited seller support came through unions often being seen as not very useful under the circumstances, given the fragmented nature of work, with some suggesting other means:

It… [is] hard to know how… [trade unions] could benefit me because they've got no central body to negotiate with, or so it felt, because we're going from client to client and it's sort of, like, the gig economy, isn't it? So you're never really fully employed…, so it's very difficult to understand how a union could help. (Participant 23)

[Rather than] a trade union for freelancer[s]… maybe… a lobbyist group… [would work better]. We are too many, too different… [and there are] too many divergent needs to have a common goal [that] we can possibly fight for together. And we don't have the weapons [that] you need in this fight. (Participant 24)

I don't think… [trade unions] are useful… I don't think you need that. I think what can be a great thing instead of trade union[s] is a community of other designers that can help you with advice. I don't think trade union[s] will fight for your rights especially when you're working on such [digital labour] platforms as Upwork[.com] or Freelancer.com. It's simply impossible for them to fight for you… And communities that can give you advice [on] how to behave in some difficult situations are much more likely to be used than trades unions [by sellers]. (Participant 32)

Relatedly, while another means of voice in the same strand was reported, one seller seemed sceptical. He explained that he had witnessed efforts to convert *individual dissatisfaction* into an *expression of collective organisation* but had yet to see any effect and appeared doubtful:

There's a guy who… set up the freelance group on… Facebook[.com]… And he's now involved with… the CIPR [the Chartered Institute of Public Relations], or… PRCA [the Public Relations and Communications Association]… He's kind of championed freelancers, and… at the moment they're trying to establish… how… freelancers [have] been affected by COVID[-19]… I think they try and do… surveys…, [which include questions like] what are your… [pay] rates… and how much work do you get… et cetera? Whether… [as a result] anything [came] off the back of it, or it's just a case of, well this is the latest figures, great, so what are you going to do about it? (Participant 28)

9.2.3 Online task crowd work as a social endeavour: A solidarity to the work via network alliances

Rather than support for collective organisation, and action or voice (usually termed solidarity, Heckscher and McCarthy, 2014:629), sellers appeared to be more focused on a solidarity to the work via network alliances. In spite of the challenges reported, some sellers were able to adapt. For example, seller-seller contact materialised in various ways. Participants described how sellers contacted one another virtually over web communities (via DLPs/otherwise, such as, over Discourse, Facebook, GitHub, Instagram, Reddit, Stack Exchange, or Overflow), via

communication tools (over DLPs collaborating/otherwise, such as via Discord, Internet Relay Chat, Skype, Slack, WhatsApp, or Zoom), and reported meeting in-person, on- or off-the-job:

So I am a member of a lot of those [web communities]. I haven't spent much time on IRC [Internet Relay Chat] or Discord lately. I do spend a lot of time on Facebook groups for some Python programming and whatnot, and we will frequently have interchanges back and forth between Stack Overflow…, Facebook groups, and… GitHub. (Participant 14)

There's been a few [face-to-face] meetups here in Buenos Aires of freelancers. (Participant 16)

Meetups are basically meetings of people from similar working environments. Usually you have like Dribbble meetups. Dribbble[.com] is a [self-promotion and social networking] platform where designers can… showcase… a portfolio basically… I have met a lot of… [designers] through Dribbble meetups and also quite a few clients as well. (Participant 32)

Once I visited [an] Upwork offline… [face-to-face] meeting… [which] they have… [from] time to time…, [but] now it's online. (Participant 29)

While some invested time on public professional networks, through web communities, others reported how they built more personal ones. For example, working with others through DLPs opened lines of communication during and after a task, job or project via DLPs, or otherwise:

If the client hires two persons for the same project… [then] that's the opportunity to know other freelancers. (Participant 12)

If there's an on-going [job or], if there's like a previous task that we've carried out together, then that communication stays open. (Participant 18)

Quite often, I'll get a job where there's another freelancer involved, and then we'll strike up a friendship, or something, from that. (Participant 27)

One seller reported how he sought to grow his own community from his pre-existing contacts and by encouraging them to sign up to DLPs, and another described how he capitalised on a chance encounter with a fellow seller, whereby he expanded his network by staying in touch:

I started to contact people I knew all over the world, like my friends who were studying architecture, and I started to… [inform] them about these opportunities and to invite them to make an account in this [digital labour] platform… I tried to grow a community. (Participant 12)

It's funny, I just met him… in a bar… when he moved to France, looking at becoming a freelancer. And he only does PeoplePerHour[.com]. (Participant 27)

Professional networks were utilised by sellers to access and/ or provide support. An ethos of support signals the appropriation of (collective) *identity*. Notably, goal identification and class or group solidarity were found to underpin supportive practices. Here help often consisted of: providing work (that is, passing work along, and employing [co/] workers, see s 7.2.3 above), information-sharing, seller-seller mentoring, peer reviewing or translation and inflating prices.

In terms of providing work, help unfolded in two ways. First, as to passing work along, sellers reported that if work offered was not suitable or convenient, it would frequently be passed on to a more suitable replacement by the seller. While some offered work on public professional networks, others did so via more personal ones. Once referees were placed in direct contact with buyers, referrers would then commonly exit this new arrangement without remuneration:

> *I'm on a freelance platform on Facebook[.com], which is members only, but people do communicate with each other…, they do post jobs on there and say, I can't do that job, can anybody else…? And that's… [very] community spirited, so no one gets anything out of it financially, but no one minds, it's kind of [like], we're all in this together. (Participant 28)*

> *[There is] a community of freelancers, so we can help each other [out]. Right now, I'm in different Facebook groups. And it's interesting because… [other sellers] post… [work] opportunities [from a different digital labour platform to mine], which are [in]valuable for me since I don't have my Upwork[.com] account [anymore]. (Participant 26)*

> *I'm in touch with… [several sellers], I'll pass work onto [them], or they'll pass work [on]to me. (Participant 27)*

Second, as to employing (co/) workers, public/personal professional networks were found to be used as a means of employing others, whereby support was a two-way process. Notably, help was accessed and provided concomitantly by both the providers and recipients of work:

> *I think if you're assuming that these people work solely independently in their own little siloes, I don't think they do. (Participant Alpha)*

With regard to information sharing (or knowledge sharing), this was reported to happen over professional networks. A main form of support described by sellers was helping one another to navigate the demands of the LP when working via DLPs. For example, assistance was on hand from more tenured sellers, over various web communities, for those in need of support, but most notably, for short-tenured sellers who faced a challenging start (see s 7.2.1 above):

> *There are plenty of communities on Facebook[.com], on Instagram[.com], on YouTube[.com and], on Upwork[.com] itself, where you can ask questions and don't be afraid to ask questions. Because… we've all been there, we've been through all of the issues, we can help. (Participant 32)*

On Freelancer[.com] I've heard lots of people telling me that if you're on a [digital labour] platform as such, you wouldn't just go sending proposals to whatever job there is, like focus on a certain field, for example, content writing or something. (Participant 7)

I receive Skype messages from people from India and Pakistan. They mostly find [me from] my [digital labour platform] profile and… ask me for help… [on] how to get work, and stuff like that. (Participant 29)

Knowledge sharing among sellers concerning specific buyers was another important finding, shared over networks, or by leaving buyers ratings and reviews. This was used as a way for sellers to identify reliable DLP work or as a means for them to advance their tacit knowledge:

[Sellers] do know each other, they do talk amongst themselves. Because they want to know that you're a legitimate client, that you're not going to come back asking for loads of revisions and things like that. (Participant Alpha)

Something I've had common conversations with other co-workers about [is] certain difficult clients that we've had in the past… You are sharing concerns, which hopefully you can… [learn from]. (Participant 18)

Some companies I prefer not to work with, some by personal experience, some by others' experience. (Participant 14)

[There are] these platforms like Slack… [and] Discord… [for example], and I saw the feedback… [that sellers] provided to other people and it was [like], Jesus… That's where the [digital labour] platform comes in hand[y], because if a lot of freelancers said this client is not good, then probably you should not work with him. (Participant 25)

Relatedly, opportunities for sellers to question, or criticise the DLP in a space away from the workplace indicated a collective act – and a second form of escape (see s 8.2.3 above), that is, mental escape, specifically cynicism (Noon et al., 2013:256, 258). In particular, one seller explained how a web community (in this case, Facebook) was used to arrange in-person off-the-job meetings (at a bar), where experiences of work got shared. Here, sellers shared their disbelief in the values of their choice of DLP (and buyers), mocked it, yet remained loyal to it:

Sometimes… [on] Facebook groups… [sellers] create like a meeting event, [where] they just go to the bar and drink and talk about work and clients, and how Upwork[.com] is bad and how it robs us all… But… we actually… like the [digital labour] platform, that's why we're [all] still there. (Participant 32)

Information sharing as a support mechanism with work completion was also found to show a degree of collective identity or solidarity. As Participant 27 reported: '*We help each other out if we're stuck'*. Such cooperation among sellers made work via DLPs more viable in allowing the completion of work that otherwise may not have been possible for certain sellers without the necessary support, and upskilling or reskilling which unlocked new earning opportunities:

Sometimes I call one of my friends, my colleagues, who are… experts… to help me and to teach me some point. It's good to enlarge my knowledge, my skills…, and of course it will be the key to get the new opportunities. (Participant 12)

In terms of mentoring, peer reviewing or translation, some sellers described how they sought people who were less experienced than themselves to mentor, so as to influence or advance their professional growth; some sellers explained how professional networks were utilised for the evaluation of work by others, so as to influence or advance professional growth; and one seller described how without the assistance of a fellow seller in providing him with translation support upon preparing proposals, work opportunities via DLPs would have been less viable:

I am taking one [or] two… young designers every… six months to mentor, to… help them get out there or… [to] find their style or… technique. Or I can recommend a YouTube course that they can watch and [help them to] improve their skills. (Participant 32)

I'm trying… to publish some of my work to get feedback, to get comments from other professionals… It's usual for professionals to evaluate your work, [and] to give you comments. Other professionals for example that collaborate with… [me], like engineers, sometimes I show them my freelance work… so… they can evaluate it. (Participant 12)

Back in Cuba… my level of English wasn't the greatest… Sometimes I didn't quite get… what the client was wanting and [so] I was seeking advice from one of my friends who was more advanced in… English… to help me… [understand the job post and] reword what I was trying to say… That was an important point where I needed help. (Participant 21)

Finally, with regard to inflating prices, one seller described how the identity derived from the collective shaped his behaviour to one of solidarity, whereby he (together with other sellers), would enter fake bids on job postings in order to artificially inflate the prices for other sellers:

Sometimes… I give the client a higher price, a price that he doesn't accept. I know that [when I'm bidding] but I give that because… I want to help other freelancers… In bidding you can see other bidders, their profiles and their reviews. The high[ly] review[ed] ones, the extreme[ly] high[ly] price[d] ones…, [they give] ridiculous numbers so the average… price goes up in the project. They only do that to help others as [a form of] professional ethics. It is… good to be [a] part of such a community. There is huge competition but there is [also] such ethical behaviour among freelancers. They want to help because as a result, in the long run… everyone earns higher. (Participant 8)

9.3 Concluding summary

This chapter has addressed subsidiary research question three apropos collective identity – *how do DLPs impact the collective identity of sellers?* The findings here add new knowledge regarding *online task* crowd work being a(n impersonal) social endeavour through indicating

136

different challenges and tensions for collective identity and worker voice and yet, a solidarity mainly to the work via network alliances. Specifically, remote gig work was reported to be an impersonal social endeavour for some sellers. DLP tactics and communication barriers often challenged collective identity or solidarity. Moreover, voice went unheard across two strands: as *articulation of individual dissatisfaction*, and *contribution to management decision-making*. Yet, despite this, seller support for voice as *expression of collective organisation* was limited, thereby providing added contributions to debates in these areas, in the new platform context. Rather than a solidarity in this respect, sellers appeared to be more concerned with adapting to appropriate *identity* as a source of group solidarity to the task or job, via network alliances. Chapter ten (next) reports on control to address the final subsidiary research question (four). Following this, chapter eleven will provide a discussion structured by the themes of the data.

Chapter 10: Situating the limits and specifics of labour control on digital labour

platforms (subsidiary research question 4)

10.1 Introduction

Having addressed issues of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work, and collective identity and voice (over chapters six to nine), chapter ten will now consider issues that affect the control of labour when using platforms, apropos subsidiary research question four – *how is labour control implemented when using DLPs?* Control pertains to "the ability of capitalists and/or managers to obtain desired work behaviour", or to forms with which companies direct, evaluate, reward and discipline workers (R. Edwards, 1979:17-18). Importantly, from Taylor (1911) to Braverman (1974), up to contemporary debates, control has been a central aspect of LPT, and this chapter aims to understand the factors around labour control in the platform context. The chapter firstly gives an outline of the findings, and signals the main contribution. Secondly, it will then report findings on DLP terms of services, algorithmic management, and limitations of control. Finally, this chapter will end with a brief concluding reflective summary.

10.2 Control over the labour process: Coexisting in multiple forms, limitations and situation specific

The data on this theme shows that control coexists in multiple forms and is situation specific. Specifically, the findings presented here contribute knowledge to debates around the control of labour, in two primary areas: the DLP terms of services – which were found to correspond to direct technical control and indirect bureaucratic and concertive controls – and algorithmic management – that was found to correspond to direct simple and technical controls, indirect normative control and responsible autonomy approaches. Limitations here are also reported.

10.2.1 Digital labour platform terms of services: Direct technical control and indirect bureaucratic and concertive control

The terms of services of DLPs were reported to relate to direct technical control and indirect bureaucratic and concertive controls. Covered here are ways platforms use mechanisms for directing, evaluating, rewarding and disciplining, to obtain desired behaviour, rather than the specific content of their terms of services, which have already been identified in chapter five.

A bureaucratic set of methical, rational-legal rules for direction are enforced by monitoring, and rewarding (and disciplining non-)compliance (Barker, 1993). DLPs were found to reward compliance as to engagement with them in three ways, with each acting as a prerequisite for neutralising indeterminacy and so made them an effective means for control for the platform. Engagement was key for DLPs to value-skim the buyers-sellers' economic exchange[65]. First, DLPs rewarded engagement by giving status, and work to those sellers that maintained their user profiles and activity histories (or penalised those for disengagement, or cutting them out [see s 8.2.2 above], by demotion, dismissal, or filtering work away). The second was through

---

[65] A key part of a DLPs' business model (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:29).

providing policing, safety and security (or punished disengagement as it prevented access to these). And finally, DLPs rewarded engagement by the lowering of their fees for repeat work:

> *The problem [when sidestepping the digital labour platform] is [that] in doing this, you are penalised because… the more work you carry out on [the] site, the more projects that are put your way. (Participant 18)*

> *Even with a client who I['ve been] work[ing] with since 2015…, we could have gone… [off the digital labour platform], even though it's illegal, [but] I don't really want to do this. First of all, when he pays me on the platform, I get profile earnings, so the profile grows. Second of all, it's safe… [because] with a new client, it might end up with you not getting paid. (Participant 29)*

> *I ask… [buyers] to meet all the… [digital labour platform's] terms of… [service], like using the platform, [including] funding the minimum SafePay, [and] exchanging all the information and documents only by the platform. Because… it's important to have a trace for everything. (Participant 12)*

> *What I'm not doing on purpose is evading… [the digital labour platform's] payment system because… if it's a new client…, then I can be sure [that] I [will] get paid. And if it's a repeat client later on, then the fees are much lower and then, well, I don't win much. (Participant 31)*

Even sellers that were adapting to circumvent DLP rules (see s 8.2.2 above), recognised the value in maintaining their user profiles and activity histories for getting new work. Here some were sidestepping DLPs (to avoid paying the fees), whilst continuing to maintain a presence:

> *If you circumvent [the digital labour platform with] every single project, then there is no history. (Participant 21)*

> *Sometimes I will say no [to buyers], let's do… [the work] on the [digital labour] platform… I deliberately… [do this] because I want more reputation to be built... I want their ratings. [And] so [every so often], I don't mind paying [the] 20 per cent [in fees]. (Participant 22)*

DLPs were found to use three sanctions for disciplining non-compliance, including demotion, suspension, or dismissal. First, participants often reported how (in)actions that breached the DLPs' terms of services – including inactivity or poor ratings and reviews – were usually met with demotion. Here seller downgrading came by profiles being moved down in the rankings, placed into a private status or being wiped, which negatively affected their ability to get work:

> *When you sign up to the [digital labour] platforms, you sign up to the terms and conditions…, to fulfilling certain roles within a certain amount of time… Or you will be downgraded or… penalised… in a very punitive model. (Participant 23)*

On Upwork[.com], if you don't get somebody to hire you on a project… [within a defined period of time], your profile moves to being on a private status… So [the] clients couldn't actually search for it. (Participant 7)

There was a period of five years where I did not work on any of these [digital labour] platforms. I was filled up with jobs through my personal network… [and I didn't have a] need to seek [out] new clients and… new project[s]… All [of] my achievements simply disappeared…, the work history, the reviews…, and so on, were gone. (Participant 24)

Second, suspension was also used as a means for punishing non-compliance. For example, one seller described how his account was suspended, since he had undertaken a request to complete university/ college/ school work, and another seller explained how his account was placed on hold as he was unable to verify his location. These (in)actions breached the DLPs' terms of services, and the resulting penalties negatively affected their ability to acquire work:

I actually got banned from the system for… two… week[s] because I supposedly helped someone with an academic project… I was just completely unaware, and I emailed them and said that... but they still locked me out of my account… And this was at the point when I was one of their top-rated freelancers, I had X amount of jobs done and I'd always been paid through them, so I'd gone… by the book, and then suddenly I was locked out… [which] was a little bit draconian… So now… [if] someone… [asks] me to do something that even… [verges] on academic work, I… [ask] Peopleperhour[.com first if]… I [am] allowed to do it… [which takes an additional] day or two. (Participant 17)

I face[d] a problem… [where the digital labour platform] want[ed] me to verify my location. They asked [me] for a document that contains my location…, my full name and my phone number in English. Unfortunately, that's not available here in Egypt… Every document here [is] in Arabic. Then my account… [was] locked, [and] my money…, frozen. (Participant 10)

Finally, DLPs also punished non-compliance by dismissal. Sellers commonly described how (in)actions that breached the DLPs' terms of services – such as inactivity, unsuccessful bids, poor ratings and reviews, and allowing others to share access to their accounts – were often met with expulsion. The ramifications of which negatively affected their ability to obtain work:

I lost all my previous accounts because I was inactive… I worked in… different [digital labour] platforms like Freelancer[.com and]… PeoplePerHour[.com]… So I was obliged to start from the beginning… and [to] build [a] new profile in Guru[.com]. (Participant 12)

[Upwork.com] have this policy… [where] they will give you… [a] number of [free] proposals… but if you… don't get projects back [from them, then] they will terminate your account…, [and] you cannot do anything [about it]… [Or] if you have a bad review at the beginning, your account will be terminated. (Participant 25)

I made the mistake… [of] let[ting] someone log in to my [Upwork.com] account and use it, and make some payments. And then I lost my account because… [the digital labour platform] noticed, and they thought it was something illegal. (Participant 26)

Crucially, seller dependency acted as a prime weapon of platforms regarding enforcing their terms of services. Barker (1993:411) argues that through bureaucracy and rule-enforcement, control is achieved since it shapes the knowledge and behaviours of workers as to the "right" or "wrong" ways to act and interact. Here, many sellers normally followed DLP rules because that is what they were required to do in order to obtain work and therefore earn. Dependency (which was reported to be progressive), was a deterrent for sellers, as not following the rules risked placing their user profiles, activity histories and their ability to secure work in jeopardy:

We have to follow the rules [on Peopleperhour.com and Guru.com] because they are the one[s]… providing… the… [work]. I think… [the terms of service is] where they have a bit of control… For example…, I've tried to take the money out of these [digital labour] platforms [before] but eventually… [they will] block… [your account. There are] other… [payment methods] like PayPal…, [but] for [the sake of a] two per cent [saving], I don't want to risk my whole effort. (Participant 2)

[I went] off the [digital labour] platform, but that was at the beginning when I didn't value my status on the platform as much. I don't want the platforms to think that I'm not obeying their policies, so for me I just try to stick with that because I don't want to get in [to] trouble with them because… whatever I'm making, I make on them. (Participant 16)

[Upwork.com are] very stringent about their policies. So, it's not like a cosy club... It's mostly if you work properly… [and] deliver properly [then] you are taken as a proper freelancer… [But if not] then… chances… [are, you'll be] throw[n off]… So you have to be very careful. It's like walking on eggshells working on Upwork[.com]… [They've] included a lot of data science into their [digital labour] platform… If… any elements [of their terms of service are breached]… and it is detected, [then] they instantly… suspend your account for a certain [period of] time… [Here] they talk you through… their terms [of service and] if it is [deemed to be] a serious… [enough] issue, then they might not give you your account back. So they kind of hold your account hostage. (Participant 1)

Relatedly, DLPs directed and reinforced control by automated messaging. Here, participants explained, for instance, that platforms sought to re-orientate and/ or reinforce the behaviours desired by DLPs as to the "right" or "wrong" ways to act, with interaction guided by automatic textual prompts, sparked via (in)actions, or manifesting as periodic performance evaluations:

You will get on some [digital labour] platforms where you put the word "payment" in and it comes up with a warning flag, you know, do not negotiate payment outside [of] this platform… Because their algorithms are tuned to pick up on certain words, so that's how they're policing it. (Participant Alpha)

You have some recommendation[s] or… automatic points, like… [using] SafePay, for example, before starting… The [digital labour] platform advises… you not [to] provide any work… before getting… [it, to ensure that payment is] locked by the platform… For a new client, you can't feel safe… and start work before getting… [this]. (Participant 12)

[Upwork.com] are of course tracking the success of the projects… I'm at a pro level… So if someone has a very high level of ratings…, they get [to] a higher level… Also I'm getting… [automated] congratulation emails…, like, oh yes, you did amount X… over the last… [period and] you have been at this top level for X years now. (Participant 31)

Into the mix, concertive control was also discernible through a form of negotiated consensus between sellers around perceived ethics and/or expected integrity. Workers achieve this, we may recall from chapter two, by way of reaching a substantial, negotiated consensus around how to shape their behaviours – which hinges on ideas, norms and rules – based on a set of core values – such as those found in corporate literature – thereby, aligning their activities in the organisation's favour, forming a supervisory force of themselves (Barker, 1993:411-412). For example, sellers frequently described how their knowledge and behaviours were shaped as to the "right" or "wrong" ways to act and interact through the DLPs consensual, normative ideologies, around ethics or integrity, in terms of disengagement with them/ cutting them out:

First and foremost is the ethics… When we are working… [on] a [digital labour] platform it is like our employer and we should respect their protocols… [If] you respect the[se, then]… they're definitely protecting the freelancer… [It's important to] work according to… [these], so the purpose of using a platform will be fulfilled and you will be protected. Never try to cheat or go behind the platform['s back] because… when a person is giving you a job, they… fund that [system. Plus], it's not fair [to sidestep them]. (Participant 3)

Oftentimes you'll find some [digital labour] platforms will say no communication outside of the platform, and they have a purpose for it, and that's because there are a lot of clients out there who are not honest and don't have integrity, and they will ask you to produce work and then they'll take the work without paying for it. That's where the flipside of having the platform gets a little bit more intrusive and insistent that communication [and payment] must go through them. (Participant 14)

The only reason I don't want to go off the [digital labour] platform is the ethical reason that I owe them something for the project. (Participant 25)

It's extremely important to… abide by… [digital labour platform] rules… I don't take any risk… I am a part of many freelancing communities and I see many people who [have] explained the[ir own] experience[s] about how they'd break the rules, and [how] eventually their accounts were blocked or restricted… This is a part of the integrity, and we have to be sincere… [It's crucial that] we don't bypass them, [and] it's extremely important to pay them their part… [This is] because they are working with us and they are giving us a great opportunity to present ourselves to the rest of the world… [For

example], there was a time when… [a buyer] asked me to bypass the digital… [labour] platform… but I… [told] him that we can't… and [that] we have to… [go through] them. So he was really impressed, and he said that integrity is extremely important. (Participant 5)

Relatedly, collaborative values served as a self-regulatory supervisory force. Notably, ideas, norms and rules as to the DLPs' desired ethics or integrity guided the activity of some users, where some were policing others, to ensure they also acted within the systems' parameters:

I put a website project out to tender last year and another website designer based in the UK… got in touch with me and said… I know for certain [that] two of those people [who are applying for your job] are fraudulent. If you take their [profile] photos and run them through Google images… [you can see for yourself]. (Participant 18)

Somebody from Ukraine on Guru[.com]… took my portfolio, [specifically] all [of] the text… [So] I found this guy… [on] Facebook[.com]… and… said… please remove this text or I will have to contact the [digital labour] platform. (Participant 29)

Some of these projects are posted with just an abysmal[ly low]… hour[ly] wage… And [on] PeoplePerHour[.com], you can report job posts… or you can reject an offer particularly for that… So it does happen, and what we don't want is a race to the bottom. (Participant 17)

10.2.2 Algorithmic management: Direct simple and technical control, indirect normative control and responsible autonomy approaches

Against the backdrop of DLP terms of services which correspond to several forms of control, algorithmic management was found to relate to direct simple, and technical controls, indirect normative control and responsible autonomy approaches. Reported next are ways platforms afford or buyers use mechanisms for directing, evaluating, rewarding and disciplining sellers. Specifically, control will be presented over three stages of the LP: the allocation, undertaking and completion of work, determined by buyer-seller inputs, mediated through a digital space.

The first key stage described where control was operated, was at the time of work allocation. To begin with, buyers who required new or existing seller(/s), and who hired through posting a task, job or project via the DLP, were often found to input their requirements in such a way that would allow them the means of achieving greater control over the sellers that they hired. Notably, because buyers perceived sellers to occupy the knowledge of their skill, they would ordinarily break the work task down upon posting, in a bid to exert greater control over them:

We would never give… [sellers] the whole project. We always try and break it into constituent parts. That way we can keep better control and no one actually knows what the whole thing's for. (Participant Alpha)

With one or two of my clients…, they've provided a large requirement and they've told a person [that] they are free to send a proposal on the areas in which they have expertise and can provide a brief description of what they can deliver. For those areas, what I feel good and confident, I send them the proposal. Later, they came and they gave only a particular part of whatever I have sent. For example, I sent for three parts and I [only] got the project for the one part. (Participant 3)

Having allocated work to seller(/s), a *kick-off* meeting usually took place between buyers and sellers where pay rates, working times and methods were discussed for instance, the upshot of which was input into the DLP (Participant 32). For example, at such meetings buyers were found to control sellers through normally imposing demands by: unilaterally setting meetings, reviews and deadlines (that were usually urgent in nature, see s 7.2.4 above), or milestones, which divided work "into a series of phases, due dates, or deliverables" (Upwork.com, 2021):

The client decides [on deadlines]. I have to adapt my time to be good with the client, you know? So I don't have any freedom to manage my time. No way for this. (Participant 10)

You have… digital [labour] platforms where you have steps throughout… [or milestones where] you have approval, or disapproval of work which is being done. (Participant 14)

A core tactic in this regard was aiming to create commitment and self-direction. For instance, one buyer reported how he attempted this through offers of continuity or higher levels of pay:

You say to… [sellers], look, if you do this, it's going to lead to other… work... You might have to say [to them], I've paid you more than you actually wanted so I expect this to be delivered on time. (Participant Alpha)

The second key stage found where control was operated, was when sellers undertook work. Participants reported that buyers deployed mechanisms for surveillance, requested updates, and sent reminders. For example, as a means for enforcement by monitoring and rewarding (and disciplining non-)compliance, DLP-specific tools (that were often non-optional) such as: milestone setting, screen sharing, time tracking or capping[66], or non DLP-specific apparatus, such as: screen sharing, online video calling, remote PC login and Google Docs, were used:

You have monitored work where the screen that you're working on is shared with a customer and they can view it at any given time. Snapshots are kept at regular intervals. You give up a little bit of your autonomy and control then because you're naturally allowing someone to look over your shoulder the entire time. So there's considerable demand as far as that type of digital [labour] platform goes where largely you sort of feel like you're being babysat throughout the entire process. It can be tedious and it can be frustrating at times. (Participant 14)

---

[66] For budget type of per hour rather than fixed price.

We can actually see how… [sellers] are working. Like… [the digital labour platform] take[s] screenshots… [For example], I managed to catch on very early that this person wasn't exactly doing the job. Like the screen was just staying at the same page for a long period of time. So, once I saw that, I knew that they were just charging us an hourly rate but they were not actually performing the task. So, we were able to pull the plug very quickly on that situation and end the contract. (Participant Bravo)

You occasionally get the odd client who wants you to fill in a live timesheet as you're working, or even wants to be on a video call as you're working... [One buyer] wouldn't give the files that he wanted me to work on, so I had to log into his PC, have a video conference, operate his PC, while in the files, and it was just, no, I can't do this. You feel like someone's watching over your shoulder... On Upwork[.com], you can click a button to say, I'm starting to work on a project, and [then once] you've worked on it… [you click a button to] stop. (Participant 27)

What you're asking for [from sellers] is clear communication throughout. Updates, regular updates, you know… You need to know what the position of the project is [in relation] to the time frame... And you might have to put some firm reminders in. (Participant Alpha)

One differentiator here is where buyers gave sellers responsible autonomy often in contexts where sellers were tried-and-tested (see s 10.2.3 below). Theoretically, we might recall from chapter two, employers may provide workers responsible autonomy, by allowing them some discretion over work by giving status, authority and responsibility to align their thinking to the firm's ideals (Friedman, 1977a:48-49). Sellers were occasionally allowed a wide measure of discretion over working times and methods but in line with buyer demands and expectations:

Once the universe has been crystallised by the client, within that they oftentimes want me, and actually ask me, to suggest and advise on different processes and stuff. (Participant 17)

Overall, the clients [are in control], because they're the ones that set the work. But the order I do things, and the manner I do them [in], I control that. (Participant 27)

[Buyers] treat you as an employee to… [some] extent, and I think they also treat you as a separate entity… You do… [the work] within your own timeline, but [you] also have [to deliver] it within their deadlines. (Participant 13)

The third and final key stage reported where control was operated, was at the end of the LP. The rating and reputation systems of DLPs provided buyers a means to reward (or discipline non-)compliance, by leaving sellers positive or negative feedback following the completion of work. While good feedback meant further work for sellers, poor feedback meant the opposite for them down to buyer preferences and algorithmic ranking (see s 7.2.1 above). This relates to algorithmic control which has been identified as a key function of DLPs (Wood, 2019:112):

[Ratings and reputation are] very important for us because… [a] one-star [rating and] bad review… is going to destroy our online business and reputation. Other people will see that bad [rating and] review and will think again before hiring us. So it's very important to satisfy… [buyers]. (Participant 5)

It's a hazard… [and] a disaster if someone writes something nasty [as a review] and… gives you [a] one-star [rating]… It would ruin the entire work [that] you have built so far. (Participant 26)

A core tactic in this regard was the use of control mechanisms aiming to create commitment and self-direction. Notably, DLPs were frequently found to appeal to the professional values, career, creativity, goodwill, and trust of sellers. This transpired in three major ways: one was by automated messaging, one was through (digital) positional striving (Eastman, 1998), and another was by coercive means[67]. Here, such attitudes and emotions were reportedly linked to one's user profile, activity history and ability to get work. Sellers lived-or-died-by evidence of (non-)compliance within user profiles and activity histories, which shaped their knowledge and behaviours, apropos the platforms' presumed "right" or "wrong" ways to act and interact:

[These] websites… all have their own… hints and tips and things like that, and they all say pretty much the same thing… [For example], make sure [that] you give the work… [in] a timely manner. (Participant 20)

I really want to grow my profile in this [digital labour] platform because… I am seeing every day that the platform is growing [in] the number of freelancers and… clients… Actually, I'm rated one of the [top] 20… freelancers, so I want to grow my profile more… [and make it more visible so as to] attract new clients… That's the goal. (Participant 12)

If somebody buys… one of my regular offers, then the site dictates I have to fulfil that within two days. If a client sends me a direct message then I have 24 hours to respond, otherwise… [the digital labour platform] penalise[s] me… They're penalising themselves as well, which also confuses me. So that's how the platform serves to make sure I fulfil my promise, which I guess is fulfilling their promise to the buyers… I genuinely believe reliability, responsiveness, politeness, professionalism, actually matter a lot… So sometimes that dictates, and my desire to want to do a good job for my client dictates. (Participant 23)

I would generally say my reputation controls my work tasks and that also controls my quality… Yeah, I am controlling everything. But there is a reputation above me that tells me to do that. (Participant 32)

---

[67] Referring to DLPs' monitoring and rewarding (and disciplining non-)compliance as to their terms of services (see s 10.2.1 above), and to buyers leaving sellers positive or negative feedback.

10.2.3 Limitations of control: Contradicted or undermined and situation specific

Platform or buyer pursuits of control were found to be contradicted or undermined. This was either through contradictory features of the DLP attempts at control, and/ or via unconscious and/ or conscious (mis)behaviours. Notably, control was contradicted or undermined around three main strands presented here of: tenure/ activity history (by opportunities of ratings and reputation eventually increasing autonomy), skill labels and levels (through sellers' upskilling or reskilling, or finding a niche, enhancing autonomy), and buyer-seller continuity (via issues or opportunities of indeterminacy increasing autonomy). Other elements have been reported elsewhere[68]. Importantly, the data here also shows that control is situation specific, whereby skills, or low tenure, came second to high tenure, or these to continuity for autonomy gained, due to issues of indeterminacy, since direct control was loosened for tried-and-tested sellers.

Firstly, seller tenure/ activity history in time, contradicted DLP software algorithms (based on rating and reputation systems) turning it into a contradictory feature of control in and of itself. This came in legitimate ways and/ or through unconscious and/ or conscious (mis)behaviour (in chapters six and eight). The more tenure/ activity history sellers had, the more autonomy over buyers and tasks (pay rates, working times, and methods) they had. This tempered the effects of algorithmic management. Here more tenured sellers got work from new (or repeat) buyers via invitations, algorithmic ranking, or buyer preference due to tenure/ activity history, rather than by submitting proposals, supported by progressive and accumulated momentum:

> *[Sellers] want to have a lot of positive comments alongside their offering, because they know the more positive they are, [and] the greater the reviews they get, the more… work they're going to get, you know. And I think that's the motivation for them to do a better job. (Participant Alpha)*

> *I'm one of the top rated voice talents on Upwork[.com], so people can write [to] me at this point, or I have repeat clients… Nowadays I['m] usually… lucky enough to mostly work with repeat clients. So I'm not in the monkey muck of sending out proposals. (Participant 16)*

> *Before I would be… like, oh, I'll just do it… [But] when you do start getting that regular-ish work in and you get those jobs in and you get that feedback, it gives you a bit more [of a] boost in your own ability and things like that, and that's when you can really feel a bit more confident in to stipulating what you are comfortable… doing. (Participant 20)*

> *I focused on building a profile and maintaining a good reputation, but now I don't really care about that much... Sometimes you actually need to work a little bit harder than*

---

[68] To avoid repetition, other contradictory or undermining aspects regarding control presented elsewhere include: issues of: (limited/ non-existent) barriers to entry (see s 6.2.1 above), skill personalisation (see s 6.2.2 above), bogus user activity (see s 6.2.3 above), five-star ratings being the norm (see s 6.2.4 above), buyers lacking technical know-how (see s 6.2.5 above), and tactics for survival (see s 8.2.1 to s 8.2.3 above).

you're expected to, just so you reach a point where you don't need to do that anymore. (Participant 7)

In fact, participants often reported that the greater a seller's DLP tenure/ activity history was, the more autonomy they had over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times, and methods (which contrasts with the experiences of short-tenured sellers, as reported in s 7.2.1 above):

As a beginner you have no autonomy, you depend on every client [that] you are able to get. As a freelancer with [a] background, you can choose [your] clients… You can basically do whatever. You can propose the most crazy strategies. (Participant 32)

At the beginning you want to build a profile and so… you just work with what you [can] get… Gratefully… I don't have to… work with these clients anymore because at this point, I think [that] I have the experience needed to actually propose my budget or my perspective on how a project should go. (Participant 7)

[You have to] put in the hours at the beginning, if you're working ten, [or] eleven hours a day then it's unfortunately the way that you have to go. And once you have a [number of] good recommendation[s], then you can maybe start lifting your rate and actually start functioning as a regular individual would through a regular office job. (Participant 11)

Secondly, certain DLP skill labels or levels and platforms giving sellers' discretion over skill labels or levels (see s 6.2.2 above), signal contradictory features of control as these offered sellers enhanced autonomy, in this case, via their upskilling or reskilling, or finding a niche[69]. Grugulis and Lloyd (2010:91) and Noon et al., (2013:111), we might recall from chapter two, remind us that skill is where aspects of the LP hinge. While deskilling and degradation were evident in the accounts of participants (see s 7.2.1 above), sellers often described how they adapted to circumvent this, control (and labour competition, see s 7.2.2 above) by upskilling or reskilling themselves, or finding a niche, in order to present themselves in a different way. This lessened the effects of algorithmic management, as skills – particularly those that were niche – enhanced autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times, and methods:

I think there's always some kind of movement, always some evolving companies that are automating some parts of the tasks. Yes, I'm moving along with it and trying to stay in front of it, and, well, be one or two steps there before everybody else… For example, when it comes to the topic of data extraction, there are companies out there who are building AI platforms that can do most of the data extraction at a good enough quality, so basically, they are making part of my work either easier or they will replace me. (Participant 31)

---

[69] Other unconscious or conscious (mis)behaviours as to skill labels or levels are reported in chapter six.

My skill set has a lot of impact, because if I have some niche skill…, people know that this skill is not readily available, so they are ready to pay more… I make sure that whatever skill… I have… should be very niche. (Participant 2)

Whenever you're feeling confident… in your niche [skill], basically you're in control of every aspect of the job. You're in control of what type of client you're working with, you're in control of how much you're paid and you're in control of so-called expertise. As an expert you're saying, hey, this will cost that, I don't want to work with this, I won't work with that, this is the deadline, those are the steps, [and] I will use these and these tools… So… whenever you become an expert, you become an autonomous part of this [digital labour] platform, you set your rules…, [it's buyers that] need you, [it's] not you that need them. (Participant 32)

One thing to note is that skills came second to tenure for engaging autonomy, as Participant 21 explained: *'I think [it's] not that much the skills… [that's important but rather] your history'*. One buyer shared this sentiment where he favoured one's activity history over qualifications, and one seller reported how buyer perceptions of her skills changed through long(er) tenure:

You're not really too bothered about the qualifications. You're more bothered about the rating that they've got and how many jobs they've completed. Some [digital labour] platforms will say how much money they've earned as a criteria to choosing. (Participant Alpha)

When you're a beginner…, you don't have much self-worth or self-respect or trust in your skills… [So] you [just] accept everything, even if it's underpaid and the client is a jerk… But after some time… you can actually choose the clients [that] you want to work with. And it's a privilege, and a blessing to get rid of rude clients that don't respect you, [and] don't respect the pay, time, and everything like that. (Participant 26)

Thirdly, participants described how issues or opportunities of indeterminacy (that are related to contradictory and undermining features as to control, evidenced in chapters six and eight), translated into buyer-seller continuity, to avoid the uncertainty around entering into new work relationships. Such working arrangements weakened the effects of algorithmic management:

So the challenges are, you know, you're always a bit worried when you're giving somebody a project because you pay money in escrow. You're never quite certain what you're going to get back. Once you find a freelancer that does what you want, you tend to use them a lot, you know, so you're already limiting yourself just for your own security factors and reliance factors. (Participant Alpha)

I… consider myself [to be] really lucky because after I sign[ed] up… [to the digital labour platform], in a month I… [had] a regular client… He liked my work right away and [began] sending [me] projects from then on. I didn't need to search for projects. They

always sent [projects to] me… I do work in other projects I find… but they are my regular customers and my main income comes from that. (Participant 8)

In fact, participants regularly reported how sellers experienced enhanced autonomy through buyer-seller continuity. This was sometimes perceived as the only way sellers could engage greater degrees of autonomy (over one's tenure/ activity history and skills advertised) owing to buyer uncertainty occasionally not being satisfied by one's user profile and activity history:

So, initially… we would always ask [the seller] how many hours [the work] is… going to take, and stuff, but now we have built a relationship [and] so now we just give it to him and I don't really question him… [anymore]. (Participant Bravo)

The more mature… your relationships [become] with [the] clients, [the more] you begin to trust each other and [buyers] realise that… [they] don't have to be sitting [there] with the camera over your shoulder in order to accomplish the work. (Participant 14)

The only time you'd have a lot of autonomy, maybe a huge amount of autonomy is when it's repeat work... With… first time clients, they really don't want to give you that much autonomy, because they want to feel in charge. So they want to follow up on what [you] are… doing right now, [and] how far along… the project [has] come. But with… repeat clients, they… [are] more hands off…, because they have previous work experience [with you], so there's already a certain level of trust. (Participant 13)

Moreover, it was also found that features of control were contradicted in fostering continuity. For example, one buyer explained: *'We want to get a relationship going with… [sellers] and stay with them'* (Participant Alpha). And DLPs (and one seller) did so through reducing fees:

Once that particular milestone or amount is crossed, the rolling charges go down. So it gives more motivation to work with the same client. That means that you have to deliver a good job so that the client will come back to you again, and you will be earning better for the same job with the same client. (Participant 3)

I like to build more long-term relationships [with buyers] whereby I think [in terms of digital labour platform fees], I've dropped to like… seven per cent or something… [And] half price… means I get magnitudes [of] more work from… [one particular buyer]. (Participant 17)

One caveat here, is that continuity was often found to be on an ad hoc basis, typically being on the buyers' terms. As one buyer explained: *'So you are creating a deep relationship [with sellers] but it's very much ad hoc'* (Participant Alpha). This meant that although sellers were frequently able to secure continuous employment, work from these arrangements was often not consistent enough, and therefore, the need to connect with new buyers, and to maintain user profiles and activity histories commonly remained, which propagated DLP dependency:

When I don't have enough work, absolutely, I try to get new clients. (Participant 16)

These clients that I work with currently, some of them are for long term projects but the others aren't... And so there would be a need for me to look for more clients… Even those clients that ask for continuous work, they don't always send you that... So they could send you, for example, a file to work on like in a week for example and then leave you with nothing for two weeks and then come back… [to you] later [on]. (Participant 7)

10.3 Concluding summary

This chapter has dealt with subsidiary research question four on the subject of control – *how is labour control implemented when using DLPs?* The findings reported advance new insight on control's coexistence, its objectives being contradicted, or undermined, and it manifesting as a situation specific form, unique to the nature of platforms. Specifically, two primary areas of control were found: firstly, the DLP terms of services – which were found to relate to direct technical control and indirect bureaucratic and concertive controls; and secondly, algorithmic management – that was found to correspond to direct simple, and technical controls, indirect normative control and responsible autonomy approaches. DLP or buyer objectives of control however were found to be contradicted or undermined around three central areas of: tenure/ activity history, skill labels or levels, and buyer-seller continuity. Importantly, control was also found to be situation specific, due to issues of indeterminacy, as direct control was loosened. In chapter eleven (next), a discussion structured by the themes of the data (as to the last six chapters) will be provided. Afterwards, in chapter twelve, the thesis will be concluded overall.

Chapter 11: Discussion

11.1 Introduction

This chapter will now provide a discussion structured by the themes of the data. This will be done over three parts, taken in the order of the five preceding empirical findings chapters of: first, skills (chapter six), autonomy (chapter seven), consent and resistance (chapter eight) – (which presented on subsidiary research question two); second, collective identity and voice (chapter nine) – (which reported on subsidiary research question three); and third and lastly, control (chapter ten) – (which presented on subsidiary research question four). Chapter five (which reported on subsidiary research question one), will be integrated over these sections. Each part will discuss the thesis' contribution(s) to debates in the literature with regard to LP dimensions, and will recap the LP concepts (as considered in chapter two). The chapter first provides a discussion apropos the searching and matching of skills, and their mismatch and labour indeterminacy, prior to looking at issues of self-employment, (false self-)employment, autonomy and structured antagonism, and exploring surviving by consent and/ or resistance (the first part). It will then offer a discussion on *online task* crowd work being a(n impersonal) social endeavour (the second part), before considering control's coexistence, limitations and specificity (the third and final part). Lastly, this chapter will close with a concluding summary.

11.2 Skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work

Concepts of skill, autonomy, consent and resistance are a central focus of LPT (Thompson, 1990:100-101) and are operationalised in chapter two. For instance, first, skill comprises of three parts: "skill that resides in the man [sic] himself", "skill demanded by the job", and "the political definition of skill" (Cockburn, 1983:113). Second, autonomy refers to the extent that workers are able to exercise initiative and discretion over what occurs on-the-job (Kalleberg et al., 2009:101). And consent "implies some level of agreement… to a set of work relations" (Thompson, 1989:176), while resistance at work relates to "anything you do at work you are not supposed to do" (Sprouse, 1992 cited in Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:2). The sections that follow will discuss the thesis' contribution to debates apropos these four LP dimensions.

11.2.1 Searching and matching undermined: Skills mismatch and indeterminacy

In spite of the registration, verification and approval on platforms and the various ways DLPs provide platform users to convey, search, and match skills (see chapters three and five), the data of this thesis signals a number of issues which engages, builds on and adds to debates around the searching and matching of skills, their mismatch and indeterminacy (Smith, 2015; Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; ILO, 2020; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2021 and others).

The gig economy is a contemporary phenomenon in relation to more established areas such as skills (see s 2.7.1 above) or skills mismatch. The finding about skills mismatch is more an emergent issue from the data which was not signalled in the literature review. It has possible ramifications across various levels of the labour market (ILO, 2020), including indeterminacy.

Skills mismatch is regarded here as a discrepancy between "the skill that resides in the man [sic] himself… [and] the skill demanded by the job" (Cockburn, 1983:113). The ILO (2020) in a recent report, outlined seven types of skills mismatch, of which, four are comparable in the data, referring to skills gaps, over or under skilling, vertical mismatch or horizontal mismatch.

As discussed in chapter three, while DLPs may lower search or information costs by offering search engines, algorithmic suggestions or digital certification and reputation scores (among other data) (Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2021:1374), the findings (mainly reported in chapter six) suggest an undermining of searching and matching, which may increase costs for platforms, buyers or sellers through skills mismatch and indeterminacy. In particular, these costs might materialise through problems of registration, verification and approval (see s 5.2.1 above) or by issues of: (limited/ non-existent) barriers to entry (see s 6.2.1 above), skill personalisation (see s 6.2.2 above), bogus user activity (see s 6.2.3 above), five-star ratings being the norm (see s 6.2.4 above) and buyers lacking technical know-how (see s 6.2.5 above) for example.

Before recapping these issues, it is worth noting therefore that beyond education or training not providing individuals with the skills demanded by the labour market, or the economy not producing jobs that correspond to the skills of the people (ILO, 2020), the data of this thesis shows how skills mismatch is also likely via the technology and system of working on DLPs.

First, searching and matching was undermined through problems of registration, verification and approval (see s 5.2.1 above), or issues of (limited/ non-existent) barriers to entry (see s 6.2.1 above), for instance. To start with, though verification and approval (at registration and periodically thereafter) was a concern for DLPs, platforms offer their users no guarantees as to other users. In fact, DLPs display disclaimers warning that they do not review and monitor purported content, or that they are unable to verify its accuracy, truthfulness, or validity. This can be seen by the limited/ non-existent barriers to entry reported (and by the prevalence of bogus user activity found that also undermined searching and matching, see s 6.2.3 above). Lax entry requirements on platforms can be explained by the *scaling at speed*, a key part of their business models, included in chapter three (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:29).

Next, problems of skill personalisation also undermined searching and matching (see s 6.2.2 above), for example. To begin with, simple or broad skill labels on DLPs restricted the scope of skill that one could convey or search. As a result, platform search features usually yielded numerous, and inappropriate options to DLP users, worsened by the lack of filters. Platforms may wish to portray a large number of returns given their business models that are based on attracting large numbers of people (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:29). Furthermore, DLPs allowing sellers' discretion over their skill labels and levels also undermined searching and matching due to problems of subjectivity. Finally here, searching and matching was also undermined by platform portfolio limitations hampering what could be conveyed or searched.

Third, before exploring further findings here, it is apt to consider the role software algorithms play in searching and matching on DLPs. Specifically, they are key for effective and efficient

searching and matching (among other things), and are impacted by external user-generated evaluations that propagate digital trust (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:24, 30). Thus any interference with the rating and reputation systems undermines these platform functions.

As we saw in s 6.2.3, bogus user activity undermined searching and matching (together with the digital trust infrastructure), for instance. To start with was the buying, selling or renting of user accounts among sellers, where barriers to entry were encountered. Barriers here came from labour market issues embodied in the DLPs, which triggered a temporary shift in policy and practice, through platforms temporarily barring access to some sellers with certain skills (see s 6.2.1 above). Such seller-owned initiatives undermined searching and matching (and digital trust) as they rendered entire profiles inaccurate. Furthermore, where DLPs permitted any personalisation of skills in profiles, some intentionally manipulated skill labels and levels, and some displayed images of plagiarised work in portfolios to gain entry or work. Moreover, some sellers manipulated past history information displayed in profiles, through: cheating on tests, improving ranking with software, buying feedback or partaking in sham endorsements, which also undermined searching and matching (and digital trust). Finally here, seller failure to disclose (co/) workers on platforms rendered entire profiles inaccurate as a basis for RSS.

Fourth, searching and matching (and digital trust) were also undermined by five-star ratings being the norm (see s 6.2.4 above), for example. Specifically, risk of negative feedback was commonly avoided by platform users, which confirms what Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019:24-25) put forward, that while DLPs assume reliability can be measured in ratings (as discussed in chapter three) – with reputation systems seen to function as an 'invisible hand' (as a means for control) – ratings are not always impartial, devoid of collusion, or retaliation. To begin with, platform users tended to default to a five-star rating (the top grading), or they had discretion to accept or decline feedback via DLP features or support when this was not the case. Another contradictory feature of platform attempts at control was sellers obtaining additional feedback for the same job. Last, seller tactics for evading bad (or obtaining good) feedback also undermined searching and matching (and digital trust) in: buying feedback, a readiness to sustain financial loss, buyer-seller continuity, and in soliciting desired feedback.

Finally, buyers lacking technical know-how (see s 6.2.5 above), or buyer tactics (see s 7.2.2 above) also undermined searching and matching (and digital trust), for instance. Here buyer ineptitude caused unintentional miscommunicated job posts, and incorrect selection of skills upon posting, or ill-suited feedback on completion of work. Intentional miscommunicated job posts represent buyer tactics since this was at times down to a deliberate act to get consent (as discussed in chapter three) which confirms and adds to the work of Felstiner (2011:156).

Taken together these findings point to (likely) skills mismatch (and indeterminacy). In fact, as we saw in s 6.2.5, s 7.2.2 and s 8.2.2, in certain cases, either sellers bid for work that did not match their skill, or buyers/ DLPs invited sellers with skill that did not match the skill required by the job. In such circumstances buyers (or sellers) were being taken in by, or were making

mistakes on, user accounts (or miscommunicated job posts) on RSS sellers (or buyers). The ramifications of which may impact different levels of the labour market: at the individual level, to companies, to countries and regions (ILO, 2020). In other words, with what the ILO (2020) has reported, and the data of this thesis, there are potential consequences. For example, for individuals, there may be a wage penalty that comes to affect satisfaction in domains of work and life, and mismatch might lower chances of getting work altogether. For companies, skills mismatch could negatively impact productivity and competitiveness, create sub-optimal work organisation and high staff turnover, which lead to lost profits and markets. And for countries and regions, mismatch might increase unemployment, and affect competiveness and appeal to investors, which may mean lost opportunity for productive transformation and job creation.

Further to skills mismatch, there is a related consideration regarding uncertainty to be made apropos the issue of indeterminacy (see s 2.7.2 above). For Smith (2015:231), labour power holds two components or indeterminacies: mobility and effort power, which form the basis of capital-labour strategies, tactics, or policies in capitalist employment relations. Uncertainty is further produced around the issue of skill on using DLPs. On the one hand, for buyers this is created through: problems of registration, verification and approval, or (limited/ non-existent) barriers to entry, skill personalisation, bogus user activity, five-star ratings being the norm or their lack of technical know-how, for instance. On the other hand, for sellers this is driven by: issues of registration, verification and approval, or limited/ non-existent barriers to entry, skill personalisation, five-star ratings being the norm, buyer ineptitude or tactics, for example. As a result, both buyers and sellers sought continuity to reduce uncertainty (see s 7.2.1 above).

11.2.2 Self-employment, (bogus self-)employment, autonomy and structured antagonism

Building on Wood and Lehdonvirta's (2019; 2021) work regarding the false self-employment debate, there are further nuanced contributions as to how bogus self-employment manifests itself, which extends debates in the literature (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019; 2021 et cetera). Structured antagonism will also be considered here.

As discussed in chapter three, Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019; 2021) rebut claims that remote gig work is false self-employment. The data of this thesis agrees but with further elaboration. In particular, the authors (2019:1-3, 7) advance four main claims. First, that the gig economy exists within or sellers usually operate inside a grey area of (self-)employment. Second, that only some DLPs function on the basis of bogus self-employment and that such platforms are taking steps to avoid doing so. For instance, Upwork.com detail how it is buyers (and not the DLP) who are responsible for deciding how to contract with sellers (User Agreement – see s 5.2.2 above). Third, that gig workers themselves frequently identify as freelancers over other classification types. Indeed participants in this study confirm this (see s 7.2 above). And last, that sellers in certain cases can engage aspects of autonomy related to self-employment (by algorithmic control enhancing autonomy [Wood, 2019:113]), and that platforms lower the risk

of false self-employment between buyers and sellers, by increasing seller agency to contract with buyers outside of their local labour market (Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:1; 2021:1369).

But, there is more to the story, as DLPs appear to constitute bogus self-employment in three key ways, therefore questioning how Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019; 2021) have reframed the debate. To start with, although it is argued that not all platforms operate on the basis of false self-employment, as we saw in s 5.2.2, the majority of DLPs surveyed delimited employment status to independent contractor, which confirms Pongratz's (2018:64) work. This is because much of the price advantage enjoyed comes from skirting employment regulations (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:30-31). Moreover, these platforms have been reported to typify the most prominent DLPs[70] (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018). While Upwork.com was identified to afford flexibility to their users in this regard, such an approach may merely signal a means for platforms to "avoid triggering statutory definitions of employment" (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:31). Secondly, although participants often view themselves or those working via DLPs as freelancers, issues of employment status ambiguity are known to exist, whereby "an encyclopaedic knowledge of case law" could be needed to decipher the variations, which can create space for employers to game the system (Taylor et al., 2017:33). For that reason, participants may be unable to determine employment status correctly. A notion supported by the third and final point. While Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019; 2021) posit that sellers in some cases enjoy aspects of autonomy related to self-employment, and that platforms reduce risk of bogus self-employment, chapter seven indicates conflicting and competing interpretations.

Drawing on Behling and Harvey's (2015) work, false self-employment occurred in two ways. The first was in the working arrangements having limited or no features of self-employment. This was demonstrated by problems of: *tendering for different contracts* (see s 7.2.1 above), *negotiating prices for services* (see s 7.2.2 above) or *employing workers in addition to, or in place of, themselves* (see s 7.2.3 above), for example. The second was in working activities possessing many characteristics of direct-employment. This was evidenced by problems of: *substantial continuity of engagement* (see s 7.2.1 above), *lack of control over working times* and methods, or *obeying instructions* (see s 7.2.4, and s 7.2.5 above), for instance. In other words, bogus self-employment can be seen in the ways sellers came to experience (limited) autonomy in respect of buyers and tasks, pay rates, employing (co/) workers, working times and methods. These are covered next given the added contributions to literature and theory.

For Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019:29; 2021:1389), DLPs do not entail false self-employment since they increase the mobility power of sellers, relative to buyers (by way of reducing their dependency on individual buyers, because platforms increase seller agency to contract with buyers beyond their locality), and thus enhance autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times and methods. This finding might be down to their sample having bias towards successful sellers (ibid, 2019:11; 2021:1366) or due to a neglect of constraining factors. We

---

[70] The DLPs surveyed appear to be the most visited and represent the majority of the market (in terms of gross transaction value) (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:243).

first look at how the findings of this work (including successful workers and those struggling) counters or adds to the aforesaid, before considering implications for structured antagonism.

First, seller agency to contract with buyers was hindered by deskilling and degradation, tacit knowledge and preferences, or issues or opportunities of indeterminacy (see s 7.2.1 above), for example. To begin with, deskilling and degradation constrained autonomy. As Thompson (1990:100) argues, this could be down to "pressures to eliminate or reduce existing skills, as well as to divide aspects of conception and execution" owing to a logic of accumulation. This was evident in buyers requesting sellers teach them their skill or automate work for instance, whereby skill came to be undermined or made redundant. Furthermore, tacit knowledge and preferences were also constraining. Here, user profile activity history was heeded by buyers when RSS. In particular, user profiles that featured limited activity history (created a *chicken and egg* situation for beginners who were paying their dues to remedy), and accounts which displayed negative activity history (by reputation scores), secured relatively less work due to buyer preferences and algorithmic ranking. Moreover, buyers frequently selected or avoided certain countries or languages, indicating a liability to foreignness. Buyers typically preferred (native) English speakers and yet, according to some data, there could be a mismatch in the upper geography of supply (Horton et al., 2017:11, 40), and demand (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018:246), which might leave the majority of sellers unappealing to the bulk of buyers. Lastly here, issues (that chapters six and eight show) or opportunities of indeterminacy as to buyer-seller continuity also hampered seller agency to contract with buyers. In particular, this acted as a double-edged sword, whereby issues translated into opportunities of continuity – a core concern for sellers (Schörpf et al., 2017:89) – and yet, took buyers and sellers off the market to some extent, even when continuity surfaced in a relatively ad hoc way (see 10.2.3 above).

Next, as we saw in s 7.2.2, competition, fees and subcontracting also hindered autonomy for example. To start with, in terms of labour competition, contextual (dis/)advantage (via labour arbitrage), underbidding practices and overpopulation, suggest a downward spiralling of pay by which sellers were either locked into a price, limited to the highest bid, being driven down on their standard rates of pay, or were being pushed out on price. This confirms and adds to the work of Graham et al., (2017:145), as discussed in chapter three. Furthermore, DLP fees were other ways autonomy was constrained. This was either by sellers having to buy *credits*, *bids*, or *connects* (see s 5.2.2 above), beyond those issued for free, owing to competition, or by platform fees taken on completion of work. Finally here, autonomy was also hampered by subcontracting (a prevalent phenomenon), that generated a downward spiralling of wages – exacerbating issues of exploitation (P. Edwards, 2018:5) – and triggered miscommunication.

Following, while some sellers employed (co/) workers for (part/ all of) the work, others were reluctant to do so, because of their perceptions of buyer demands and expectations, and of other sellers as to their quality, demands and expectations, for instance (see s 7.2.3 above).

Fourth, as we saw in s 7.2.4, building on Kühne and Leonardi (2020), incompatible demands and exceptions also hindered autonomy. These gave rise to intra-role conflict on-the-job and inter-role conflict whereby work responsibilities interfered with familial responsibilities (or vice versa). For example, sellers were driven to take on work (whether they wanted to or not) due to DLPs (en)forcing engagement by rewarding activity (/ compliance) and punishing inactivity (/ non-compliance), as to their terms of services. Notably, activity was rewarded by platforms conferring status or more work to those sellers that maintained their user profiles and activity histories, while disengagement was penalised via demotion, dismissal, or filtering work away (see s 10.2.1 above). Moreover, (digital) positional striving was another element (see s 7.2.4 and s 10.2.2 above) where sellers felt pressed "to keep up with or outwork others" (Eastman, 1998:51), causing some to take on more work in order to maintain their algorithmic rankings.

Lastly, buyer specificity over work also constrained autonomy for instance. In contrast to the extant literature which suggests that workers possessing software or creative skills are often required to make subjective contributions, and so have a relatively high degree of autonomy (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2013:967; Schörpf et al., 2017:89), the findings show that such workers can experience little room for subjective self-expression. As we saw in s 7.2.5, specificity of work may relate to issues of indeterminacy with buyers seeking to tilt the wage-work exchange in their favour, or to circumvent uncertainty of new work relationships. It also seeks to ensure that sellers follow brand guidelines or to impose what one is accustomed to.

Taken together these findings signal bogus self-employment. DLPs increasing seller mobility power (by reducing seller dependency on single buyers), and thus enhancing autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times and methods, was not usually the case. This was true for successful workers and those struggling to get work. In particular, seller dependency on individual buyers was not typically reduced when working through platforms. Contrary, or further to, what Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019:29; 2021:1389) purport, while DLPs may make it easier for sellers to find buyers beyond their locality, this was generally hindered by one or more constraining factor(s). It follows then that the mobility power they argue stem from that is undermined. Indeed autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, employing (co/) workers, working times and methods, was more constrained than hitherto depicted in extant literature.

False self-employment however, could be contingent, variable and nebulous, as Figure 11.1 below illustrates. This is a graphical representation of how dynamic shifts in one's autonomy might dictate whether one finds themself in the domain(s) of self-employment and/ or (bogus self-)employment. The top half of the diagram features a number of ways sellers were found able to access various aspects of autonomy related to self-employment, and the bottom half shows a number of constraining factors. Specifically, the risk of bogus self-employment may hinge upon the extent to which one is able to access characteristics of autonomy associated with self-employment, when faced with constraining factors. For example, the data suggests that sellers could engage higher degrees of autonomy through purchasing optional extras or by receiving zero/ reduced service fees for referrals/ buyer-seller continuity on DLPs, and by

deciding to opt out of the non-circumvention agreement on Upwork.com (see s 5.2.2 above). Moreover, some sellers engaged enhanced autonomy by their: contextual advantage (see s 7.2.2 above), misbehaviour (see s 6.2.3, s 6.2.4, and s 8.2.1 to s 8.2.3 above), employing of (co/) workers (see s 7.2.3 above), tenure, skill or continuity with buyers (see s 10.2.3 above).

Figure 11.1: Dynamic shifts in autonomy, self-employment and (bogus self-)employment
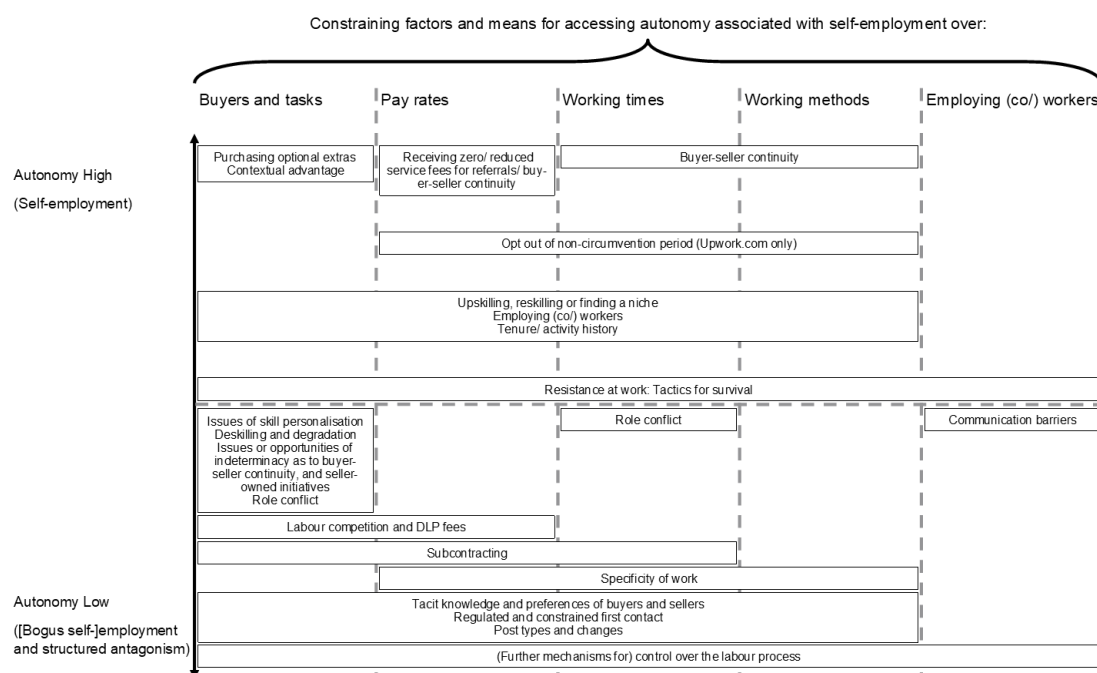
Yet routes to autonomy related to self-employment were not without their problems and may have tilted sellers into the sphere of (false self-)employment to some extent. For instance, to begin with, as we saw in s 10.2.3, reduced service fee schemes fostered continuity between buyers and sellers (a feature of direct-employment, see Behling and Harvey, 2015:970), and could have taken them off the market to some extent (see s 7.2.1 above). The opt out option on Upwork.com either meant having to pay a conversion fee of up to $50,000 USD, or put in at least two years for each relationship (see 5.2.2 above). Contextual (dis/)advantage meant being locked to a price (see s 7.2.2 above). Misbehaviour by some sellers created issues for others, due to perceived scale, and indeterminacy produced (see s 7.2.1 above). Employing of (co/) workers might perpetuate problems of subcontracting (see s 7.2.2 above), and lastly, skills, or low tenure comes second to high tenure, and these to continuity (a feature of direct-employment), for accessing autonomy, owing to issues of indeterminacy (see 10.2.3 above).

Further to bogus self-employment, there is a consideration to be made concerning the issue of structured antagonism (P. Edwards, 1986:5) (see s 2.7.4 above). Due to dynamic shifts in autonomy that situate sellers in realm(s) of self-employment and/ or (false self-)employment, determined through an interplay of constraining factors and ways for accessing autonomy, a structured antagonism may also be contingent, variable and nebulous. As Figure 11.1 above illustrates, on the one hand, where working arrangements have limited or no features of self-

employment, or where they possess many characteristics of direct-employment (Behling and Harvey, 2015:970), a structured antagonism could exist in the traditional sense by adding up to (bogus self-)employment. This counters or adds to what Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019:1-3; 2021:1369-1370) put forward, that a structured antagonism exists between DLPs and sellers typically, since for them (2019:29; 2021:1389), platforms do not entail false self-employment. Indeed, it might be that the nature of the triangular relationships of the parties (Schörpf et al., 2017:89) and constraining factors, induce structured antagonisms. On the other hand, it may be that where sellers engage higher degrees of autonomy (which could act as countervailing force), that genuine self-employment as to buyer-seller relationships become more probable, and a structured antagonism less probable. Moreover, while Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019:1; 2021:1369) reveal the existence of a structured antagonism towards the DLPs themselves – manifesting over fees, pay rates and limited voice (as discussed in chapter three) – in sellers achieving enhanced autonomy, antagonism here might also be counteracted to some extent.

11.2.3 Surviving by consent and/ or resistance at work

As an analytical category, resistance or misbehaviour (assumes a dialectic with control that) is an outcome of a structured antagonism between capital and labour, within a traditional LP framework (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:24; Hall, 2010:167; Marks and Chillas, 2014:109).

The findings reveal a number of tactics for survival. These took the shape of covert, informal, individual, and collective workplace (mis)behaviours. Such seller-owned initiatives countered DLP or buyer authority and power through tempering and moderating it, and provided sellers greater degrees of autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times, and methods.

Indeed, like Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) or Fleming (2001:191), resistance is considered not only "as a negative reaction to power" but also "as an *active* set of practices that attempt to recover a degree of autonomy". Yet, the data suggests nuances to how misbehaviour can be interpreted through each of the tactics also representing consent, which questions, builds on and contributes to debates (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Noon et al., 2013, and so on).

As discussed in chapter three, workers who lack formal structures of representation (or view such representation as futile), find new and subtle means to exert resistance as a method to oppose managerial authority and power (Van den Broek and Dundon, 2012:103), as well as to regain control over their work (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Fleming, 2001). This thesis confirms this to some extent. Indeed, arising out of four sources of contention – identified by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999:25), indicated in chapter two – including areas of *work* (see s 8.2.1 above), *product* (see s 8.2.2 above), *time* (see s 8.2.3 above) and *identity* (see s 9.2.3 above), were misbehaviour such as fiddling, making out, escape, or class or group solidarity.

Table 11.1 below places these survival strategies (largely excluding class or group solidarity as *identity* is considered below), against examples of DLP rules taken from chapter five, and shows how such (mis)behaviours can be interpreted as a form of consent and/ or resistance.

Table 11.1: Interpretation of the tactics for survival

Survival strategy (I and II)	Seller tactic for survival (III), e.g.	Platform rule from terms of services and related documents (IV), e.g.	Interpreted as a form of consent and/ or resistance (I)
Fiddling *(Appropriation of work or time)*	Lying in one way or another, e.g. - *Convincing buyer of easier job procedure* - *Claiming unnecessary or extra work needed* - *Exaggerating deadlines needed* - *Misleading buyers on progress made* Soldiering, e.g. - *Output restriction*	Must not fraudulently charge buyers	Consent: 'Deserved' perks that help subsidise wages and confer status on sellers Resistance: Theft that affects profitability and undermines the integrity of everyone in the organisation
Making out (or fiddling) *(Appropriation of product)*	Cutting DLPs out, e.g. - *Bypassing service fee* - *Bypassing communication tool* - *Bypassing payment tool* - *Bypassing portfolio tool* Bogus user activity and/ or lying in one way or another, e.g. - *Intentional manipulation of skill labels and levels* - *Showcasing images of plagiarised work* - *Cheating on DLP-specific tests* - *Improving one's ranking with software* - *Engaging in sham endorsements* - *Attempting to secure work when aware of skills mismatch* - *Changing one's IP address*	Must use inbuilt communication and payment tools Must not misrepresent self or experience, skills, or qualifications	Consent: Acts of 'game playing' within the organisation's rules, which result in mutual benefit for sellers, buyers and DLPs Resistance: Acts that undermine DLP or buyer control by bending the rules to satisfy the self-interest of sellers Consent: 'Deserved' perks that help subsidise wages and confer status on sellers Resistance: Theft that affects profitability and undermines the integrity of everyone in the organisation
	- *Failing to disclose (co/) workers*	Must be honest about who is doing the work	

	- *Submitting fake bids* - *Pricing strategies*	Must not fraudulently charge buyers	
	- *Creating more than one user account*	Must not have multiple accounts	
	- *Buying, selling or renting user accounts*	Must not sell, trade or give account to anyone else	
	- *Purchasing fake ratings and reviews* - *Readiness to sustain financial loss* - *Soliciting positive feedback*	Must use the feedback system honestly and fairly	
Escaping (Appropriation of time or identity)	Physical escape, e.g. - *Quitting the job* Mental escape, e.g. - *Cynicism*		<u>Consent</u>: Acts of withdrawal that result in sellers accepting the status quo, even though they disagree with policy or objectives <u>Resistance</u>: Acts that result in withdrawal of goodwill or mental and physical effort, thereby reducing organisational performance and undermining management objectives

<u>Key</u>

    I.   Conceptual terms taken from Noon et al., (2013)

    II.   Conceptual terms <u>underlined</u> taken from Ackroyd and Thompson (1999)

    III.   Evidence taken from the data of this thesis (chapters six, eight and nine), with further examples in *italics*

    IV.   Evidence taken from the data of this thesis (chapter five)

Source adapted from Noon et al., (2013)

Given the added contributions to literature and theory, we first discuss the misbehaviour and rules found (under areas of *work*, *product*, and *time*, since *identity* is explored below), before considering the ways in which such (mis)behaviours can typify consent or resistance or both.

First, individual expressions of resistance were apparent through sellers lying (in one way or another)[71] and soldiering – or fiddling, concerning the effort bargain and output restriction as P. Edwards (1986) imagined – (see s 8.2.1 above), for example. Such tactics allowed sellers a route to engage autonomy over pay rates, working times and methods. To start with, some sellers circumvented DLP (or buyer) rules by lying about job procedures to make work easier

---

[71] This work kept with the term "lying" after Jenkins and Delbridge (2020), as it illustrates the way sellers were lying because of their interests.

or lied about unnecessary or extra work, to drive up pay rates. As we saw in s 5.2.2, platform terms of services (and related documents) describe how sellers must not fraudulently charge buyers, for instance. Moreover, some sellers engaged in what Taylor (1911) called natural or systematic soldiering, entailing a deliberate restriction of output. Indeed, such misbehaviours show posited "manipulation of the wage-work exchange" (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:26), in terms of its extent being considerable, as the works of Roy, and Burawoy have suggested. Therefore, fiddling at work represents a key covert element in one's total rewards, as well as a central means for altering the balance of the wage-work exchange (Noon et al., 2013:242).

Next, misbehaviour was also visible where sellers engaged in acts of making out (or fiddling) (see s 8.2.2 above), for example (as in Table 11.1). While Burawoy (1979) views making out as consent, this thesis also considers it resistance. Making out subverts control by partakers bending the rules to satisfy their self-interests, and fiddling – regarding theft of goods or time as Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) or Noon et al., (2013) imagined – impacts profitability and subverts the integrity of all (ibid, 2013:260). It is important before exploring the findings here, to discuss a nuance around these. While acts of making out entail working within or bending the rules, acts of fiddling normally involve breaking the rules (Noon et al., 2013:245). Yet, as Noon et al., (2013:245) point out, this distinction of strategies is not always clear-cut. Indeed, the findings show how such a distinction between working within the rules, bending the rules (as to making out), and breaking them (as to fiddling), is not always as sharply defined, easy to perceive or understand. What seems evident in the data of this thesis is that sellers (often along with buyers) were concerned with "beating the system, finding the angles, working out dodges or discovering loopholes – in other words, making out" (ibid, 2013:236). In particular, seller tactics entailed cutting DLPs out, bogus user activity and lying (in one way or another).

To begin with, platform users were cutting DLPs out in part and/ or fully. This questions what some advance, that the social relations of production "forcefully take place on the platform[s] and cannot exist outside of [them]" (Schörpf et al., 2017:97; Gandini, 2018:7), as considered in chapter three. In fact, this finding confirms and adds to what Alacovska (2018:1576) found respecting some DLP users sidestepping the platforms. Indeed, some adapted to circumvent DLP rules to duck platform fees and portfolio, communication or payment tools' issues. Such tactics offered sellers a means to engage autonomy over buyers and tasks, and pay rates. In particular, most DLP terms of services (and related documents) specify how their users must use inbuilt communication and payment tools, whether for first-time, repeat or follow-on work (see s 5.2.2 above). The platforms' argued purposes for such policy include to protect users, monitor compliance or to ensure protection of revenue, for instance. Yet to avoid fees, some sellers (and buyers) broke DLP rules by taking their arrangements offsite, ordinarily after the first interaction. Platform users were able to achieve this by evading the DLP communication technologies. Some sellers worked within or bent the rules (to bypass fees), by manoeuvring buyers found offsite onto and across platforms where fees were lowest, and some sellers, by making it appear as though onsite buyers had been located offsite, to qualify for zero service

fees. Or to avoid portfolio, communication or payment tools, some sellers bent (or broke) the rules by using offsite tools to augment profiles, and to improve communication and payment.

Furthermore, acts of making out (or fiddling) were also apparent where sellers participated in bogus user activity and lying. These tactics provided sellers a way to engage autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times, and methods. In particular, as we saw in s 5.2.2, platform terms of services (and related documents) detail how sellers must not misrepresent themselves, their experience, skills, or qualifications, for example. Yet, some sellers adapted to circumvent DLP (or buyer) rules to obtain work when aware of a skills mismatch. This was either short-tenured sellers, breaking the rules, who were faking it until they made it, or more tenured sellers, working within/ bending the rules, who were saying "yes" - then learning how to do the work later, or some were rewriting the post to fit their skill set. This relates to tactics or issues reported in chapter six, where other platform rules were broken, including the trade in user accounts, abuse of the feedback systems and the non-disclosure of (co/) workers, for instance. Some sellers broke the rules or misrepresented themselves through switching their digital locations to more desirable ones, through virtual private networks, to avoid any liability of foreignness. Lastly here, DLP terms of services (and related documents) state how sellers must not fraudulently charge buyers or hold multiple accounts, for example. Yet some sellers worked within or bent the rules by submitting fake bids to avoid the pre bid issues faced (see s 7.2.2 above), and some broke the rules by exaggerating their rates of pay post bid to avoid expenses (such as platform fees), expected post changes (see 7.2.2 above), or pricing error. And some sellers broke the rules by creating more than one user profile to avoid the *chicken and egg* situation (see 7.2.1 above), communication barriers (see s 9.2.1 above), insufficient tacit knowledge (see s 7.2.1 above) and labour competition (see s 7.2.2 above), for instance.

Indeed, like what Van den Broek and Dundon (2012:100) posit, as discussed in chapter two, rather than mischief being acts to "get back" at DLPs or buyers, making out (or fiddling), and related tactics, for example, were regularly (mis)behaviours which allowed sellers to "get by".

Last, individual (and collective) misbehaviours were also evident through acts of escape and fiddling (see s 8.2.3 above), for instance (as in Table 11.1). Escape means the withdrawal of goodwill or physical or mental effort which reduces organisational performance and subverts management objectives (Noon et al., 2013:260). Such tactics gave sellers a route to engage autonomy over pay rates or working times. To start with, some sellers physically escaped, or quit the job by unauthorised absence as a response to post changes not being remunerated, and some, by leaving buyers if dissatisfied with them, or the job. As we saw in s 9.2.2, some sellers mentally escaped via cynicism where some shared disbelief in DLP (or buyer) values, mocked it but remained loyal to it. Furthermore, some circumvented platform (or buyer) rules by lying (in one way or another) to fiddle time. In particular, while DLP terms of services (and related documents) describe how sellers must not fraudulently charge buyers or must deliver within agreed deadlines for example (see s 5.2.2 above), some exaggerated timings needed for work requested, and some misled buyers respecting progress made while updating them.

Yet, as discussed in chapter two, each strategy can represent (or be interpreted as) consent or resistance, or both (Noon et al., 2013:260). As Table 11.1 shows, fiddling may be seen as deserved perks, rather than as theft. Making out might be seen as mutually beneficial acts of game playing for sellers, buyers and DLPs, rather than as acts that subvert platform or buyer control. And escape might be seen as acts that cause sellers to accept the status quo, rather than as acts that reduce organisational performance or undermine managerial aims. In other words, worker activity here can represent "some level of *agreement*" (Thompson, 1989:176), and/ or be anything one does at work, which one is not supposed to do (Sprouse, 1992 cited in Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:2). While interpretations of consent or resistance may differ (Noon et al., 2013:260-261), expressions of misbehaviour might not in all cases be regarded as problematic by DLPs and buyers. For instance, as we saw in s 8.2.2, in sellers cutting the platforms out as a means to bypass the fees, and portfolio, communication or payment tools' issues, DLP users were able to avoid, or reduce fees (which subsidised the wages of sellers, that sometimes got passed onto buyers), augment profiles, and improve communication and payment. These could have resulted in mutual benefit by making platform use more feasible. Similarly, sellers engaging in bogus user activity and lying might have created mutual benefit (for DLPs and sellers), in such seller-owned initiatives also making platform use more viable.

In fact, as we saw in s 9.2.3, platforms were often willing "to turn a blind eye" to such activity. Noon et al., (2013:237-244) offer several reasons for this which can be seen in the data. For example, first, making out (or fiddling) may be tolerated to maintain a cooperative workforce. Indeed, far from being a threat to capitalism, similar to what Burawoy (1979) posits, consent becomes produced by workers (sellers) challenging the periphery of the rules or making out, which supports agreement, or concession to existing social relations of production, and thus, helps to secure and obscure surplus value/enable exploitation (see s 6.2.3 and 8.2.2 above). Second, making out (or fiddling) may be tolerated due to a recognition of its near-inevitability (see s 5.2.1 above). Third, it could allow employers (buyers) to pay lower wages (see s 8.2.2 above) and last, employers (DLPs or buyers) may be involved (see s 6.2.4 and 8.2.2 above).

11.3 Collective identity and voice

One further area of conflict where sellers resisted managerial authority and power (Van den Broek and Dundon, 2012), and recovered control over work (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Fleming, 2001), was (collective) *identity* – defined as a source of contention by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999:25), outlined in chapter two – as to class or group solidarity, but relating to tiny acts of participation (as signalled in chapter three), rather than collective action or voice.

11.3.1 Online task crowd work as a(n impersonal) social endeavour

Panteli et al., (2020:482) advocate that a "strong collective identity may provide a vehicle for organising and expressing worker voice", while Joyce et al., (2022) advance unionism in the gig economy in relation to earlier (nineteenth century) modes of capitalism. This work shows that rather than support for contemporary or modern forms of union mobilisation (Heckscher and McCarthy, 2014) – apropos union recognition, collective bargaining and industrial action

(Dundon et al., 2004:1152) – sellers appeared to be more concerned by a network solidarity and identity to the work. This questions, confirms and adds to debates in the literature about collective organisation and action in the gig economy (Irani and Silberman, 2013; Gray et al., 2016; Panteli et al., 2020; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019; 2021; Joyce et al., 2022 and so on).

Given the added contributions to literature and theory, we first consider the issues that made *online task* crowd work an impersonal social endeavour, structured antagonism(s) and (little) support for collective organisation, and action or voice in this regard among sellers. We then discuss how some sellers adapted as a means of appropriating *identity* as a source of group solidarity (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:25) typically to the work, through network alliances.

Remote gig work was found to be an impersonal social endeavour for some DLP users (see s 9.2.1 above), which was reported and briefly explored in the work of Dundon et al., (2020). Those authors (2020) argue that social interactions from work and employment have a deep psychological and philosophical effect on us as humans, and remote gig work frustrates this. Specifically, the data of this thesis indicates that platform tactics and communication barriers hindered to some extent group collective identity or solidarity among sellers from developing.

Before considering the findings here, it is necessary to discuss mechanistic dehumanisation (Haslam, 2006), a related (Christoff, 2014) phenomena and one further emergent issue from the findings of this work (see s 9.2.1 above). Drawing on Haslam's work (2006:257-258), the data indicated mechanistic dehumanisation, where sellers tended to be likened to objects or automata, were treated as a means to an end and denied emotion, warmth, and individuality for instance by DLPs (and buyers). For example, platforms were reported to consider sellers to be something that is not important or not valued in itself, but as something that is useful in meeting their aims regarding their business models (as have been outlined in chapter three).

In fact, such dehumanising attitudes negatively impacted on how sellers came to be seen or treated by buyers, and by one another. On the one hand, for instance, DLP tactics of *scaling at speed*, and avoidance, change and ambiguity of the law (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:30), for example (as discussed in chapter three), translated into buyers treating sellers as disposable commodities, even when continuity manifested in a relatively ad hoc way (see 10.2.3 above). Furthermore the nature of platform-controlled, mandatory (see s 5.2.2 above) communication tools led to impersonal work relationships, where sellers were denied human recognition. On the other hand, the fierce competition produced (and the resultant tactics) of sellers seeking earning opportunities through platforms *scaling at speed*, tended to stifle any group collective identity or solidarity developing, as a way of acting as a countervailing force.

As discussed in chapter two – and in the spirit of 'The Disconnected Capitalism Thesis' (see s 2.6.1 above) – considering linkages between the LP and the broader political economy are needed for understanding issues of identity, resistance, and voice (Marks and Chillas, 2014). Dundon and Gollan (2007:9-18) argue that macro environmental factors can influence micro organisational dimensions in non-union work contexts. Crucially, the findings from this thesis

go further. In particular, the latter authors (2007) draw on traditional (non-union) workspaces, whereas the data of this thesis extends knowledge, which is relevant to platform workplaces. For instance, micro organisational dimensions including occupational identity as a source of group solidarity, appear affected by macro environmental factors, such as market influences (or product and labour markets and competitive pressures), and the regulatory environment, that is becoming increasingly more deregulated (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:30).

By the same token, macro environmental factors may also go some way towards explaining micro organisational dimensions, involving (DLP) management strategies towards unions in terms of non-union voice outcomes, which include union avoidance (through suppression or substitution or both, which the findings in s 5.2.3 above may signal), ideological hostility and irrational/rational employer behaviour for example (see Dundon and Gollan, 2007:10, 18-29).

As we saw in s 9.2.1, the new platform context made seller-seller contact difficult outside of a job, which suppressed any group collective identity or solidarity among sellers. While DLP-controlled public forums or blogs, for instance, were found to exist on platforms (see s 5.2.3 above), the technology and system of working often challenged any group collective identity or solidarity developing. Contrary to what Wood and Lehdonvirta (2021:1390) conclude, this finding shows that it might not be possible for sellers – in a context of heightened structured antagonisms – to repurpose DLP voice infrastructure into spaces for collective voice. Lastly, collective identity or solidarity was further frustrated by seller perceptions of buyer demands and expectations, and of fellow sellers with regard to their quality, demands or expectations that compelled some sellers to avoid contacting (or working with) others (see s 7.2.3 above).

Related to collective identity or solidarity, there is a consideration to be made respecting the issues of structured antagonism (P. Edwards, 1986), and support for collective organisation. Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019:1-2; 2021:1369) advance that platform labour or subordinated agency engender a structured antagonism (as discussed in chapter three) that fuels conflict towards DLPs and produces seller desire for representation, greater voice and unionisation, while reinforcing entrepreneurial attitudes to buyers. They (2019:3; 2021:1370) suggest that this is due to platforms triggering a new economic relationship or dual contradictory process where sellers face dependency on or increased subordination to DLPs (concerning network effects, data lock-in, and gatekeeping), while also encountering enhanced agency to buyers. Accordingly, the authors (2019; 2021) put forward (based on the work of Hirschman [1970]), that the increased mobility power of sellers will translate into ease of exit, which reduces the likelihood of (bogus self-employment, structured antagonism, and) collective action towards buyers. Yet, as we saw in s 11.2.2, there are dynamic shifts in autonomy that situate one in domain(s) of self-employment and/ or (bogus self-)employment, meaning that antagonism – which sparks collective action (Edwards, 1986) – may be contingent, variable and nebulous. Thus, collective action (albeit small scale acts of participation, as the data of this thesis, and the work of others signal, see s 3.6.1 above), as a way of remedying dissatisfaction in terms of buyer behaviour, could be more possible than Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019; 2021) assert.

Furthermore, while Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019:25-27; 2021:1385-1387) indicate that there is widespread support for unions among sellers, the data of this thesis suggests the contrary (see s 9.2.2 above). Specifically, those authors (2019; 2021) argue that seller desire for new collective voice channels stemmed from how they experienced a lack of voice through DLPs. This finding confirms Dundon and Gollan (2007:14) who put forward (drawing on the work of Dubin [1973]), that absent employee influence or a lack of recognition about employee effort from management can result in a more militant workforce as group solidarity is realised. Yet, while the data of this thesis agrees that voice goes unheard[72] (see s 9.2.2 above), in spite of (or because of) the mechanisms and practices platforms afforded (see s 5.2.3 above), union support did not typically follow as hitherto depicted for two reasons. For example, as we saw in s 9.2.1, seller-seller communication barriers and in s 9.2.2, the limited support for voice as *expression of collective organisation*, among sellers, frustrated scope for voice in this regard. For instance, seller support for union voice was lacking though perceptions of unions placing one at a competitive disadvantage, conditioned thinking by experiences and environment, or doubt as to whether or not contemporary union structures can address concerns. Doubt was expressed by sellers on account of the fragmented nature of work as well as social relations through DLP workspaces, and in reference to demands for mutual collaboration for example.

The probability of union voice, therefore (dependent on three variables according to Willman, Bryson and Gomez [2003]) seems unlikely, as DLPs appear unwilling to deal with unions (as s 5.2.3 signals), and union propensity to organise or seller propensity to join seem frustrated.

In fact, rather than a solidarity apropos union recognition, collective bargaining and industrial action (Dundon et al., 2004:1152), sellers appeared to be more focused on a solidarity to the task or job via network alliances. This reflects what Webb and Webb (1894) wrote on mutual association (as to recognising a commonality of interests and purpose around the task), as a way workers can address their concerns. Indeed, in spite of the challenges reported to make DLP work an impersonal social endeavour for some sellers (see s 9.2.1 above), other sellers were found utilising professional networks as a means to access and/or provide support (see s 9.2.3 above). This suggests the appropriation of (collective) *identity* as to goal identification and class or group solidarity (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), and confirms and adds to what Irani and Silberman (2013), Gray et al., (2016) and Panteli et al., (2020) found. For instance, some sellers adapted by contacting other sellers: virtually – over web communities (platform-controlled or otherwise), or communication tools (DLP-controlled collaborating, or otherwise) – or met in-person on- or off-the-job. While some sellers invested time on public professional networks, over web communities, other sellers built more personal ones. For example, some sellers were able to keep lines of communication open with other sellers, having worked with them through the platforms, and some sellers grew communities of other sellers through pre-existing contacts, or capitalised on chance encounters by staying in touch. Help via networks

---

[72] "This is because the interests of the employer may mitigate the interests of the employee, and therefore fail to satisfy employee needs" (Dundon and Gollan, 2007:21).

comprised of: providing work (specifically, passing work along, and employing [co/] workers), information-sharing, seller-seller mentoring, peer reviewing or translation and inflating prices.

11.4 Control over the labour process

From Taylor (1911) to Braverman (1974) and beyond, a main focus of LPT has been control (Thompson, 1990:100-101) and is defined in chapter two. It refers to "the ability of capitalists and/or managers to obtain desired work behaviour", or to forms with which companies direct, evaluate, reward and discipline workers (R. Edwards, 1979:17-18). The following section will discuss the thesis' contribution to debates as to the control of labour in the new DLP context.

11.4.1 Control coexisting, limitations and situation specific

The data of this thesis signals that control coexists in multiple forms and is situation specific. Notably, labour control was found in two prime areas: the platform terms of services – which were found to correspond to direct technical control and indirect bureaucratic and concertive controls – and algorithmic management – that was found to correspond to direct simple, and technical controls, indirect normative control and responsible autonomy approaches. Control however, was often found to be contradicted or undermined, and situation specific. The data here questions, confirms and adds to debates in the literature (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Donaghey et al., 2011; Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Wood et al., 2019, et cetera).

Given the added contributions to literature and theory, we will first consider the DLP terms of services (and related forms of control), and algorithmic management (and the corresponding types of control), prior to considering the limitations of platform, or buyer control, and it being situation specific. Structured antagonism and observable conflict are also covered from here.

First, the terms of services of DLPs (and specific content, identified in chapter five), relate to direct technical control and indirect bureaucratic and concertive controls (reported in chapter ten). This confirms and adds to what Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019:30) contend (as in chapter three) that one way platforms attempt control is by tightly defined terms of service. Notably, as we saw in s 5.2.2 and s 10.2.1, DLPs operate methodical, rational-legal rules for direction, hierarchical monitoring and rewarding (and disciplining non-)compliance – aspects emphasised by the bureaucratic form of control (Barker, 1993:409) – that platform users are required to agree to, and abide by, whereby consent is provided physically or is assumed by use of service. These terms of services include a code of conduct (among other things), that set out the rules around: bidding, payment, user content, personal behaviour, confidentiality, communication, and fraud, for instance. Breaching such rules can lead to disciplinary action.

As we saw in s 5.2.2 and s 10.2.1, chief among DLP rules identified were those in regard to communication and payment. Platforms did not want their users to cut them out – to protect users, monitor compliance or to ensure protection of revenue for example – in line with their business models (as detailed in chapter three). Thus, DLPs 'ring-fenced' the social relations of production by requiring their users follow a regulatory process regarding the ways buyers hired sellers, or sellers submitted proposals (or competing entries), their resulting exchange,

and potential disputes and related services. (Dis)engagement was rewarded (or disciplined) in three ways by platforms: first, by offering status and work to those sellers that maintained user profiles and activity histories (or punished those for disengagement or cutting them out [see s 8.2.2 above] through demotion, dismissal, or filtering work away); second, by offering policing, safety, and security (or penalised disengagement, as it prevented access to these); and finally, DLPs rewarded engagement by reducing their fees for repeat work, for instance.

DLPs used demotion, suspension or dismissal for disciplining non-compliance. Many sellers followed platform rules as that is what they were required to do to obtain work and earn, and thus, seller dependency acted as a main form of control here. Barker (1993:411) reminds us that bureaucracy and rule-enforcement is achieved because it orientates the knowledge and behaviours of workers regarding the "right" or "wrong" ways to act and interact. Dependency (which was progressive), was a deterrent for sellers, as not following the rules risked placing user profiles, activity histories, and ability to get work at risk. Relatedly, platforms directed or reinforced desired behaviour by automated messaging, with interaction guided by automatic textual prompts, sparked by (in)actions or materialising as periodic performance evaluations.

The data of this thesis signals, however, that organisational activity becomes constrained by bureaucratic rationalisation processes. This finding agrees with Barker (1993:410) who drew on Weber's (1958) 'iron cage' of rational rules and deduced that rules that seemingly benefit organisational effectiveness, also constrains its effectiveness. In particular, bureaucracy and rule-enforcement often impeded the sellers' ability to obtain work or to complete work, or the buyers' ability to hire those sellers or to have their requests actioned, or the platforms' ability to value-skim these economic exchanges. For example, a DLP rule that requires verification and approval (at registration and periodically thereafter) (see s 5.2.1 above) of documents in English (see s 10.2.1 above) meant that a seller was not able to satisfy such a demand, and had the aforementioned effects. Where a seller had been penalised for breaking a rule as to undertaking the buyer's request to complete university/ college/ school work, such aforesaid effects meant platform approval was sought from there on out before accepting similar work, to avoid further sanctions, impeding their ability to meet demands for a timely response (see s 10.2.1 above). Further, a DLP rule requiring platform approved refunds may balk a seller's ability to satisfy demands for promptness (see s 5.2.2 above). Moreover, a rule that requires sellers to deliver work or reply to buyers within certain times can hurt all parties where these demands cannot be met (see s 10.2.3 above). Thus DLP actors can be likened to squirming bureaucrats (Weber, 1968:988) as their rules could both benefit and constrain effectiveness.

Concertive control was also evident through a form of negotiated consensus between sellers around a perceived ethics and/ or expected integrity (see s 10.2.1 above). As in chapter two, workers achieve concertive control through reaching a substantial, negotiated consensus, on how to shape their behaviours – which hinges on ideas, norms and rules – based on a set of core values – such as those found in corporate literature – thereby, aligning their activities in the organisation's favour, forming a supervisory force of themselves (Barker, 1993:411-412).

In particular, knowledge and behaviours were shaped as to the "right" or "wrong" ways to act and interact through the DLPs consensual, normative ideologies around ethics or integrity, in respect of (dis)engagement with them. As a result, platform users acted in the parameters of value systems and discourses that they themselves had a hand in creating. Moreover, ideas, norms and rules regarding the DLPs' desired ethics or integrity, guided the activities of some users, where some policed others, to ensure they also acted within the systems' parameters.

Second and last, against this backdrop was algorithmic management, which relates to direct simple and technical controls, indirect normative control and responsible autonomy methods. Indeed in contrast to other authors (as signalled in chapter three), who associate algorithmic management with the use of control mechanisms seeking to generate commitment and self-direction, or with automated control and Taylorist approaches (Kittur et al., 2013; Irani, 2015; Elmer et al., 2019; Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Wood et al., 2019), the evidence in chapter ten relates it to both. Notably, as we saw in s 10.2.2, control was operated across three stages of the LP: the allocation, undertaking, and completion of work, which questions Wood et al., (2019:64), who posit that it is operated at the end of the LP rather than during it. For instance, upon work allocation, buyers broke the work task down to exert greater control over sellers. Having allocated work, buyers controlled sellers through imposing demands by: unilaterally setting meetings, reviews and deadlines, or milestones, and also aimed to create commitment and self-direction by offers of continuity, or higher levels of pay, for example. At the second stage when sellers undertook the work, buyers utilised surveillance mechanisms, requested updates, and sent reminders. While DLP-specific tools were afforded, or used for: milestone setting, screen sharing, time tracking, or capping[73], for instance, non DLP-specific tools for: screen sharing, online video calling, remote PC login and (reviewing) Google Docs, were also used, for example. Thus information technologies can lead to "the Taylorisation of white-collar work" (Bain and Taylor, 2000:9), which is inconsistent to the work of Wood et al., (2019:64, 70) that concluded to the contrary. One differentiator here is where buyers offered sellers responsible autonomy in granting discretion over their work (Friedman, 1977a:48-49) however, usually in circumstances where they had been tried-and-tested. The third and final stage where control was operated, was at the end of the LP, where the rating and reputation systems of platforms gave buyers a means to reward (or discipline non-)compliance through leaving sellers feedback. While good feedback meant further work for sellers, poor feedback meant the opposite, owing to buyer preferences and algorithmic ranking (see s 7.2.1 above). This confirms what Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019:30) advance (as in chapter three) that DLPs also attempt control by software algorithms[74]. Here commitment and self-direction came by auto messaging, (digital) positioning striving (Eastman, 1998), and coercive means.

---

[73] For budget type of per hour rather than fixed price.
[74] Notable, while Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019:30) put forward one final way that DLPs attempt control, by self-employment classification (as discussed in chapter three), the data of this thesis shows that not all platforms delimit employment status in this way, and for the ones that do, this possible means for control appears to be subsumed by their terms of services (see s 5.2.2 above).

Yet, as we saw in s 10.2.3, platform or buyer objectives of control were typically contradicted or undermined. This was either through contradictory features of the DLP attempts at control and/ or by unconscious and/ or conscious (mis)behaviours, on the part of platform users. For instance, control was contradicted or undermined around three key strands of tenure/ activity history, skill labels or levels, and buyer-seller continuity. First, software algorithms (based on rating and reputation systems) in time, turned into a contradictory feature of control in and of itself through the eventual accumulation of one's tenure/ activity history. More tenure/ activity history (that contained positive feedback), not only meant greater autonomy over buyers and tasks – as work came by invitations, algorithmic ranking or buyer preferences, rather than by submitting proposals – but also more autonomy over pay rates, working times, and methods. As a result, rating and reputation systems which relate to indirect control, in time, came to be less effective on, or important to, more established and longer tenured sellers, and therefore, the accumulation of tenure/ activity history weakened the effects of algorithmic management.

Notable, further to what Wood et al., (2019:64-65) indicate (as outlined in chapter three), that algorithmic control "afforded workers freedom to work however they wished", the evidence in this thesis suggests that such autonomy comes by a blend of unconscious and/ or conscious undermining (mis)behaviours. Though these acts in themselves tended to undermine control (and digital trust), DLP users did not necessarily intend on doing this (see s 6.2.2 and s 6.2.4 above). For example, such acts (indicating further contradictory features of platform attempts at control) can be seen where users had discretion over feedback, or where buyers provided sellers added feedback, or where (DLPs or) users fostered continuity (as repeat buyers gave sustained positive feedback). Moreover, (mis)behaviours that undermined features of control (and digital trust) can further be seen where users defaulted to five-stars (the top grading), or where sellers evaded negative (and obtained positive) feedback through a number of tactics.

Second, specific skill labels or levels and DLPs permitting sellers' discretion over skill labels or levels (see s 6.2.2 above), suggests contradictory features of platform attempts at control, since certain skill(s) or level(s) of skill provided sellers with enhanced autonomy over buyers and tasks, pay rates, working times and methods. This was achieved by unconscious (see s 6.2.2 above) and conscious (see s 6.2.3 above) (mis)behaviour, and tempered the effects of algorithmic management. One thing to note is that skills came second to tenure for engaging autonomy. Third and lastly, issues or opportunities of indeterminacy (which relate to features that contradict or undermine control in chapters six and eight) translated into (ad hoc) buyer-seller continuity and greater levels of autonomy over pay rates, working times, and methods. This was occasionally seen as a situation specific way one could engage greater degrees of autonomy, and such working arrangements lessened the effects of algorithmic management.

Importantly, this thesis contributes to control as a situation specific form, where skills, or low tenure, came second to high tenure, or these to continuity for accessing autonomy, owing to issues of indeterminacy, since direct control was loosened for tried-and-tested sellers (see s 10.2.2 and s 10.2.3 above). This confirms what Donaghey et al., (2011:60-61) suggest as to

control being situation specific due to the fluid and incomplete nature of the frontier (Hughes et al., 2019:175) or 'contested terrain' (R. Edwards, 1979) (as discussed in chapter two), but in the new DLP context. Notably, buyers adopted responsible autonomy methods (Friedman, 1977a:48-49) but often in certain contexts. Outside of these specific circumstances however, buyers deployed tighter forms of control. For instance, some buyers had trust in the platform system, and were reassured by statistics with respect to the sellers' past history on the DLP, which likely accumulated through a blend of unconscious and/ or conscious (mis)behaviours. Consequently, more tenured sellers experienced greater degrees of (responsible) autonomy, than their short-tenured counterparts that faced more direct types of control (see s 7.2.1 and s 10.2.2 above) – even for those sellers with particular skill(s) or level(s) of skill, which would otherwise enhance autonomy (see s 10.2.3 above). Other buyers lacked trust in the platform system, however, and loosened direct control ordinarily after continuity with sellers. This was sometimes the only way sellers could engage higher levels of (responsible) autonomy, since buyer uncertainty was occasionally not satisfied via one's user profile and activity history. As such, short- and more tenured sellers normally encountered direct forms of control from new buyers, at times, or were permitted (responsible) autonomy from repeat buyers, on occasion.

Notable in all cases, indirect control relating to DLP rating and reputation systems coexisted with the aforementioned forms of buyer control. Evidence of compliance in user profiles and activity histories was not only consequential to short-tenured sellers to secure work, but was also important for more tenured sellers, to some extent. While rating and reputation systems normally became less effective on, or important to, more tenured sellers eventually, they still understood the importance of maintaining their user profiles and activity histories, especially where continuity with buyers materialised in a relatively ad hoc manner (see s 10.2.3 above).

Related to the certain pattern of platform and buyer control regimes, there is a consideration to be made in relation to structured antagonism (P. Edwards, 1986), and observable conflict. As detailed in chapter two, while employers' (DLPs'/ buyers') concerns to control labour and workers' (/ sellers') concerns for autonomy are dialectically opposed, escalation from frontier struggles to observable conflict depends on contextual conditions like the use of direct forms of control versus the use of those types that are more indirect (Hughes et al., 2019:175-176). For example, the likelihood of observable conflict may reduce with the accumulation of one's tenure/ activity history and/ or with buyer-seller continuity, where direct control was loosened in such circumstances, since sellers were permitted higher levels of (responsible) autonomy, but not full autonomy. Moreover, the possibility of observable conflict as to any direct control experienced by sellers may be neutralised via rating and reputation systems/ indirect control.

11.5 Concluding summary

This chapter has now provided a discussion structured by the themes of the data, over three parts. In doing so, it has indicated the thesis' contribution to debates apropos LP dimensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work (respecting subsidiary research question two), collective identity and voice (as to subsidiary research question three), and control over

the LP (in relation to subsidiary research question four). The first part added new knowledge on skills (mis)match (which is largely based on chapter six), by indicating that searching and matching is undermined on DLPs, and points to skills mismatch, and may have ramifications through the labour market – including indeterminacy. Autonomy, self-employment and (false self-)employment were then discussed (and is mainly based on chapter seven). This section advanced new insight on how platforms constitute bogus self-employment in three key ways: through most DLPs delimiting employment status to independent contractor, by employment status ambiguity, and through limited autonomy via constraining factors. Yet it also signalled how (false self-)employment in relation to one's (in)ability to access autonomy related to self-employment might be contingent, variable and nebulous, which also added knowledge that a structured antagonism may be contingent, variable and nebulous. Consent and/or resistance were then discussed (which is largely based on chapter eight). The discussion indicated that (mis)behaviour emerges out of four sources of contention as a means to oppose managerial authority and power, and to regain control over work. But it also led to suggestions that each strategy may represent consent or resistance, or both. The second part, on collective identity and voice (mainly based on chapter nine), put forward that platform tactics or communication barriers made *online task* crowd work an impersonal social endeavour and hindered to some extent group collective identity or solidarity. Yet it also advanced new ideas that some sellers were appropriating *identity*, as a source of group solidarity to the work, via network alliances, and less towards traditional forms of collective organisation. The final part, regarding control (which is largely based on chapter ten), put forward new insight on control's coexistence, its objectives being contradicted or undermined, and it materialising as a situation specific form. Chapter twelve will next conclude the thesis by summarising the key findings as these relate to the research question(s), and by reviewing the value of the contribution thereof. It will also reflect on the limitations of the research and put forward recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 12: Conclusions

12.1 Introduction

Having reported the data (across chapters five to ten), and discussed key themes (in chapter eleven), chapter twelve will now conclude the thesis as a whole. This will be done by offering a summary of the main findings as they relate to the research questions (detailed in chapters one and four of this work), giving an explanatory answer, and through discussing the ways in which this study contributes to the field, concerning knowledge, theory, and practice (through reflecting on reported gaps, by discussing the research concerning [LP] theory development, and through considering how the findings could be applied in the real world). As a result, the chapter will highlight what this study has found, why it is valuable and how it may be applied. It will then critically discuss the limitations of this work (by looking at limitations related to this study's qualitative research methods, and through exploring how this thesis project has been affected by COVID-19), and propose recommendations with regard to future research areas. Finally, this chapter will provide a concluding summary, which will bring the thesis to a close.

12.2 Key findings

This study aimed to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions from the expansion and evolution of web-based DLPs for *online task* crowd workers and buyers. This was done by exploring four subsidiary research questions. This section provides a summary of the key findings as they relate to the subsidiary research questions, giving an explanatory answer, where the sum of these will offer a definitive answer to the main research objective.

First, *do DLPs' terms of services differ in approach to LP issues?* The findings from the QCA have been reported in chapter five. In short, the evidence in this thesis signals that platforms differ only marginally. In particular, while all DLPs' terms of services (and related documents) were identified to specify registration, verification and approval, they provided no guarantees to users apropos other users, conceded limits to their control and acknowledged potential for misbehaviour and indeterminacy (see s 5.2.1 above). Further, despite the (self-)employment status predetermination located on most platforms (and aspects of autonomy that go hand in hand with that), DLPs deployed (or afforded buyers) various mechanisms for control and yet, also provided several routes for sellers to engage autonomy (see s 5.2.2 above). And finally, (limited) scope for collective identity and voice was found over platforms (see s 5.2.3 above).

Second, *how can LPT help understand challenges and tensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work when using DLPs?* The findings from the template analysis (covering subsidiary research questions two to four), have been reported over chapters six to ten. Due to the level of data which emerged from the empirical fieldwork, the findings on this research question were presented through chapters six (skills), seven (autonomy), and eight (consent and resistance). While dimensions of LPT do not easily untangle and so there is a degree of overlap, the importance of such LP aspects necessitated the treatment of them on their own.

Drawing on the work of Thompson (1990), the explanatory power of core LPT (as in chapter two) will be deployed here. LPT has given us a high degree of insight into understanding the subject of investigation. Core LPT rests on the notion of labour as a commodity, and thus its indeterminacy, and thereby the conversion of labour power into labour under conditions that permit capital accumulation (Littler, 1990:48). In the DLP context, the data and discussion in this study signals that uncertainty was further created around the issue of skill (as in chapter six and s 11.2.1). The third tenet of core LPT argues that there is a control imperative due to indeterminacy and structured antagonism (Thompson, 1990:99-101). Indeed, DLPs used, or afforded, and buyers used – in a situation specific way, because of increased (un)certainty – mechanisms for control, due to "the ultimate function of management" (Littler, 1990:48), and the purchasing of labour power (at times) creating a structured antagonism over the creation and distribution of surplus value (P. Edwards, 1986:5) – see s 5.2.2, chapter ten, or s 11.4.1.

Further, the aforementioned propositions relate to the second and fourth tenets of core LPT, regarding dimensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work. While the second tenet helps us to understand issues of deskilling and degradation (as reported in s 7.2.1 and discussed in 11.2.2), since there are "pressures to eliminate or reduce existing skills, as well as to divide aspects of conception and execution", owing to a logic of accumulation, the final tenet calls for the unpacking of the social relations between capital and labour as structurally antagonistic, and focuses on autonomy, consent and resistance (Thompson, 1990:100-101).

There is the potential for (false self-)employment and structured antagonism(s). Concepts of a shifting frontier (Goodrich, 1921) or contested terrain (R. Edwards, 1979), help in grasping issues here as the data and discussion of this thesis suggests that (bogus self-)employment about one's (in)ability to engage autonomy related to self-employment (which is determined by an interplay of constraining factors and ways for accessing autonomy), and so structured antagonism, may be contingent, variable and nebulous (as detailed in s 11.2.2). To take this idea further, LPT states that resistance (assumes a dialectic with control and) is a product of antagonism between capital and labour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999:24), and so can help us to understand the (mis)behaviour identified in the data (see chapters six, eight, and nine). Sellers unable to engage aspects of autonomy associated with self-employment, were more likely to exert (mis)behaviour, to oppose managerial authority and power, and regain control over work (as signalled in chapter eleven). Such activity overlaps with consent, as proposed by core LPT (Thompson, 1990:101-102), which the data and discussion in this thesis shows.

Third, *how do DLPs impact the collective identity of sellers?* The evidence on this subsidiary research question has been presented in chapter nine. The data and discussion of this work signals that *online task* crowd work is an impersonal social endeavour, for some sellers, due to platform tactics and communication barriers hindering to a certain degree group collective identity or solidarity among sellers (see s 9.2.1 and s 11.3.1). Yet some sellers adapted as a way to appropriate identity as a source of group solidarity to the task or job, through network

alliances, rather than to traditional forms of collective organisation (see s 9.2.3 and s 11.3.1). In fact, limited support was expressed by sellers as to union voice (see s 9.2.2 and s 11.3.1).

Lastly, *how is labour control implemented when using DLPs?* The findings on this subsidiary research question are reported in chapter ten. The data and discussion of this thesis signals control's coexistence, limitations and specificity. There are two key areas of control: first, the platform terms of services (which relates to direct technical control, and indirect bureaucratic and concertive controls); and second, algorithmic management (which corresponds to direct simple and technical controls, indirect normative control and responsible autonomy methods (see s 10.2.1 and s 10.2.2). Yet contradictory features of the DLP attempts at control and/ or (un)conscious (mis)behaviour contradicted or undermined control. Importantly, buyer control appears situation specific, due to issues of indeterminacy, as direct control was loosened for sellers with tenure/ activity history and/ or buyer-seller continuity (see s 10.2.3 and s 11.4.1).

12.3 Contribution(s)

This section will now discuss how this study contributes to the field, as to knowledge, theory, and practice. This will be done over three parts: first, by reflecting on reported gaps in extant research that work in this thesis contributes towards addressing; second, through discussing the study in terms of theory development (specifically LPT as to its durability as a theoretical lens); and finally, in considering how the research findings could be applied in the real world.

First, a number of gaps were identified in the existing research (as advanced in chapters one and four of this work), which this study contributes towards addressing. Specifically, the work and employment challenges and tensions in the DLP domain are noted as under-researched (Pongratz, 2018:60), especially via the intellectual lens of the LPT (Gandini, 2018:2). Indeed, elements of: skills, autonomy, consent and resistance (ibid, 2018:13) – and collective identity and voice (Pongratz, 2018:69; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019:8; 2021:7) – and control (Wood, 2019:113) required further exploration. One notable contribution is that, as yet, the platforms' terms of services have not been explored in the extant literature as to LPT (see chapters five and eleven). This work adds new knowledge on skills (and their mismatch), by indicating that searching and matching is undermined, signalling possible issues for the labour market (ILO, 2020) – including indeterminacy (see chapter six and s 11.2.1). This thesis also puts forward new insight relating to how DLPs constitute false self-employment (most importantly, through constraining factors limiting autonomy), and signals how it might be 'contingent, variable and nebulous' (given routes to autonomy related to self-employment) which also adds knowledge that structured antagonism may be similarly 'contingent, variable and nebulous' (see chapter seven and s 11.2.2). This study advances new insight on consent and/ or resistance at work. It signals that (mis)behaviour arises out of four areas of conflict to resist managerial authority and power and to regain control over work. But it also indicates that each strategy may typify consent or resistance, or both (see chapter eight and s 11.2.3). Evidence also suggests new ideas on collective identity and voice where some sellers adapted as a means to appropriate identity, as a source of group solidarity typically to the work, over network alliances, and less

towards traditional forms of collective organisation (see chapter nine and s 11.3.1). Last, this work further advances new insight on control's coexistence, its limitations, and it manifesting as a situation specific form, unique to the nature of platforms (see chapter ten and s 11.4.1).

Next, there is utility in established concepts of LP dimensions and features of understanding the relationships. Although the context, technologies and spaces are different, the illustrative understanding remains relatively robust (see s 2.6 above). Thus this work demonstrates that the intellectual and conceptual points from the LP tradition have validity over time and space and help to unpack the nuances of labour relationship dynamics, among digital work spaces.

Finally, the findings in this research may be taken forward and applied in the real world. The data and discussion around skills mismatch have policy implications through highlighting the need for regulation, to minimise potential ramifications across the labour market (ILO, 2020). There is a need to strengthen (in)formal skills systems on platforms, given that the evidence in this thesis suggests that skills mismatch comes via the technology and system of working (see chapter six and s 11.2.1) At a minimum, policy-makers should ensure that DLPs afford platform users more reliable and accessible information around skills demanded (by buyers) and supplied (by sellers), for example. Regulation is warranted because skills mismatch can partly be explained by their *scaling at speed*, a main part of DLP business models (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:29). The data facilitated further refined discussion as to (bogus self-)employment through highlighting the need for regulation so as to ensure that sellers do not become placed beyond the scope of various layers of protections, associated with social security and employment rights or forms of collective representation (Grimshaw et al., 2015). The evidence in this thesis indicates that platforms constitute false self-employment through delimiting employment status to independent contractor, by employment status ambiguity or through limited autonomy by constraining factors (see chapters five and seven and s 11.2.2). As a minimum, policy-makers could ensure that DLPs can no longer determine employment status, for instance, especially given the reality of seller autonomy experienced. Because of findings from this research, regulation could be useful as avoidance (change and ambiguity) of the law regarding employment status appears to be a specific response by platforms (see also Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019:30). Moreover, the data and discussion in terms of collective identity and voice have implications for unions. Traditional union structures may not be well-suited to this type of DLP, or to the skills and autonomy status of such sellers on these specific platforms. Traditional union structures may have challenges in addressing the unique demands or aspirations of labour on such DLP types (see chapter nine and s 11.3.1). Therefore, unions might have to have different agendas should they seek to mobilise sellers.

12.4 Limitations

Having highlighted what the study has found, why it is important and how it might be applied, this section will now critically discuss the limitations of this work, in two parts: first, by looking at three limitations related to this study's qualitative research methods (as outlined in chapter four); and second, through exploring how this thesis project has been affected by COVID-19.

First, three limitations – indicated by Bryman and Bell (2015:413-414) – relate to this study's qualitative research methods. While this work attempts to mitigate such limitations, issues of subjectivity, replicability and generalisability are inherent in much qualitative research, which includes to some extent this research. To begin with, this study (or qualitative research more broadly), has subjectivity issues, meaning that the findings rely on the unsystematic views of the researcher with respect to what is significant and important, and on the relationships that the researcher had struck up with those studied. Next, and relatedly, the unstructured nature and reliance on the researcher's ingenuity, leaves this work (or qualitative research), difficult to replicate because of several reasons (though this is in no way ever straightforward[75]). For instance, what this researcher chose to look at may differ to what another researcher deems significant; participant responses can differ because of the researchers' characteristics (age, gender, personality and so on); and last, interpretation of the findings can be affected by the researcher's subjective learnings. To mitigate – and although there is a lack of transparency in much qualitative research – this study included as much detail as possible in chapter four, to avoid difficulty in establishing what the researcher actually did in relation to sampling and recruitment, the process of data analysis and how they came to the conclusions of the work. A reflexive approach was also taken (Saunders et al., 2019:814), as outlined in chapter four. Following, problems of generalisation mean that the scope of the findings from this research (or qualitative research more broadly), is restricted to theory. Yet this work's findings are not meant to be generalised to populations and are instead intended to be generalised to theory.

Finally, COVID-19 has impacted this work. The scope of the thesis was more ambitious pre-COVID-19, since it was originally planned to benefit from both buyer and seller experiences. Access to buyers is less than straightforward under normal circumstances given the secrecy and opaqueness as to their use of platforms. While robust strategies for getting access were designed and implemented (see chapter four), access (especially to buyers) became further hampered with COVID-19. Based on pre-COVID-19 progress made, the researcher was set to secure a greater number of buyers (and sellers). Peopleperhour.com and Freelancer.com did express an interest in the research (with the latter set to provide assistance with access), but they had stopped responding to the researcher's communications once the crisis had hit. Adaptions were warranted, to mitigate, including easing up attempts to access buyers (since DLPs had stopped responding), and stepping up efforts in attempting to access sellers. As a result, the sample size of buyers was narrower than was initially anticipated (pre-COVID-19).

12.5 Recommendations

This section will now suggest recommendations for future studies. This will be done through outlining how other researchers may build on this study, in order to take the research further, and develop the body of knowledge and will largely be based upon the limitations discussed.

---

[75] See chapter seven in Bryman and Bell (2015) for example.

First, an important area for further exploration could be to capture the experiences of buyers in order to better understand their strategies. This will allow greater understanding on issues that were interesting and were signalled in this thesis, such as on buyer ineptitude and other labour control possibilities, including buyer interpretation of digital technologies, for example.

Another direction for future research could be the use of quantitative (and qualitative) data – especially the use of survey data regarding *online task* crowd workers. While there is debate ongoing in mixed methods research about the relationship between research paradigms and research methods, there are a number of different stances that researchers may adopt, such as *a-paradigmatic*, *dual-paradigm* or *dialectical*, *pragmatist* and *single-paradigm* approaches (see McChesney and Aldridge, 2019:228-230). A mixed methods strategy can offer a way to offset some of the issues inherent in any opposite method (Bryman and Bell, 2015:413-414).

Finally, future research could be directed specifically towards the ways in which trade unions themselves judge sellers as potential new members. Notably, how (or if) unions consider the variation in sellers' skills and occupational categories relative to collective representation, as well as how they might mobilise sellers or those (self-)employed, across different DLP types.

12.6 Concluding summary

This chapter has now concluded the thesis as a whole. To start with, a summary of the main findings as they relate to the research question(s) was offered where an explanatory answer to the four subsidiary research questions provided information for the core question. In short, platforms differ only marginally in their approach to LP issues while LPT gives a high degree of insight into understanding the phenomenon under investigation: for instance, in explaining issues of skills, autonomy and bogus self-employment, as well as consent and/ or resistance at work. The key findings also indicated how DLPs impact the collective identity of sellers as to *online task* crowd work being a(n impersonal) social endeavour, and further signalled how control coexists but also has limitations, and how it manifests in a situation specific way. The chapter next reviewed how the research has contributed to the field as to knowledge, theory, and practice. To sum up, the work has contributed towards addressing gaps identified in the extant literature (Gandini, 2018; Pongratz, 2018; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019; 2021; Wood, 2019), while also demonstrating the durability of LP, as a robust theoretical prism. Moreover, the study has also shown how the findings in the research can be taken forward and applied in the real world by suggesting policy implications in highlighting the need for regulation, and implications for trade unions. The chapter then detailed the limitations of the research, which included issues of subjectivity, replicability, and generalisability (Bryman and Bell, 2015:413-414), as applied to this thesis, and in particular, how this study has been affected by COVID-19. Last, the chapter made three recommendations for future research: buyers' experiences, additional quantitative data and a possible focus on union-specific strategies for DLP sellers.

Reference list

Abraham, K. G., Haltiwanger, J. C., Sandusky, K. and Spletzer, J. R. (2017). Measuring the gig economy: current knowledge and open issues. In: C. Corrado, J. Miranda, J. Haskel and D. Sichel, eds. *Measuring and Accounting for Innovation in the 21st Century*. University of Chicago Press. Ch. 2.

Ackers, P. (2002). Reframing employment relations: the case for neo-pluralism. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 33(1), pp. 2-19.

Ackers, P. (2014). Rethinking the employment relationship: a neo-pluralist critique of British industrial relations orthodoxy. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(18), pp. 2608-2625.

Ackroyd, S. (2009). Labor Process Theory as 'Normal Science'. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 21(3), pp. 263-272.

Ackroyd, S. and Thompson, P. (1999). *Organizational Misbehaviour*. London: Sage.

Adler, P. S., Forbes, L. C. and Willmott, H. (2007). 3 Critical Management Studies. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 1(1), pp. 1-61.

Alacovska, A. (2018). Informal creative labour practices: A relational work perspective. *Human Relations*, 71(12), pp. 1563-1589.

Alberti, G. (2014). Mobility strategies, 'mobility differentials' and 'transnational exit': the experiences of precarious migrants in London's hospitality jobs. *Work, Employment and Society*, 28(6), pp. 865-881.

Bain, P. and Taylor, P. (2000). Entrapped by the 'electronic panopticon'? Worker resistance in the call centre. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 15(1), pp. 2-18.

Baldamus, W. (1961). *Efficiency and Effort: An Analysis of Industrial Administration*. London: Tavistock Press.

Barker, J. R. (1993). Tightening the iron cage: Concertive control in self-managing teams. *Administrative science quarterly*, 38(3), pp. 408-437.

Barnes, S-A., Green, A. and de Hoyos, M. (2015). Crowdsourcing and work: individual factors and circumstances influencing employability. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 30(1), pp. 16-31.

Behling, F. and Harvey, M. (2015). The evolution of false self-employment in the British construction industry: a neo-Polanyian account of labour market formation. *Work, Employment and Society*, 29(6), pp. 969-988.

Berg, J., Furrer, M., Harmon, E., Rani, U. and Silberman, M. S. (2018). *Digital labour platforms and the future of work: Towards decent work in the online world*, International Labour Office, Geneva ILO.

Bergvall-Kåreborn, B. and Howcroft, D. (2013). 'The future's bright, the future's mobile': a study of Apple and Google mobile application developers. *Work, Employment and Society*, 27(6), pp. 964-981.

Birch, M., Miller, T., Mauthner, M. and Jessop, J. (2012). Introduction to second addition. In: T. Miller, M. Birch, M. Mauthner and J. Jessop, eds. *Ethics in qualitative research*. 2nd edn. London: Sage. pp. 1-13.

Boddy, J. (2016). The Ethics of Social Research. In: N. Gilbert and P. Stoneman, eds. *Researching Social Life*. 4th edn. London: Sage. pp. 203-221.

Bolton, S. (2005). *Emotion Management in the Workplace*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bolton, S. and Muzio, D. (2008). The Paradoxical Processes of Feminization in the Professions: The Case of Established, Aspiring, and Semi-professions. *Work, Employment and Society*, 22(2), pp. 281-299.

Bolton, S. and Wibberley, G. (2007). Best Companies, Best Practice and Dignity at Work. In S. Bolton, ed. *Dimensions of Dignity at Work*, London: Butterworth Heinemann, pp. 134-153.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101.

Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Breaugh, J. A. (1985). The measurement of work autonomy. *Human Relations*, 38(6), pp. 551-570.

Briken, K., Chillas, S., Krzywdzinski, M. and Marks, A. (2017). Labour Process Theory and the New Digital Workplace. In: K. Briken, S. Chillas, M. Krzywdzinski and A. Marks, eds. *The New Digital Workplace: How New Technologies Revolutionise Work, Critical Perspectives on Work and Employment*. London: Palgrave. pp. 1-17.

Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 3rd edn. London: Sage.

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2015). *Business research methods*. 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burawoy, M. (1979). *Manufacturing Consent*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Burawoy, M. (1985). *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism*. London: Verso.

Burrell, G. and Morgan, G. (1979) 2019. *Social Paradigms and Organisational Analysis: Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life*. London: Routledge.

Christoff, K. (2014). Dehumanization in organizational settings: Some scientific and ethical considerations. *Frontiers in human neuroscience*, 8(748), pp. 1-5.

Cockburn, C. (1983). *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change*. London: Pluto Press.

Coleman, J. S. (1958). Relational Analysis: The Study of Social Organizations with Survey Methods. *Human Organization*, 17(4), pp. 28-36.

Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 3rd edn. London: Sage.

Corporaal, G. F. and Lehdonvirta, V. (2017). *Platform Sourcing: How Fortune 500 Firms Are Adopting Online Freelancing Platforms*. Oxford Internet Institute: Oxford.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage.

Cunliffe, A. L. (2008). Orientations to Social Constructionism: Relationally Responsive Social Constructionism and its Implications for Knowledge and Learning. *Management Learning*, 39(2), pp. 123-139.

Cunliffe, A. L. (2010). Crafting Qualitative Research: Morgan and Smircich 30 Years On. *Organizational Research Methods*, 00(0), 1-27.

de Stefano, V. (2016). *The rise of the 'just-in-time workforce': On-demand work, crowdwork and labour protection in the 'gig economy'*. Conditions of Work and Employment Series: no 71. Geneva: ILO.

Deakin, H. and Wakefield, K. (2014). Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative Research*, 14(5), pp. 603-616.

Donaghey, J., Cullinane, N., Dundon, T. and Wilkinson, A. (2011). Reconceptualising employee silence: Problems and prognosis. *Work, employment and society*, 25(1), pp. 51-67.

Duberley, J. Johnson, P. and Cassell, C. (2012). Philosophies Underpinning Qualitative Research. In: G. Symon, and C. Cassell, eds. *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: Sage. pp. 15-34.

Dubin, R. (1973). Attachment to work and union militancy. *Industrial Relations*, 12(1), pp. 51-64.

Dundon, T. and Dobbins, T. (2015). Militant partnership: a radical pluralist analysis of workforce dialectics. *Work, employment and society*, 29(6), pp. 912-931.

Dundon, T. and Gollan, P. J. (2007). Re-conceptualizing voice in the non-union workplace. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(7), pp. 1182-1198.

Dundon, T., Stringer, L. and Mustchin, S. (2020). Technology and remote working post COVID-19. 13 July. *Futures of Work*. [Online]. Available from: <https://futuresofwork.co.uk/2020/07/13/technology-and-remote-working-post-covid-19-insights-from-on-going-research-into-digital-labour-platforms> [accessed 23 March 2022].

Dundon, T., Wilkinson, A., Marchington, M. and Ackers, P. (2004). The meanings and purpose of employee voice. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(6), pp. 1149-1170.

Eastman, W. (1998). Working for position: Women, men, and managerial work hours. *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 37(1), pp. 51-66.

Edwards, P. K. (1986). *Conflict at Work: A Materialist Analysis of Workplace Relations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Edwards, P. K. (1990). Understanding Conflict in the Labour Process: The Logic and Autonomy of Struggle. In: D. Knights and H. Willmott, eds. *Labour Process Theory*. London: Macmillan. pp. 125-152.

Edwards, P. K. (2009). The employment relationship in strategic HRM. In: J. Storey, P. M. Wright and D. O. Ulrich, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Strategic Human Resource Management*. London: Routledge. pp. 40-51.

Edwards, P. K. (2010). Developing Labour Process Analysis: Themes from Industrial Sociology and Future Directions. In: P. Thompson and C. Smith, eds. *Working Life: Renewing Labour Process Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 29-46.

Edwards, P. K. (2018). *Conflict in the Workplace: The Concept of Structured Antagonism Reconsidered*. Warwick Papers in Industrial Relations, No. 110. November 2018.

Edwards, P. K. Belanger, J. and Wright, M. (2006). The basis of compromise in the workplace: a theoretical framework. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 44(1), pp. 125-145.

Edwards, R. C. (1978). The social relations of production at the point of production. *Insurgent Sociologist*, 8(2-3), pp. 109-125.

Edwards, R. C. (1979). *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Basic Books.

Elger, T. (2001). Critical Materialist Analyses of Work and Employment: A Third Way? *Sociologie del Livoro*, 34, pp. 61-84.

Elmer, M., Herr, B., Klaus, D. and Gegenhuber, T. (2019). Platform workers centre stage! Taking stock of current debates and approaches for improving the conditions of platform work in Europe. In: Working Paper No. 140, Düsseldorf: Hans Böckler Stiftung.

ESRC (2020). *Our core principles*. [Online]. Available from: <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/our-core-principles/> [accessed 24 November 2020].

Felstiner, A. (2011). Working The Crowd: Employment and Labor Law In The Crowdsourcing Industry. *Berkeley Journal of Employment & Labor Law*, 32(1), pp. 143-204.

Fleming, P. (2001). Beyond the Panopticon? *Ephemera*, 1(2), pp. 190-194.

Forde, C., Stuart, M., Joyce, S., Oliver, E., Valizade, D., Alberti, G., Hardy, K., Trappmann, V., Umney, C. and Carson, C. (2017). *The Social Protection of Workers in the Platform Economy*, European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (IP/A/EMPL/2016-11), November.

Friedman, A. L. (1977a). Responsible Autonomy versus Direct Control over the Labour Process, *Capital & Class*, 1(1), pp. 43-57.

Friedman, A. L. (1977b). *Industry and Labour: Class Struggle at Work and Monopoly Capitalism*. London: Macmillan.

Fuller, L. and Smith, V. (1991). Consumers' reports: management by customers in a changing economy. *Work, Employment and Society*, 5(1), pp. 1-16.

Gandini, A. (2018). Labour process theory and the gig economy. *Human Relations*, 00(0), pp. 1-18.

Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of 'platforms'. *New Media & Society*, 12(3), pp. 347-364.

Goodrich, C. L. (1921). *The frontier of control: A study in British workshop politics*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Graham, M., Hjorth, I. and Lehdonvirta, V. (2017). Digital labour and development: Impacts of global digital labour platforms and the gig economy on worker livelihoods. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 23(2), pp. 135-162.

Gray, M. L., Suri, S., Ali, S. S. and Kulkarni, D. (2016). February. The Crowd is a Collaborative Network. In *Proceedings of the 19th ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*, New York: Assoc. Comput. pp. 134-147.

Grimshaw, D., Johnson, M., Keizer, A. and Rubery, J. (2015). *Reducing Precarious Work through Social Dialogue: An Analysis of 'Protective Gaps' Facing People at Work in the UK*, Report for the European Commission.

Grugulis, I. and Lloyd, C. (2010). Skill and the Labour Process: The Conditions and Consequences of Change. In: P. Thompson and C. Smith, eds. *Working Life: Renewing Labour Process Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 91-112.

Hall, R. (2010). Renewing and Revising the Engagement between Labour Process Theory and Technology. In: P. Thompson and C. Smith, eds. *Working Life: Renewing Labour Process Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 159-181.

Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An Integrative Review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(3), pp. 252-264.

Heckscher, C. and McCarthy, J. (2014). Transient solidarities: commitment and collective action in post-industrial societies. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 52(4), pp. 627-657.

Hirschman, A. O. (1970). *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hood, J. C. (2007). Orthodoxy vs. Power: The Defining Traits of Grounded Theory. In: A. Bryant and K. Charmaz, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles: Sage. pp. 151-164.

Horton, J., Kerr, W. R. and Stanton, C. (2017). Digital labor markets and global talent flows. In: Working Paper No. 23398. National Bureau of Economic Research.

Howcroft, D. and Bergvall-Kåreborn, B. (2019). A Typology of Crowdwork Platforms. *Work, Employment and Society*, 33(1), pp. 21-38.

Hsieh, H.-F. and Shannon, S. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, 15(9), pp.1277-1288.

Hughes, E. S., Dobbins, T. and Murphy, S. (2019). 'Going Underground': A Tube Worker's Experience of Struggles over the Frontier of Control. *Work, Employment and Society*, 33(1), pp. 174-183.

Huws, U. and Joyce, S. (2016). Crowd Working Survey: Size of the UK's "Gig Economy" revealed for the first time [online]. Available from: <http://englishbulletin.adapt.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/crowd-working-surveypdf1.pdf> [accessed 23 May 2019].

Huws, U., Spencer, N. H. and Syrdal, D. S. (2018). Online, on call: the spread of digitally organised just-in-time working and its implications for standard employment models. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 33(2), pp. 113-129.

ILO [The International Labour Organisation] (2020). *What is skills mismatch and why should we care? A key question to ensure a decent future of work*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.ilo.org/skills/Whatsnew/WCMS_740388/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=Skills%20mismatch%20is%20a%20discrepancy,mismatch%20between%20skills%20and%20jobs.> [accessed 30 August 2022].

Irani, L. (2015). The cultural work of microwork. *New media & society*, 17(5), pp.720-739.

Irani, L. C. and Silberman, M. S. (2013). April. Turkopticon: Interrupting Worker Invisibility in Amazon Mechanical Turk. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, Paris: Assoc. Comput. pp. 611-620.

Jaros, S. (2005). Marxian Critiques of Thompson's (1990) 'Core' Labour Process Theory: An Evaluation and Extension. *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization*, 5(1), pp. 5-25.

Jaros, S. (2010). The Core Theory: Critiques, Defences and Advances. In: P. Thompson and C. Smith, eds. *Working Life: Renewing Labour Process Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 70-88.

Jenkins, S. and Delbridge, R. (2020). Exploring organizational deception: Organizational contexts, social relations and types of lying. *Organization Theory*, 1(2), pp. 1-24.

Joyce, S., Stuart, M. and Forde, C. (2022). Theorising labour unrest and trade unionism in the platform economy. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, (2022), pp. 1-20.

Joyce, S., Stuart, M., Forde, C. and Valizade, D. (2019). Work and social protection in the platform economy in Europe. In: D. Lewin and P. J. Gollan, eds. *Advances in Industrial and Labor Relations*. Emerald Publishing Limited. pp. 153-184.

Kalleberg, A. L., Nesheim, T. and Olsen, K. M. (2009). Is participation good or bad for workers? Effects of autonomy, consultation and teamwork on stress among workers in Norway. *Acta Sociologica*, 52(2), pp.99-116.

Kässi, O. and Lehdonvirta, V. (2016). 2018. Online labour index: Measuring the online gig economy for policy and research. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 137, pp. 241-248.

Kässi, O. and Lehdonvirta, V. (2019). "Do digital skill certificates help new workers enter the market? Evidence from an online labour platform", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 225, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Katz, L. F. and Krueger, A. B. (2016). The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 1995-2015 [online]. Available from: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w22667.pdf> [accessed 23 May 2019].

Katz, V. (2015). Regulating The Sharing Economy. *Berkeley Technology Law Journal*, 30(4), pp. 1067-1126.

Kenney, M. and Florida, R. L. eds. (1993). *Beyond Mass Production: The Japanese Systems and its Transfer to the U.S*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

King, N. (2012). Doing Template Analysis. In: G. Symon and C. Cassell, eds. *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: Sage. pp. 426-450

King, N. and Brooks, J. M. (2017). Template Analysis for Business and Management Students. In: B. Lee, M. N. K. Saunders and V. K. Narayanan, eds. *Mastering Business Research Methods: Template Analysis for Business and Management Students*. London: Sage.

King, N. and Brooks, J. M. (2018). Thematic Analysis in Organisational Research. In: C. Cassell, A. L. Cunliffe and G. Grandy, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods: Methods and Challenges*. London: Sage. pp. 219-236.

King, N., Horrocks, C. Brooks, J. M. (2019). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Kittur, A., Nickerson, J. V., Bernstein, M., Gerber, E., Shaw, A., Zimmerman, J., Lease, M. and Horton, J. (2013). The future of crowd work. In: *Proceedings of the 2013 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, New York, NY: ACM, pp. 1301-1318.

Knights, D. and Willmott, H. eds. (1990). *Labour Process Theory*. London: Macmillan.

Kuek, S. C., Paradi-Guilford, C., Fayomi, T., Imaizumi, S. and Ipeirotis, P. (2015). The Global Opportunity in Online Outsourcing, (Washington, DC: World Bank Group).

Kühne, O. and Leonardi, L. (2020). The 'Annoying Fact of Society': Norms and Roles in 'Homo Sociologicus'. In: R. Dahrendorf, eds. *Between Social Theory and Political Practice*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 85-98.

Lee, M. K., Kusbit, D., Metsky, E. and Dabbish, L. (2015). Working with machines: The impact of algorithmic and data-driven management on human workers. In: *Proceedings of the 33rd annual ACM conference on human factors in computing systems*, Seoul, Republic of Korea, pp. 1603-1612.

Lehdonvirta, V., Barnard, H., Graham, M. and Hjorth, I. (2014). Online labour markets – levelling the playing field for international service markets? *Paper presented at the IPP2014: Crowdsourcing for Politics and Policy*, Oxford, September 25th-26th September 2014. pp. 1-20.

Lepanjuuri, K., Wishart, R. and Cornick, P. (2018). The Characteristics of Those In The Gig Economy: Final report [online]. Available from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/687553/The_characteristics_of_those_in_the_gig_economy.pdf> [accessed 23 May 2019].

Littler, C. R. (1982). *The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies: A Comparative Study of the Transformation of Work Organization in Britain, Japan and the USA*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

Littler, C. R. (1990). The Labour Process Debate: A Theoretical Review, 1974-1988. In: D. Knights and H. Willmott, eds. *Labour Process Theory*. London: Macmillan. pp. 46-94.

Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L. and Lofland, L. H. (2006). *Analysing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. 4th edn. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/ Thomas Learning.

MacKenzie, R. and Martinez Lucio, M. (2019). Regulation, migration and the implications for industrial relations. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 61(2), pp. 176-197.

Marks, A. and Chillas, S. (2014). Labour process perspectives on employee voice. In: A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, and R. B. Freeman, eds. *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc. pp. 97-113.

Marx, K. (1867) 1976. *Capital Volume 1*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research/ Sozialforschung*, 11(3).

McChesney, K. and Aldridge, J. (2019). Weaving an interpretivist stance throughout mixed methods research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 42(3), pp. 225-238.

MTurk.com (2020). Amazon Mechanical Turk. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.mturk.com> [accessed 06 January 2020].

Nadin, S. and Cassell, C. (2004). Using data matrices. In: C. Cassell and G. Symon, eds. *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. London: Sage. pp. 271-287.

Niglas, K. (2010). The Multidimensional Model of Research Methodology: An Integrated Set of Continua. In: A. Tashakkori, and C. Teddlie, eds. *SAGE Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. pp. 215-236.

Noon, M., Blyton, P. and Morrell, K. (1997). 2013. *The realities of work: Experiencing work and employment in contemporary society*. 4th edn. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

O'Doherty, D. (2009a). Revitalising Labour Process Theory: A Prolegomenon to Fatal Writing. *Culture and Organization*, 15, pp. 1-19.

O'Doherty, D. (2009b). Perspectives on Labor Process Theory: Retrieving The "Missing Subject" In Labor Process Analysis: Towards Emancipation and Praxis, In: M. Alvesson, T. Bridgman and H. Willmott, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies*. London: Oxford. pp. 108-121.

O'Doherty, D. and Willmott, H. (2001a). The Question of Subjectivity and the Labor Process. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 30(4), pp. 112-132.

O'Doherty, D. and Willmott, H. (2001b). Debating Labour Process Theory: The Issue of Subjectivity and the Relevance of Poststructuralism. *Sociology*, 35(2), pp. 457-476.

Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms. In: H. Roberts, ed. *Doing Feminist Research*. London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. pp. 30-61.

OECD [The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] (2000). *Employment Outlook 2000*. Paris: OECD.

Outhwaite, W. (1975). *Understanding Social Life: The Method Called Verstehen*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Pallais, A. (2014). Inefficient hiring in entry-level labor markets. *American Economic Review*, 104(11), pp. 3565-3599.

Panteli, N. Rapti, A. and Scholarios, D. (2020). 'If He Just Knew Who We Were': Microworkers' Emerging Bonds of Attachment in a Fragmented Employment Relationship. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(3), pp. 476-494.

Parsons, T. (1951). 2013. *The social system*. 2013 edn. London: Routledge.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. 4th edn. London: Sage.

Pesole, A., Urzí Brancati, M. C., Fernández-Macías, E., Biagi, F. and González Vázquez, I. (2018). Platform Workers in Europe. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Piore, M. J. and Sabel, C. F. (1984). *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity*. New York: Basic Books.

Pongratz, H. J. (2018). Of crowds and talents: discursive constructions of global online labour. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 33(1), pp. 58-73.

Prasad, P. (2018). *Crafting Qualitative Research: Beyond Positivist Traditions*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Reich, J. A. (2015). Old methods and new technologies: Social media and shifts in power in qualitative research. *Ethnography*, 16(4), pp. 394-415.

Ritchie, J. and Spencer, L. (1994). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In: A. Bryman, R. G. Burgess, eds. *Analysing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge. pp. 173-194.

Roy, D. (1952). Quota Restriction and Goldbricking in a Machine Shop. *American journal of sociology*, 57(5), pp. 427-442.

Saunders, M. N. K. and Townsend, K. (2016). Reporting and Justifying the Number of Interview Participants in Organization and Workplace Research. *British Journal of Management*, 27(4), pp. 836-852.

Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students*. 8th edn. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Schörpf, P., Flecker J. and Schönauer, A. (2017). On Call for One's Online Reputation – Control and Time in Creative Crowdwork. In: K. Briken, S. Chillas, M. Krzywdzinski and A. Marks, eds. *The New Digital Workplace: How New Technologies Revolutionise Work, Critical Perspectives on Work and Employment*. London: Palgrave. pp. 89-111.

Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. London: Sage.

Schreier, M. (2014). Qualitative content analysis. In U. Flick, ed. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage. Ch. 12.

Sinclair, A. (1992). The tyranny of a team ideology. *Organization studies*, 13(4), pp.611-626.

Skype (2020). *Does Skype use encryption?* [Online]. Available from: <https://support.skype.com/en/faq/FA31/does-skype-use-encryption> [accessed 16 April 2020].

Smith, C. (1989). Flexible Specialisation, Automation and Mass Production. *Work, Employment and Society*, 3(2), pp. 203-220.

Smith, C. (1994). Beyond Japanisation. *Work, Employment and Society*, (8)2, pp. 289-296.

Smith, C. (2006). The double indeterminacy of labour power: labour effort and labour mobility. *Work, Employment and Society*, 20(2), pp. 389-402.

Smith, C. (2015). Continuity and Change in Labour Process Analysis Forty Years After Labor and Monopoly Capital. *Labour Studies Journal*, 40(3), pp. 222-242.

Smith, C. and Meiksins, P. (1995). System, Society and Dominance Effects in Cross-National Organizational Analysis. *Work, Employment and Society*, 9(2), pp. 241-267.

Smith, J. Flowers, P. and Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, Research*. London Sage.

Spencer, D. (2017). Work in and beyond the Second Machine Age: the politics of production and digital technologies. *Work, Employment and Society*, 31(1), pp. 142-152.

Srnicek, N. (2017). *Platform Capitalism*. London: Polity Press.

Storey, J. (1985). The Means of Management Control. *Sociology*, 19(2), pp. 193-211.

Taylor, F. W. (1911) 1998. *The Principles of Scientific Management*. Dover Publications, Inc.

Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicol, D. and Broadbent, P. (2017). *Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*. [Online]. Available from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/627671/good-work-taylor-review-modern-working-practices-rg.pdf> [accessed 09 April 2019].

Teddlie, C. and Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples, *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), pp. 77-100.

Thompson, P. (1989). *The Nature of Work: An Introduction to Debates on the Labour Process*. 2nd edn. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Thompson, P. (1990). Crawling from the Wreckage: The Labour Process and the Politics of Production. In: D. Knights and H. Willmott, eds. *Labour Process Theory*. London: Macmillan. pp. 95-124.

Thompson, P. (2003). Disconnected capitalism: or why employers can't keep their side of the bargain. *Work, Employment and Society*, 17(2), pp. 359-378.

Thompson, P. (2009). Perspectives on Labor Process Theory: Labor Process Theory and Critical Management Studies. In: M. Alvesson, T. Bridgman and H. Willmott, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies*. London: Oxford. pp. 100-108.

Thompson, P. (2013). Financialization and the workplace: extending and applying the disconnected capitalism thesis. *Work, Employment and Society*, 27(3), pp. 472-488.

Thompson, P. and Harley, B. (2007). HRM and the Worker: Labor Process Perspectives. In: P. Boxall, J. Purcell and P. Wright, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 147-165.

Thompson, P. and Newsome, K. (2004). Labor Process Theory, Work, and the Employment Relation. In: B. E. Kaufman, ed. *Theoretical Perspectives on Work and the Employment Relationship*. NY: Cornell University Press. pp. 133-162.

Thompson, P. and Smith, C. (2001). Follow the Red Brick Road – Reflections on Pathways into and out of the Labour Process Debate. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 30, pp. 40-67.

Thompson, P. and Smith, C. (2009). Labour Power and Labour Process: Contesting the Marginality of the Sociology of Work. *Sociology*, 43(5), pp. 913-930.

Thompson, P. and Smith, C. (2010). Introduction: Labour Process Theory in Retrospect and Prospect. In: P. Thompson and C. Smith, eds. *Working Life: Renewing Labour Process Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 1-8.

Tompkins, P. K. and Cheney, G. (1985). Communication and unobtrusive control in contemporary organizations. In: R. D. McPhee and P. K. Thompkins, eds. *Organizational Communication: Traditional Themes and New Directions*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. pp. 179-210.

Upwork.com (2021). *Milestones for Fixed-Price Jobs*. [Online]. Available from: <https://support.upwork.com/hc/en-us/articles/211068218-Milestones-for-Fixed-Price-Jobs> [accessed 20 October 2021].

Van den Broek, D. and Dundon, T. (2012). (Still) Up to No Good: Reconfiguring Worker Resistance and Misbehaviour in an Increasingly Unorganized World. *Relations Industrielles-Industrial Relations*, 67(1), pp. 97-121.

Warren, C. A. B. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In: J. F. Gubrium and J. A. Holstein, eds. *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Ch. 4.

Webb, B. and Webb, S. (1894). *The History of Trade Unionism (revised Edition, Extended to 1920)*. Glasgow: Good Press.

Weber, M. (1958). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Scribner's.

Weber, M. (1968). Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology, Volume III. In: G. Roth, and C. Wittich, eds. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology, Volume III*. New York: Bedminster Press.

Willman, P., Bryson, A. and Gomez, R. (2003). 'Why Do Voice Regimes Differ?', Centre for Economic Performance, Working Paper, No. CEPDP0591, November, London School of Economics.

Womack, J. P., Jones, D. T. and Roos, D. (1990). *The Machine that Changed the World: How Lean Production Revolutionized the Global Car Wars*. New York: Rawson Associates.

Wood, A. J. (2019). The Taylor Review: Understanding the gig economy, dependency and the complexities of control. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 34(2), pp. 111-115.

Wood, A. J. and Lehdonvirta, V. (2019). Platform labour and structured antagonism: understanding the origins of protest in the gig economy. *Paper presented at the Oxford Internet Institute Platform Economy Seminar Series*. March 5th. pp. 1-37.

Wood, A. J. and Lehdonvirta, V. (2021). Antagonism beyond employment: how the 'subordinated agency' of labour platforms generates conflict in the remote gig economy. *Socio-Economic Review*, 19(4), pp. 1369-1396.

Wood, A. J., Graham, M., Lehdonvirta, V. and Hjorth, I. (2019). Good Gig, Bad Gig: Autonomy and Algorithmic Control in the Global Gig Economy. *Work, Employment and Society*, 33(1), pp. 56-75.

Wood, A. J., Lehdonvirta, V. and Graham, M. (2018). Workers of the Internet unite? Online freelancer organisation among remote gig economy workers in six Asian and African countries. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 33(2), pp. 95-112.

Wood, S. ed. (1982). *The Degradation of Work? Skill, Deskilling, and the Labour Process*. London: Hutchinson Radius.

Wood, S. ed. (1989). *The Transformation of Work? Skill, Flexibility and the Labour Process*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Zhao, Y. and Zhu, Q. (2014). Evaluation on crowdsourcing research: current status and future direction. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 16(3), pp. 417-434.

Appendices

Appendix A: Examples of organisations reported to use digital labour platforms

Peopleperhour	Freelancer	Upwork	Survey tool* (Industry and sector)		Other
Cup The Market	Apple	Airbnb	Alpha	Textiles; clothing; leather; footwear	Samsung
KLOO Games	Avery Dennison	Automattic	Bravo	Financial services; professional services	
Looku	Boeing	Bissell	Charlie		
Santamaria Shirt Makers	Cisco	Coty	Delta		
ScandiKitchen	eharmony	Dropbox	Echo		
Writing Maps	Entertainment and Sports Programming Network	General Electric	Foxtrot		
Young Lambeth Cooperative	Forbes	Microsoft	Golf		
	General Electric	The University of California	Hotel		
	Intel	Zendesk	India		
	Lenovo				
	MetLife				
	Microsoft				
	National Broadcasting Company				
	Panasonic				
	Pricewaterhouse Coopers				
	Systems, Applications & Products				
	Union Bank of Switzerland				
	Walmart				

*Pseudonyms have been used for organisations disclosed by respondents.

Appendix B: Digital labour platforms' terms of services and related policies ranked by

degree of content

Digital labour platform	Terms of service and *related policies*	Nº of (printed) pages and words*	Total nº of (printed) pages and words*
Upwork	User Agreement	36 pages 17411 words	159 pages 75659 words
	Escrow Instructions (made up of 6 documents)	*36 pages* *17365 words*	
	Privacy Policy	*22 pages* *10498 words*	
	API Terms of Use	*9 pages* *4287 words*	
	Fee and ACH Authorization Agreement	*8 pages* *3791 words*	
	Any Hire Terms	*7 pages* *3373 words*	
	Terms of Use	*7 pages* *3318 words*	
	Upwork Payroll Agreement	*7 pages* *3276 words*	
	Optional Service Contract Terms	*6 pages* *3092 words*	
	'Upwork Team' Software License Agreement	*5 pages* *2286 words*	
	Direct Contract Terms	*3 pages* *1261 words*	
	Cookie Policy	*2 pages* *1113 words*	
	Upwork Mark Use Guidelines	*2 pages* *873 words*	
	Freelancer Membership Policy	*2 pages* *870 words*	
	Proprietary Rights Infringement Reporting Procedures	*2 pages* *854 words*	
	Privacy Center	*2 pages* *754 words*	
	Upwork Digital Accessibility Statement	*1 page* *620 words*	
	Upwork's Virtual Patent Marking	*1 page* *336 words*	
	Nondiscrimination Statement	*1 page* *281 words*	
Freelancer	User Agreement	31 pages 15360 words	56 pages 27152 words
	Freelancer Fees and Charges	*6 pages* *2780 words*	
	Privacy Policy	*5 pages* *2461 words*	
	API Terms and Conditions	*5 pages* *2312 words*	
	Milestone Dispute Resolution Policy	*2 pages* *1107 words*	
	Know Your Customer and ID Verification Policy	*2 pages* *998 words*	
	Copyright Infringement Policy	*2 pages* *945 words*	
	Code of Conduct	*2 pages* *754 words*	
	Exam Terms and Conditions	*1 page* *435 words*	
Peopleperhour	People Per Hour - Terms & Conditions	22 pages 10822 words	42 pages 20523 words
	Terms of website use	*7 pages* *3174 words*	
	Privacy Policy	*8 pages* *3972 words*	
	Posting policies (made up of 4 documents)	*5 pages* *2555 words*	
Guru	Terms of Service	16 pages 7715 words	22 pages 10366 words
	Privacy Policy	*4 pages* *1906 words*	
	IP Policy	*2 pages* *745 words*	

* Based on the way Microsoft Word counts words. The calculation has been done with: 12pt font, 0.5pt margin and single spacing.

Appendix C: The interview guides

<u>Online freelancer interview guide</u>

Start

'Warm-up' questions

1. Could I first ask you to outline your career history?

   (a) Could you say more about how DLPs fits into this?

   (**Prompt:** 1. any specific 'triggers' to starting and 2. main motivations?)

   (b) What do you consider to be your main profession?
   (c) How long have you been involved with work of this kind?

2. Can you describe the process of signing up to a DLP?

   (a) Who or what is screening you?

3. Can you outline your process of working through a DLP from start to finish?

   (**Prompt:** in terms of 1. seeking, 2. obtaining, 3. carrying out, 4. completing and 5. submitting a task, job or project)

4. Can you describe your clients to me?

   (**Prompt:** e.g. are they an individual or MNC?)

Employment status

5. Now can you tell me about your employment status when working through a DLP?

(**Prompt:** i.e. are you an employee, a worker or self-employed?)

(a) Who do you consider your employer to be when working through a DLP?

(**Prompt:** e.g. the DLP, the client or both?)

(b) How would you describe your relationship with a DLP?
(c) What is your employment status when carrying out work for a client?
(d) How does your employment status come to be determined?
(e) Are there any advantages or disadvantages to your employment status?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Skills

6. I now want to ask a few questions relating to skills, what qualifications do you need for your job?

(a) What qualifications do you have?
(b) How do you judge their usefulness in securing a task, job or project?
(c) How do you evaluate their usefulness in performing a task, job or project?
(d) Can you describe the typical skills and skills level needed for your tasks, jobs or projects?
(e) How do you judge the way DLPs communicate your skill set across to the client?
(f) What steps do you take (if any) to communicate your skill set across to the client?
(g) How does the utilisation of your skill set come to be determined?
(h) How do you evaluate the utilisation of your skill set by the clients?
(i) How free are you to determine your skill set utilisation?
(j) What impact (if any) does your skill set have on:-

1. The organisation of work,
2. DLP and client control,
3. Wages?

(k) Are you aware of any changes in skills requirements in your industry or sector?
(l) What do DLPs and clients think about your skill set?
(m) What feelings does this provoke in you?

 (Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Autonomy

7. I would now like to move onto a different topic, how much autonomy do you have in determining your own work?

(a) How do you form or devise your work role?
(b) What determines the way in which you carry out the work in your everyday routine?

(**Prompt:** e.g. you, the client and/ or DLP?)

(c) How free are you to determine how you do a task, job or project?
(d) What is your continuity of engagement with a single client?
(e) Do you tender for different contracts?
(f) How free are you to choose over clients and tasks?
(g) How does your level of pay come to be determined?
(h) How free are you to determine your level of pay?
(i) How would you describe your control over working time?

(**Prompt:** in terms of how time is used and for how long?)

(j) Can you describe a time that you employed workers in addition to, or in place of yourself?
(k) How would you evaluate your overall autonomy?
(l) What feelings does this provoke in you?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Control

8. Now can you tell me about who controls your work and your work tasks?

(a) How would you describe the quality of your work?
(b) How would you describe your performance and productivity?
(c) What compels you to carry out work in this way?
(d) Can you describe the demands of a DLP?

(**Prompt:** in terms of 1. skills, 2. working time, 3. rewards and 4. content of work– what is to be done, how you are directed and scope for autonomy and self-management)

(e) Can you describe the demands of a client?

(**Prompt:** in terms of 1. skills, 2. working time, 3. rewards and 4. content of work– what is to be done, how you are directed and scope for autonomy and self-management)

(f) How do you experience the demands of DLPs and clients in your work?
(g) How do DLP and client demands compare with your own?
(h) How do DLPs and clients ensure that their demands are met?
(i) What steps do you take (if any) to ensure that their demands are met?
(j) What steps do you take (if any) to ensure that your demands are met?
(k) Can you give me some examples of what happens when demands are not met?

(**Prompt:** from the point of view of 1. a DLP, 2. a client and 3. your own)

(l) Could you take me through the process of how you are managed precisely?
(m) How do you judge the extent that you are involved in the decision making process?
(n) What do most people think of the ways in which DLPs and clients treat their workers?
(o) What is your opinion?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Resistance and consent

9. I am now interested if you have had to circumvent or adapt to DLP instructions?

   (**Prompt:** when it comes to:

   - Fees (Ask in addition to 9a-d)

   - The rating and reputation system (Ask in addition to 9a-d)

   - Skills (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8d and in addition to 9a-d)

   - Working time (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8d and in addition to 9a-d)

   (**Prompt:** in terms of how time is used and for how long?)

   - Rewards (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8d and in addition to 9a-d)

   (**Prompt:** the terms of exchange–for what wages you get for your "effort bargain")

   - Content of work (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8d and in addition to 9a-d)

   (**Prompt:** what is to be done, how you are directed and scope for autonomy and self-management)

   (a) If so, could you give me examples? (Ask in relation to all six aspects above)
   (b) What did you hope to achieve by doing that? (Ask in relation to all six aspects above)
   (c) What happens when you try and negotiate? (Ask in relation to all six aspects above)
   (d) What feelings does this provoke in you? (Ask in relation to all six aspects above)

   (Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

10. I am also interested if you have had to circumvent or adapt to client instructions?

    (**Prompt:** when it comes to:

    - Skills (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8e and in addition to 10a-d)

    - Working time (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8e and in addition to 10a-d)

    (**Prompt:** in terms of how time is used and for how long?)

    - Rewards (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8e and in addition to 10a-d)

    (**Prompt:** the terms of exchange–for what wages you get for your "effort bargain")

    - Content of work (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8e and in addition to 10a-d)

(**Prompt:** what is to be done, how you are directed and scope for autonomy and self-management)

(a) If so, could you give me examples? (Ask in relation to all four aspects above)
(b) What did you hope to achieve by doing that? (Ask in relation to all four aspects above)
(c) What happens when you try and negotiate? (Ask in relation to all four aspects above)
(d) What feelings does this provoke in you? (Ask in relation to all four aspects above)

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

11. How are relationships managed between the DLP, the client and yourself?

(a) How do you experience the DLPs terms of service in your work?
(b) What do you think about the rating and reputation system?
(c) What steps do you take (if any) to ensure that your expectations are met?
(d) Can you give me some examples of what happens when your expectations are not met?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Collective identity and organisation of labour

12. I now want to ask a few questions relating to your co-workers, are you in contact with them?

If *yes* ask:

(a) Who are they?
(b) How did you (or they) establish contact?
(c) How frequently are you (or they) in contact?
(d) Over what channels?

(**Prompt:** e.g. forums, social media, SMS message and email)

(e) What do you hope to achieve by being in contact with them?
(f) What do you think that they hope to achieve by being in contact with you?
(g) Do you see yourself identifying with your co-workers over any issue with the DLP or the client?
(h) Do you work in teams with your co-workers?
(i) What is your opinion of your co-workers?
(j) What do DLPs and clients think about you being in contact with your co-workers?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

13. Advance to 14

If *no* ask:

(a) What is your reason for not being in contact with them?

(b) What would DLPs and clients think about you being in contact with your co-workers?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

14. Are you aware of trade unions?

(a) What is your reason for [being/ not being] a trade union member?
(b) How do you evaluate their usefulness in supporting freelance workers? (Ask in relation to differing demand[s] described in 8g)
(c) What [do/ would] DLPs and clients think about you being a trade union member?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

'Cool-off' questions

15. Now for some final questions:-

(a) What would be your top priority if you could influence the policy of DLPs?
(b) What advice would you offer to co-workers facing similar problems?
(c) Is there anything I have missed or you think I should have asked that I haven't?
(d) Have you got any questions?

End

Closing

- Thanking the interviewee, explaining next steps in the research process, what will happen to the data/ steer end towards the positive/ topics yet to be covered that you have missed.

Start

Introducing yourself: a list of self-instructions

- Explain purpose and nature of the study to the respondent, telling how or through whom they came to be selected.
- Give assurance that respondent will remain anonymous in any written reports growing out of the study, and that their responses will be treated in strictest confidence.
- Indicate that they may find some of the questions farfetched, silly or difficult to answer, the reason being that questions that are appropriate for one person are not always appropriate for another. Since there are no right or wrong answers, they are not to worry about these and do as best they can with them. We are only interested in their opinions and personal experiences.
- Explain that the respondent is perfectly free to interrupt, ask clarification of the interviewer, criticize a line of questioning, etc.
- Tell the respondent something about yourself – background, training, and interest in the area of enquiry.
- Ask permission to audio-record the interview, explaining why you wish to do this.

Source adapted from Lofland et al., (2006:104) - original source Davis (1960)

'Warm-up' questions

1. Could I first ask you to describe your organisations main motivations for DLP use?

   (a) Are there any specific 'triggers' to starting?
   (b) How does this fit into your organisations long-term aim?

2. Can you describe the process of signing up to a DLP?

   (a) Who or what is screening you?

3. Can you outline your organisations process of utilising a DLP from start to finish?

   (**Prompt:** in terms of 1. recruiting, 2. selecting, 3. negotiating, 4. managing and 5. receiving a task, job or project)

   (a) What is your involvement?

4. Can you describe your organisations use of online freelancers to me?

   (a) What are others doing with DLPs (if anything) in your industry and sector?

Employment status

5. Now can you tell me about the employment status of an online freelancer when working through a DLP?

(**Prompt:** i.e. are they an employee, a worker or self-employed?)

(a) Who do you consider their employer to be when working through a DLP?

(**Prompt:** e.g. the DLP, your organisation or both?)

(b) How would you describe their relationship with a DLP?
(c) What is their employment status when carrying out work for your organisation?
(d) How does their employment status come to be determined?
(e) Are there any advantages or disadvantages to their employment status for your organisation?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Skills

6. I now want to ask a few questions relating to skills, what qualifications do online freelancers need for the tasks, jobs or projects posted by your organisation?

(a) How do you judge their usefulness in matching the right person to a task, job or project?
(b) Can you describe the typical skills and skills level needed for your organisations posted tasks, jobs or projects?
(c) How do you judge the way DLPs communicate skill sets across to your organisation?
(d) What steps do online freelancers take (if any) to communicate their skill sets across to your organisation?
(e) How does the utilisation of their skill sets come to be determined?
(f) Can you describe how your organisation utilises their skill sets?
(g) How free are they to determine their skill set utilisation?
(h) What impact (if any) does their skill set have on:-

1. The organisation of work,
2. Your organisations ability to control,
3. Wages?

(i) Are you aware of any changes in skills requirements in your organisation, industry or sector?
(j) What does your organisation think about their skill sets?
(k) What is your opinion?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Autonomy

7. I would now like to move onto a different topic, how much autonomy do online freelancers have in determining their own work?

(a) What determines the way in which they carry out the work in their everyday routine?

(**Prompt:** e.g. your organisation, the online freelancer and/ or DLP?)

(b) How free are they to determine how they do a task, job or project?

(c) What is your organisations continuity of engagement with them?
(d) Do they tender for different contracts?
(e) How free are they to choose over clients and tasks?
(f) How does their level of pay come to be determined?
(g) How free are they to determine their level of pay?
(h) How would you describe their control over working time?

(**Prompt:** in terms of how time is used and for how long?)

(i) Can you describe a time that they employed workers in addition to, or in place of themselves?
(j) How would you evaluate their overall autonomy?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Control

8. Now can you tell me about who controls the work and the work tasks of online freelancers?

(a) How would you describe the quality of their work?
(b) How would you describe their performance and productivity?
(c) What compels them to carry out work in this way?
(d) Can you describe the demands of a DLP?

(**Prompt:** in terms of 1. skills, 2. working time, 3. rewards and 4. content of work– what is to be done, how workers are directed and scope for autonomy and self-management)

(e) Can you describe the demands of your organisation?

(**Prompt:** in terms of 1. skills, 2. working time, 3. rewards and 4. content of work– what is to be done, how workers are directed and scope for autonomy and self-management)

(f) How do these demands compare with the online freelancers?
(g) How do online freelancers ensure that their demands are met?
(h) What steps does your organisation take (if any) to ensure that their demands are met?
(i) What steps does your organisation take (if any) to ensure that their own demands are met?
(j) Can you give me some examples of what happens when demands are not met?

(**Prompt:** from the point of view of 1. an online freelancer and 2. your organisation)

(k) Could you take me through the process of how online freelancers are managed precisely?
(l) How do you judge the extent that they are involved in the decision making process?
(m) What do most people think of the ways in which DLPs and clients treat their workers?
(n) What is your opinion?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Resistance and consent

9. I am now interested if you are aware of online freelancers circumventing or adapting to DLP instructions?

(**Prompt:** when it comes to:

- Fees (Ask in addition to 9a-c)

- The rating and reputation system (Ask in addition to 9a-c)

- Skills (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8d and in addition to 9a-c)

- Working time (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8d and in addition to 9a-c)

(**Prompt:** in terms of how time is used and for how long?)

- Rewards (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8d and in addition to 9a-c)

(**Prompt:** the terms of exchange–for what wages workers get for their "effort bargain")

- Content of work (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8d and in addition to 9a-c)

(**Prompt:** what is to be done, how workers are directed and scope for autonomy and self-management)

(a) If so, could you give me examples? (Ask in relation to all six aspects above)
(b) What did they hope to achieve by doing that? (Ask in relation to all six aspects above)
(c) What happens when they try and negotiate? (Ask in relation to all four aspects above)

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

10. I am also interested if you are aware of online freelancers circumventing or adapting to your organisations instructions?

(**Prompt:** when it comes to:

- Skills (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8e and in addition to 10a-c)

- Working time (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8e and in addition to 10a-c)

(**Prompt:** in terms of how time is used and for how long?)

- Rewards (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8e and in addition to 10a-c)

(**Prompt:** the terms of exchange–for what wages workers get for their "effort bargain")

- Content of work (Ask in relation to demand[s] described in 8e and in addition to 10a-c)

(**Prompt:** what is to be done, how workers are directed and scope for autonomy and self-management)

(a) If so, could you give me examples? (Ask in relation to all four aspects above)
(b) What did they hope to achieve by doing that? (Ask in relation to all four aspects above)
(c) What happens when they try and negotiate? (Ask in relation to all four aspects above)

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

11. How are relationships managed between the DLP, the online freelancer and your organisation?

(a) How does your organisation experience the DLPs terms of service?
(b) What does your organisation think about the rating and reputation system?
(c) What steps does your organisation take (if any) to ensure that their expectations are met?
(d) Can you give me some examples of what happens when your organisations expectations are not met?
(e) What would you say are the major pitfalls (if any) when using online freelancers?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

Collective identity and organisation of labour

12. I now want to ask a few questions relating to the co-workers of online freelancers, are you aware if they are in contact?

If *yes* ask:

(a) Who are they?
(b) How did they establish contact?
(c) What do you think that they hope to achieve by being in contact?
(d) Do they work in teams?
(e) What does your organisation think about them being in contact?
(f) What is your opinion?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

13. Advance to 14

If *no* ask:

(a) What would your organisation think about them being in contact?
(b) What is your opinion?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

14. How does your organisation view trade unions?

(a) How does your organisation evaluate their usefulness in supporting freelance workers? (Ask in relation to differing demand[s] described in 8f)

(b) What would your organisation think about online freelancers being a trade union member?

(c) What is your opinion?

(Follow-up/ probe until topic exhausted)

'Cool-off' questions

15. Now for some final questions:-

(a) What would be your top priority if you could influence the policy of DLPs?

(b) What advice would you offer to co-workers facing similar problems?

(c) Is there anything I have missed or you think I should have asked that I haven't?

(d) Have you got any questions?

End

Closing

- Thanking the interviewee, explaining next steps in the research process, what will happen to the data/ steer end towards the positive/ topics yet to be covered that you have missed.

Appendix D: Links between the research question(s), dimensions of labour process theory and the interview guides

Research question(s)		Dimensions of	Interview guides			
Core	Subsidiary	LPT	Online freelancer		Client	
			Questions	Types*	Questions	Types*
What are the work and employment challenges and tensions from the expansion and evolution of web-based DLPs for *online task* crowd workers and buyers?	How can LPT help understand challenges and tensions of skills, autonomy, consent and resistance at work when using DLPs?	Structured antagonism	5	K	5	K
			5a	K	5a	K
			5b	K	5b	K
			5c	K	5c	K
			7b	EB	7a	EB
			7d	EB	7c	EB
			7e	EB	7d	EB
			7g	EB	7f	EB
			7i	EB	7h	EB
			7j	EB	7i	EB
			8d	EB	8d	EB
			8e	EB	8e	EB
			8g	OV	8f	OV
		Skills	6	K	6	K
			6a	BD	6a	OV
			6b	OV	6b	K
			6c	OV	6c	OV
			6d	K	6d	EB
			6e	OV	6e	EB
			6f	EB	6f	EB
			6g	EB	6g	OV
			6h	OV	6h	EB
			6i	OV	6i	K
			6j	EB	6j	OV
			6k	K	6k	OV
			6l	OV		
			6m	F		
			8d	EB	8d	EB
			8e	EB	8e	EB
		Autonomy	5e	OV	5e	OV
			6i	OV	6g	OV
			6j	EB	6h	EB
			7	OV	7	OV
			7a	EB	7a	EB
			7b	EB	7b	OV
			7c	OV	7c	EB
			7d	EB	7d	EB
			7e	EB	7e	OV
			7f	OV	7f	EB

			7g	EB	7g	OV
			7h	OV	7h	EB
			7i	EB	7i	EB
			7j	EB	7j	OV
			7k	OV		
			7l	F		
			8	EB	8	EB
			8a	OV	8a	OV
			8b	EB	8b	EB
			8c	OV	8c	OV
			8d	EB	8d	EB
			8e	EB	8e	EB
			8f	EB	8f	OV
			8g	OV	8g	EB
			8h	EB	8h	EB
			8i	EB	8i	EB
			8j	EB	8j	EB
			8k	EB	8k	EB
			8l	EB	8l	OV
			8m	OV	8m	OV
			8n	OV	8n	OV
			8o	OV		
			9	EB	9	EB
			9a	EB	9a	EB
			9b	OV	9b	OV
			9c	EB	9c	EB
			9d	F		
			10	EB	10	EB
			10a	EB	10a	EB
			10b	OV	10b	OV
			10c	EB	10c	EB
			10d	F		
			11	EB	11	EB
			11a	EB	11a	EB
			11b	OV	11b	OV
			11c	EB	11c	EB
		Resistance and consent	5e	OV		
			6e	OV	6d	EB
			6f	EB	6g	OV
			6h	OV	6h	EB
			6i	OV		
			6j	EB		
			6l	OV		
			6m	F		

			7	OV	7	OV
			7a	EB	7a	EB
			7b	EB	7b	OV
			7c	OV	7c	EB
			7d	EB	7d	EB
			7e	EB	7e	OV
			7f	OV	7f	EB
			7g	EB	7g	OV
			7h	OV	7h	EB
			7i	EB	7i	EB
			7j	EB	7j	OV
			7k	OV		
			7l	F		
			8	EB	8	EB
			8a	OV	8a	OV
			8b	EB	8b	EB
			8c	OV	8c	OV
			8f	EB	8f	OV
			8g	OV	8g	EB
			8i	EB	8j	EB
			8j	EB	8l	OV
			8k	EB	8m	OV
			8l	EB	8n	OV
			8m	OV		
			8n	OV		
			8o	OV		
			9	EB	9	EB
			9a	EB	9a	EB
			9b	OV	9b	OV
			9c	EB	9c	EB
			9d	F		
			10	EB	10	EB
			10a	EB	10a	EB
			10b	OV	10b	OV
			10c	EB	10c	EB
			10d	F		
			11	EB	11	EB
			11a	EB		
			11b	OV		
			11c	EB		
			11d	EB		
			12	EB	12c	OV
			12e	OV	12d	K
			12f	OV		
			12g	OV		

			12h	EB		
			12j	OV		
			13a	OV		
			13b	OV		
			14	K		
			14a	OV		
			14b	OV		
			14c	OV		
	How do DLPs impact the collective identity of sellers?		12	EB	12	K
			12a	K	12a	K
			12b	EB	12b	K
			12c	EB	12c	OV
			12d	K	12d	K
			12e	OV	12e	OV
			12f	OV	12f	OV
			12g	OV		
			12h	EB		
			12i	OV		
			12j	OV		
			13a	OV	13a	OV
			13b	OV	13b	OV
			14	K	14	OV
			14a	OV	14a	OV
			14b	OV	14b	OV
			14c	OV	14c	OV
	How is labour control implemented when using DLPs?	Labour indeterminacy	7d	EB	7c	EB
			7e	EB	7d	EB
			7f	OV	7e	OV
			8a	OV	8a	OV
			8b	EB	8b	EB
		Control	5d	EB	5d	EB
			5e	OV	5e	OV
			6g	EB	6e	EB
			6h	OV	6f	EB
			6i	OV	6g	OV
			6j	EB	6h	EB
			6k	K	6i	K
			6l	OV	6j	OV
			6m	F	6k	OV
			7	OV	7	OV
			7a	EB	7a	EB
			7b	EB	7b	OV
			7c	OV	7c	EB

			7d	EB	7d	EB
			7e	EB	7e	OV
			7f	OV	7f	EB
			7g	EB	7g	OV
			7h	OV	7h	EB
			7i	EB	7i	EB
			7j	EB	7j	OV
			7k	OV		
			7l	F		
			8	EB	8	EB
			8a	OV	8a	OV
			8b	EB	8b	EB
			8c	OV	8c	OV
			8d	EB	8d	EB
			8e	EB	8e	EB
			8f	EB	8f	OV
			8g	OV	8h	EB
			8h	EB	8i	EB
			8i	EB	8j	EB
			8k	EB	8k	EB
			8l	EB	8l	OV
			8m	OV	8m	OV
			8n	OV	8n	OV
			8o	OV		
			9c	EB	9c	EB
			10c	EB	10c	EB
			11	EB	11	EB
			11a	EB	11a	EB
			11b	OV	11b	OV
					11c	EB
			12j	OV	11e	EB
			13b	OV	12e	OV
					12f	OV
			14c	OV		
					13a	OV
					13b	OV
					14	OV
					14a	OV
					14b	OV
					14c	OV

*Question types

Experience and behaviour = EB   Opinion and values = OV   Feeling = F
Knowledge = K   Background/ demographic = BD

Appendix E: Survey tool questionnaire

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 1

Consent

1. I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet (Version 2; Date 31/10/2019) for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.*

   ☐ Yes

2. I confirm that I am over the age of 16.*

   ☐ Yes

   Should you have any questions please contact me by email: lee.stringer@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 2

This form allows you to register and/ or Refer-A-Friend and should take 4 - 5 minutes to complete.

3. Email address*

   [   ]

4. First name*

   [   ]

5. Last name*

   [   ]

6. I understand that my contact details may be retained up until the objectives of the project are met.*

   ☐ Yes

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 3

7. Do you currently use any digital labour platform(s)?*
   e.g. Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com, Guru.com, etc.

   [-- Please Select --   ∨]

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 4

Consent

8. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself. I understand that it will not be possible to remove my data from the project once it has been anonymised and forms part of the data set. I agree to take part on this basis.*

   ☐ Yes

9. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books, reports or journals.*

   ☐ Yes

10. I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.*

    ☐ Yes

11. I agree that any anonymised data collected may be shared with researchers/ researchers at other institutions.*

    ☐ Yes

12. I agree for my data to be used in future studies.*

    ☐ Yes

13. I agree to take part in this study.*

    ☐ Yes

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 5

14. What best describes you?*

    -- Please Select -- ⌄

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 6

15. Job title*

    [   ]

16. Name of organisation
    (optional)

    [   ]

17. What industry and sector does your organisation operate in?*
    For more information see https://www.ilo.org/global/industries-and-sectors/lang--en/index.htm

    -- Please Select -- ⌄

18. Which digital labour platform(s) does your organisation use?*
- ☐ Peopleperhour.com
- ☐ Freelancer.com
- ☐ Upwork.com
- ☐ Mturk.com
- ☐ Guru.com
- ☐ Other, please specify

19. What is your role regarding the(se) digital labour platform(s)?*

20. When did your organisation start using the(se) digital labour platform(s)?*

21. Please describe your organisations' use of the(se) digital labour platform(s)?*

22. What task(s), job(s) or project(s) do you and/ or your organisation typically post?*
- ☐ Academic writing
- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Ad posting
- ☐ Animation
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Article writing
- ☐ Audio
- ☐ Consulting
- ☐ Copywriting
- ☐ Creative writing
- ☐ Customer service
- ☐ Data entry
- ☐ Data science
- ☐ Financial planning
- ☐ Game development
- ☐ Human resources
- ☐ Lead generation
- ☐ Legal services
- ☐ Logo design
- ☐ Mobile development
- ☐ Photography
- ☐ Presentations
- ☐ Project management
- ☐ QA and testing

☐ Search engine optimization
☐ Server maintenance
☐ Software development
☐ Tech support
☐ Technical writing
☐ Telemarketing
☐ Transcription
☐ Translation
☐ Video production
☐ Virtual assistant
☐ Voice acting
☐ Web development
☐ Web research
☐ Web scraping
☐ Other, please specify

23. How many tasks, jobs or projects have you and/ or your organisation posted?*

24. How many online freelancers have you and/ or your organisation used?*

25. How long does a task, job or project typically take to complete?*

26. Would you like to be interviewed?*
     If invited, interviews will involve a quick one to one chat over Skype, taking around an hour.
     -- Please Select -- ⌄

27. Would you like to be provided with a summary of the findings for this study?*
     -- Please Select --   ⌄

28. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
     (optional)

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 7

29. Gender*

30. Occupation*

31. Employment status*
-- Please Select -- ▾

32. Country of residence*

33. Date of birth*

dd/mm/yyyy

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 8

34. Which digital labour platform(s) do you currently use?*
☐ Peopleperhour.com
☐ Freelancer.com
☐ Upwork.com
☐ Mturk.com
☐ Guru.com
☐ Other, please specify

35. When did you start using the(se) digital labour platform(s)?*

36. What best fits your current use of the(se) digital labour platform(s)?*
○ As a means of obtaining my main source of income.
○ As a means of enhancing my main source of income.
○ Other, please specify

37. Which digital labour platform(s) have you used?
(optional)
☐ Peopleperhour.com
☐ Freelancer.com
☐ Upwork.com
☐ Mturk.com
☐ Guru.com
☐ Other, please specify

38. Over what duration did you use the(se) digital labour platform(s)?
(optional)

39. What best fits your then use of the(se) digital labour platform(s)?
(optional)
○ As a means of obtaining my main source of income.
○ As a means of enhancing my main source of income.
○ Other, please specify

40. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
(optional)

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 9

The list below is in alphabetical order.

Through your selected digital labour platform(s) only...

41. What client(s) have you done work for and in what capacity(ies)?*

	Employee	Worker	Self-employed	Other
Airbnb	☐	☐	☐	☐
Apple	☐	☐	☐	☐
Automattic	☐	☐	☐	☐
Avery Dennison	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bissell	☐	☐	☐	☐
Boeing	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cisco	☐	☐	☐	☐
Coty Inc	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dropbox	☐	☐	☐	☐
Eharmony	☐	☐	☐	☐
Entertainment and Sports Programming Network	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forbes	☐	☐	☐	☐
General Electric	☐	☐	☐	☐
Intel	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lenovo	☐	☐	☐	☐
MetLife	☐	☐	☐	☐
Microsoft	☐	☐	☐	☐
National Broadcasting Company	☐	☐	☐	☐

Panasonic	☐	☐	☐	☐
PricewaterhouseCoopers	☐	☐	☐	☐
Samsung	☐	☐	☐	☐
Systems, Applications & Products	☐	☐	☐	☐
The University of California	☐	☐	☐	☐
Union Bank of Switzerland	☐	☐	☐	☐
Walmart	☐	☐	☐	☐
Zendesk	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐

42. If selected 'other', please specify what client(s) and/ or in what capacity(ies)?
(optional)

43. When did you do work for the(se) client(s)?*

44. What industry and sector do you typically operate in?*
For more information see https://www.ilo.org/global/industries-and-sectors/lang--en/index.htm
-- Please Select --

45. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
(optional)

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 10

The list below is in alphabetical order.

Through your selected digital labour platform(s) only...

46. What task(s), job(s) or project(s) do you typically carry out?*
☐ Academic writing
☐ Accounting
☐ Ad posting
☐ Animation
☐ Architecture
☐ Article writing

- ☐ Audio
- ☐ Consulting
- ☐ Copywriting
- ☐ Creative writing
- ☐ Customer service
- ☐ Data entry
- ☐ Data science
- ☐ Financial planning
- ☐ Game development
- ☐ Human resources
- ☐ Lead generation
- ☐ Legal services
- ☐ Logo design
- ☐ Mobile development
- ☐ Photography
- ☐ Presentations
- ☐ Project management
- ☐ QA and testing
- ☐ Search engine optimization
- ☐ Server maintenance
- ☐ Software development
- ☐ Tech support
- ☐ Technical writing
- ☐ Telemarketing
- ☐ Transcription
- ☐ Translation
- ☐ Video production
- ☐ Virtual assistant
- ☐ Voice acting
- ☐ Web development
- ☐ Web research
- ☐ Web scraping
- ☐ Other, please specify

47. Do you regard yourself as being a tech worker?*

-- Please Select -- ⌄

48. How many tasks, jobs or projects have you worked on?*

49. How long does a task, job or project typically take you to complete?*

50. Are you (or have you been) a member of a trade union?*
This question is in relation to your selected digital labour platform(s) only.

-- Please Select -- ⌄

51. Would you like to be interviewed?*
If invited, interviews will involve a quick one to one chat over Skype, taking around an hour.

-- Please Select -- ⌄

52. Would you like to be provided with a summary of the findings for this study?*

215

-- Please Select -- ▼

53. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
(optional)

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 11

Refer-A-Friend

54. Was this study referred to you by a friend?*

-- Please Select -- ▼

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher. - N.B. See T&Cs at https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

---

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 12

Refer-A-Friend

55. First name of referrer*

56. Last name of referrer*

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher. - N.B. See T&Cs at https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Refer-A-Friend

57. Would you like to Refer-A-Friend? The value must be greater than or equal to 2.*

-- Please Select -- ▾

N.B. Seeking online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) only.

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher. - N.B. See T&Cs at https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Refer-A-Friend

58. Who will you refer?*

-- Please Select -- ▾

59. How many will you refer?* The value must be greater than or equal to 2.

60.   I confirm that I have read the Refer-A-Friend T&Cs at https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog*
       ☐ Yes

You can refer a friend by sharing the URL: https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

NB. Your friend(s) will need to enter your first and last name ( ) when registering their interest.

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher. - N.B. See T&Cs at https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Page 15

61.   How did you hear about this study?*
       -- Please Select -- ⌄

62.   Is there anything else that you would like to add?
       (optional)

Your email address has been recorded as:

If this is incorrect, please re-enter your email address in the space provided above.

Appendix F: Template letters

<u>Digital labour platform template letter</u>

Dear [insert name],

Thanks for connecting, I hope you're well.

I would like to invite users of [insert DLP] to participate in a research study.

The purpose is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) digital labour platforms (DLP) for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs.

As such, I am looking for a number of online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) that use DLPs such as Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, who wish to take part.

Due to the experience and standing of those that use [insert DLP], Prof. Tony Dundon, Dr. Stephen Mustchin and I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to have their views on board.

This will involve a quick chat over Skype, taking no more than an hour of their time.

I was hoping that you might be willing and able to facilitate introductions to the clients (e.g. the hiring managers) that use [insert DLP], so that I may gain their interest?

And/ or allow me to place a post on the platform, enabling me to recruit online freelancers (esp. tech workers) directly?

A report that summarises the findings will be made available to you should you wish.

I would like to stress their anonymity is assured. Data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

As a thank you, if they qualify and take part in the study (i.e. they have been interviewed), interviewees will be reimbursed for their time with an Amazon eGift Voucher.

And/ or they (or you) can Refer-A-Friend.

If they tell their friends about this study, for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on their recommendation, they'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher.

Let me know if you have any queries or if you know of anyone who may wish to participate, the next step would be to send them a brief 4 - 5 minute questionnaire to confirm details, which can be found here: https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Mr Lee Stringer
Alliance MBS PhD student
University ID Number: 9933021

<u>Client template letter (specific)</u>

Dear [insert name],

Thanks for connecting, I hope you're well.

I would like to invite you and/ or others at your organisation to participate in a research study.

The purpose is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) digital labour platforms (DLP) for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs.

As such, I am looking for a number of online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) that use DLPs such as Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, who wish to take part.

Due to your experience and standing, Prof. Tony Dundon, Dr. Stephen Mustchin and I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to have your views on board.

This will involve a quick chat over Skype, taking no more than an hour of your time.

I would like to stress your anonymity is assured. Data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

A report that summarises the findings will be made available to you should you wish.

As a thank you, if you qualify and take part in the study (i.e. you have been interviewed), interviewees will be reimbursed for their time with an Amazon eGift Voucher.

And/ or you can Refer-A-Friend.

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher.

If you are eligible for an Amazon eGift Voucher, this will be sent to you by email shortly after the interviews have taken place.

Let me know if you have any queries or if you would like to participate, the next step would be a brief 4 - 5 minute questionnaire to confirm details, which can be found here: https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Mr Lee Stringer
Alliance MBS PhD student
University ID Number: 9933021

<u>Client template letter (generic)</u>

Dear [insert name],

Thanks for connecting, I hope you're well.

I would like to invite individuals at your organisation to participate in a research study.

The purpose is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) digital labour platforms (DLP) for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs.

As such, I am looking for a number of online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) that use DLPs such as Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, who wish to take part.

Due to the experience and standing of those at your organisation, Prof. Tony Dundon, Dr. Stephen Mustchin and I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to have their views on board.

This will involve a quick chat over Skype, taking no more than an hour of their time.

I would like to stress their anonymity is assured. Data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

A report that summarises the findings will be made available to you should you wish.

As a thank you, if they qualify and take part in the study (i.e. they have been interviewed), interviewees will be reimbursed for their time with an Amazon eGift Voucher.

And/ or they (or you) can Refer-A-Friend.

If they tell their friends about this study, for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on their recommendation, they'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher.

Let me know if you have any queries or if you know of anyone who may wish to participate, the next step would be to send them a brief 4 - 5 minute questionnaire to confirm details, which can be found here: https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Mr Lee Stringer
Alliance MBS PhD student
University ID Number: 9933021

<u>Online freelancer template letter</u>

Dear [insert name],

Thanks for connecting, I hope you're well.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study.

The purpose is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) digital labour platforms (DLP) for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs.

As such, I am looking for a number of online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) that use DLPs such as Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, who wish to take part.

Due to your experience and standing, Prof. Tony Dundon, Dr. Stephen Mustchin and I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to have your views on board.

This will involve a quick chat over Skype, taking no more than an hour of your time.

I would like to stress your anonymity is assured. Data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

As a thank you, if you qualify and take part in the study (i.e. you have been interviewed), interviewees will be reimbursed for their time with an Amazon eGift Voucher.

And/ or you can Refer-A-Friend.

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher.

If you are eligible for an Amazon eGift Voucher, this will be sent to you by email shortly after the interviews have taken place.

Let me know if you have any queries or if you would like to participate, the next step would be a brief 4 - 5 minute questionnaire to confirm details, which can be found here: https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Mr Lee Stringer
Alliance MBS PhD student
University ID Number: 9933021

Appendix G: Social media recruitment text

Calling all users of Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com, Guru.com, etc.!

Want to take part in up-to-the-minute **@ESRC** funded **@AllianceMBS** research?

Then register and/ or Refer-A-Friend here: https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

Calling all users of Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com, Guru.com, etc.!

Why not take part in up-to-the-minute **Economic and Social Research Council** funded **Alliance Manchester Business School** research?

Interviewees will be reimbursed for their time with an Amazon eGift Voucher.

Find details, register and/ or Refer-A-Friend here: https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

Appendix H: Template posts

<u>Digital labour platform post template</u>

Dear [insert DLP] user,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study.

The purpose is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) digital labour platforms (DLP) for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs.

As such, I am looking for a number of online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) that use DLPs such as Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, who wish to take part.

Due to your experience and standing, Prof. Tony Dundon, Dr. Stephen Mustchin and I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to have your views on board.

This will involve a quick chat over Skype, taking no more than an hour of your time.

I would like to stress your anonymity is assured. Data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

As a thank you, if you qualify and take part in the study (i.e. you have been interviewed), interviewees will be reimbursed for their time with an Amazon eGift Voucher.

And/ or you can Refer-A-Friend.

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher.

If you are eligible for an Amazon eGift Voucher, this will be sent to you by email shortly after the interviews have taken place.

Let me know if you have any queries or if you would like to participate, the next step would be a brief 4 - 5 minute questionnaire to confirm details, which can be found here: https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Mr Lee Stringer
Alliance MBS PhD student
University ID Number: 9933021

P.S. Your participation in this study is voluntary and should not be seen as a job, and no feedback will be left as an outcome of your participation.

<u>Forum post template</u>

Dear [insert forum] user,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study.

The purpose is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) digital labour platforms (DLP) for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs.

As such, I am looking for a number of online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) that use DLPs such as Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, who wish to take part.

Due to your experience and standing, Prof. Tony Dundon, Dr. Stephen Mustchin and I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to have your views on board.

This will involve a quick chat over Skype, taking no more than an hour of your time.

I would like to stress your anonymity is assured. Data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

As a thank you, if you qualify and take part in the study (i.e. you have been interviewed), interviewees will be reimbursed for their time with an Amazon eGift Voucher.

And/ or you can Refer-A-Friend.

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher.

If you are eligible for an Amazon eGift Voucher, this will be sent to you by email shortly after the interviews have taken place.

Let me know if you have any queries or if you would like to participate, the next step would be a brief 4 - 5 minute questionnaire to confirm details, which can be found here: https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Mr Lee Stringer
Alliance MBS PhD student
University ID Number: 9933021

Appendix I: Web advertisement text

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

ESRC funded AMBS PhD project

Exploring the work and employment challenges and tensions of online

freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers)

Do you use Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com, Guru.com, etc.?

Want to take part in up-to-the-minute Alliance Manchester Business School research?

Then register and/ or Refer-A-Friend here

Welcome

Who I am

My name is Lee Stringer and I am a PhD student studying at the University of
Manchester.

What it's all about

227

This study is an ESRC funded PhD project with the Alliance Manchester Business School.

The purpose is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) digital labour platforms (DLP) for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs.

– N.B. RECRUITING VERY SOON! –

Where you come in

I am looking for a number of online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) that use DLPs such as Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, who wish to take part.

You can do so by registering your interest here or above.

Work here might include for example:

- Quality assurance and testing
- Software development
- Mobile development
- Server maintenance
- Game development
- Web development
- Web scraping
- Data science

This will involve a quick chat over Skype, taking no more than an hour of your time.

Interviewees will be reimbursed for their time with an Amazon.co.uk eGift Voucher*.

228

(*or an equivalent Gift Card from your home countries respective Amazon website).

And/ or you can…

Refer-A-Friend

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher.*

*N.B. See T&Cs below.

How it works

- You tell your friends about this study;
- They register their interest;
- When registering, they choose the option "Yes" under "Was this study referred to you by a friend" and enter your first and last name;
- Each week I check to see if you've been named as a referrer;
- For every person (up to four) who's named you and goes on to be interviewed, you'll get an Amazon eGift Voucher.*

*N.B. See T&Cs below.

T&Cs

1. To qualify:-
   - Referrers will need to register above.
   - Referrals must go on to be interviewed.
   - A minimum of 2 referrals (who have registered) is required.
   - Your friend(s) will need to enter your first and last name when registering their interest.
2. Other things to consider:-

229

- Up to four referrals per referrer will be awarded for.
- Offer applies even if you have not been interviewed yourself.
- If someone is referred twice, the first named referrer will be counted.
- To ensure anonymity, one individual per referrer will always be deducted.

Share it on social media!

Why not tweet about it, post it on Linkedin, or share it on facebook?

Click one of the links above and copy and paste this:

"Check out this ESRC funded AMBS PhD project – register your interest now and say I referred you! Find out more at https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog"

Confidentiality

I operate under strict confidentiality rules at the University of Manchester, and these are designed to protect you, your colleague(s) and your client(s), and so any sources (e.g. organisations, sites and participants) would remain completely anonymous.

– N.B. RECRUITING VERY SOON! –

Those involved

I will be taking the lead and am a President's Doctoral Scholar Award holder which is the highest accolade the University bestow upon members of their postgraduate research community, and I have also won various other awards all of which can be viewed here.

Additionally, the project will be under the close supervision of Prof. Tony Dundon and Dr. Stephen Mustchin, and so this will ensure that the outcome will be of the highest quality.

✏️ Edit

FOLLOW ME ON TWITTER

Tweets by @LeeStringer1985

Hmm, an empty timeline. That's weird.

Check for Tweets

Embed   View on Twitter

✉️

PROUDLY POWERED BY WORDPRESS

<u>Seller profiles</u>

Ps	Sex	Age	Country	Digital labour platform(s)	Total duration of usage	Occupation & skill(s) typically employed	Nº of tasks, jobs or projects	Use	
								To obtain main source of income	To enhance main source of income
Online freelancers									
Asia									
Participant 1	M	33	IN	**Present** Upwork **Past** Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork Guru	9 years	Digital transformation consultant/ partner Data science, game development, mobile development		✓ ✓	
Participant 2	M	24	IN	**Present** Peopleperhour Guru **Past**	2 years 6 months	Data engineering Campaign management, data science	15		✓
Participant 3	F	35	IN	**Present** Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork **Past**	4 years	Freelance business consultant and tutor Academic writing, article writing, consulting, financial planning, human resources, presentations	>20	✓	
Participant 4	M	30	PK	**Present** Freelancer **Past**	5 months	Engineer Data science, software development	10		✓

Participant	Sex	Age	Country	Platforms	Experience	Role / Skills	Number		
Participant 5	M	26	PK	**Present** Fiverr Peopleperhour Upwork **Past** Fiverr Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork Guru	5 years	PowerPoint designer Animation, presentations	>800	✓	
Participant 6	M	23	PK	**Present** Upwork **Past**	1 year	Freelancer Data science, logo design, presentations, web scraping	37		✓
Participant 7	F	22	PS	**Present** Freelancer Upwork **Past** Mostaql Fiverr Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork	8 months	Content writer and VO artist Translation, content writing, audio, voice acting	50	✓ ✓	
Participant 8	M	26	TR	**Present** Freelancer **Past**	4 years	3D visualization artist 3D visualization (rendering), CGI, animation, architecture, video production	>100	✓	
Participant 9	M	26	HK	**Present** Fiverr Freelancer Upwork **Past**	3 months	IT - QA QA and testing	2		✓
				Africa					
Participant 10	M	31	EG	**Present** Freelancer **Past**	3 years	Architectural engineer and graphic designer Animation, architecture, logo design,	350	✓	

Participant	Sex	Age	Country	Platform	Experience	Role / Skills	Projects		
						presentations, video production			
Participant 11	M	32	ZA	**Present** Freelancer Guru	8 months	Data scientist Data science, QA & testing, software development	0		✓
				Past					
Participant 12	M	28	TN	**Present** CGHero Guru	6 years	Architect Architecture, presentations	60		✓
				Past Freelancer Upwork Guru					✓
Participant 13	M	27	KE	**Present** Guru	6 years	Project manager 3D design, architecture	>30		✓
				Past Freelancer Guru				✓	
				North America					
Participant 14	M	50	US	**Present** Freelancer Upwork	9 years	Software developer Digital data forensics, architecture, server maintenance, software development, web development, web scraping	>100		✓
				Past					
Participant 15	M	42	US	**Present** Upwork	6 months	QA engineer QA & testing	10		✓
				Past					

South America									
Participant 16	F	37	AR	**Present** Peopleperhour Upwork **Past**	7 years	Freelance voice-over artist Audio, voice acting	>100	✓	
Europe									
Participant 17	M	40	UK	**Present** Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork **Past**	3 years	Financial trader/ data scientist Data science, software development, web development, web scraping	>50		✓
Participant 18	M	38	UK	**Present** Studio.envato Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork **Past** Fiverr Studio.envato Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork	4 years	Designer/ animator Graphic design, marketing design, animation, logo design, presentations, video production	>50	✓	✓
Participant 19	M	37	UK	**Present** Peopleperhour Guru **Past** Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork Guru	7 years	Visual designer Photo manipulation, 3D design, animation, architecture, audio, logo design, photography, video production, voice acting			✓ ✓
Participant 20	M	34	UK	**Present** Peopleperhour Upwork Guru **Past** twine.fm Peopleperhour Upwork Guru	1 year 6 months	Designer/ illustrator Design, illustration	50		✓ ✓
Participant 21	M	34	UK	**Present**	5 years	Software developer Architecture, software development,	>10		

				Past Peopleperhour Freelancer		web development			✓
Participant 22	M	31	UK	**Present** Peopleperhour	2 years	Statistics adviser Statistics, data science	10		✓
				Past					
Participant 23	F	45	UK	**Present** Peopleperhour	4 years	Writer/ teacher Academic writing, article writing, copywriting, creative writing, game development, search engine optimization, technical writing	>1000	✓	
				Past Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork				✓	
Participant 24	M	60	RO	**Present** Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork Guru	17 years	Programmer Animation, data science, logo design, mobile development, presentations, QA & testing, server maintenance, software development, web development, web scraping	>2000	✓	
				Past Joomlancers RentACoder Scriptlance Peopleperhour Upwork Guru				✓	
Participant 25	M	33	RO	**Present** Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork Guru	11 years	Digital artist Design, illustration, art, animation, game development, logo design	>1000	✓	
				Past					
Participant 26	F	27	RO	**Present** Fiverr Guru	6 years	Content writer Article writing, copywriting, creative writing, data entry, presentations, translation, virtual assistant, web research	>200	✓	
				Past Freelancer Upwork				✓	
Participant 27	M	49	FR	**Present** Peopleperhour Upwork	8 years	Web developer Logo design, mobile development, web development	>1000		✓
				Past					

Participant	Gender	Age	Country	Platforms	Duration	Role / Services	Count		
				Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork Guru					✓
Participant 28	M	48	FR	**Present** Peopleperhour Upwork	2 years 6 months	Journalist/ public relations consultant Article writing	>100		✓
				Past					
Participant 29	F	28	UA	**Present** Upwork Guru	5 years	Freelancer Image labelling, data entry, lead generation, transcription, virtual assistant, web research	>100	✓	
				Past Peopleperhour				✓	
Participant 30	M	35	HR	**Present** Upwork	8 years	Web developer and project manager QA & testing, software development, web development, web scraping	100	✓	
				Past Peopleperhour Freelancer Upwork				✓	
Participant 31	M	39	DE	**Present** Upwork	5 years	Freelance software developer Data science, server maintenance, software development, web development	500	✓	
				Past **Elance oDesk**				✓	
				Oceania					
Participant 32	F	25	AU	**Present** Upwork	2 years	Brand identity designer Competitor analysis, brand identity creation, merchandise design, social media, website design, logo design	>50	✓	
				Past Freelancer Guru				✓	

Buyer profiles

								Extent of use	
Clients									
Ps	**Sex**	**Age**	**Country**	**Industry and sector**	**Digital labour platform(s)**	**Total duration of usage**	**Skill(s) typically employed**	**Nº of online workers**	**Nº of tasks, jobs or projects**
Europe									
Participant Alpha	M		UK	Textiles; clothing; leather; footwear	Fiverr Peopleperhour Upwork	3 years	Animation, game development, logo design, photography, presentations, software development, video production, voice acting, web development	20	150
Oceania									
Participant Bravo	F		AU	Financial services; professional services	Upwork	5 years	Presentations, web development	10	10

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

Research Participant Information Sheet

ONLINE FREELANCERS, DIGITAL LABOUR PLATFORMS AND CLIENTS:

A STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. The purpose is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) digital labour platforms (DLP) for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully before deciding whether to take part and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

About the research

➢ **Who will conduct the research?**

The research is being conducted by PhD student Mr Lee Stringer of the People, Management and Organisations Division of the Alliance Manchester Business School at the University of Manchester (UoM).

➢ **What is the purpose of the research?**

The purpose is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) DLPs for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs.

I am looking for a number of online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) that use DLPs such as Peopleperhour.com, Freelancer.com, Upwork.com and Guru.com, who wish to take part.

➢ **Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

You will be informed of the findings (should you wish) and the outcomes will be written up in anonymous form in a student thesis and published in academic books, reports or journals.

➢ **Who has reviewed the research project?**

The project has been reviewed by my supervisors (Prof. Tony Dundon and Dr. Stephen Mustchin), an independent internal reviewer (Prof. Debra Howcroft) and the Alliance Manchester Business School Research Ethics Committee.

➢ **Who is funding the research project?**

Version 2; Date 31/10/2019

The project is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

What would my involvement be?

➢ **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

Participant journey

1. Read the web advertisement and decide whether or not to register and/ or Refer-A-Friend. Once decided, select the 'register and/ or Refer-A-Friend' web button. This contains a 4 - 5 minute questionnaire which will give me an idea of your suitability for the study/ interview. Its completion is required if you wish to be interviewed and/ or you wish to Refer-A-Friend.
2. Open and read the PIS by clicking the link displayed prior to the questionnaire commencing. If you decide that you are happy to proceed having read the PIS, click the link at the bottom of this form to register your interest and/ or Refer-A-Friend. Or, close the PIS if you are not happy to proceed. The questionnaire begins with a PIS statement that you click to continue. You must give informed consent and implied consent will be given by you selecting this box.
3. You will be informed by email whether or not you are invited to take part in the interviews. If invited, interviews will involve a quick one to one chat over Skype, taking around an hour. Interviews will run between Wednesday 01st January 2020 and Saturday 31st October 2020. You must give informed consent and written consent will be requested before all interviews.

While it will be necessary to link e.g. online freelancers, clients and DLPs, for the purposes of analysis and data reporting, I operate under strict confidentiality rules at the UoM, and these are designed to protect you, your colleague(s) and your client(s), and so any sources (e.g. organisations, sites and participants) would remain completely anonymous.

Crucially, data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

➢ **Will I be compensated for taking part?**

As a thank you, if you qualify and take part in the study (i.e. you have been interviewed), interviewees will be reimbursed for their time with a £20 Amazon.co.uk eGift Voucher*.

And/ or you can Refer-A-Friend.

Tell your friends about this study and for every friend (up to four) that signs up and goes on to be interviewed on your recommendation, you'll get a £5 Amazon.co.uk eGift Voucher*.

*Or an equivalent Gift Card from your home countries respective Amazon website.

N.B. It is important that you read the Refer-A-Friend T&Cs here.

Or by copying and pasting the URL (https://onlinefreelancerresearch.school.blog) into your browser tab.

If you are eligible for an Amazon eGift Voucher (i.e. you have been interviewed and/ or you have Referred-A-Friend that has gone on to be interviewed), this will be sent to you by email shortly after the interviews have taken place.

Version 2; Date 31/10/2019

> **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You can do so by registering your interest in the way described above. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (please download and/ or print), and in order to verify your consent, implied consent will be given by you ticking a box at the beginning of the questionnaire and you will be asked to sign a written consent form if interviewed. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself. However, it will not be possible to remove your data from the project once it has been anonymised as we will not be able to identify your specific data. This does not affect your data protection rights. If you decide not to take part you do not need to do anything further.

Audio recording the interview is essential to your participation in the study. You should be comfortable with the recording process at all times and you are free to stop the recording at any time.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

> **What information will you collect about me?**

In order to participate in this research project, we will need to collect information that could identify you, called "personal identifiable information". Specifically, we will need to collect information regarding:

- Trade union membership
- Employer(s)/ client(s)
- Opinions or thoughts
- Country of residence
- Employment status
- Industry and sector
- Email address
- Date of birth
- Occupation
- Full name
- Gender
- DLP use
- Job title

> **Under what legal basis are you collecting this information?**

We are collecting and storing this personal identifiable information in accordance with data protection law which protect your rights. These state that we must have a legal basis (specific reason) for collecting your data. For this study, the specific reason is that it is "a public interest task" and "a process necessary for research purposes".

> **What are my rights in relation to the information you will collect about me?**

Version 2; Date 31/10/2019

You have a number of rights under data protection law regarding your personal information. For example, you can request a copy of the information we hold about you, including audio recordings.

If you would like to know more about your different rights or the way we use your personal information to ensure we follow the law, please consult our [Privacy Notice for Research](#).

Web http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=37095

➢ **Will my participation in the study be confidential and my personal identifiable information be protected?**

In accordance with data protection law, the UoM is the Data Controller for this project. This means that we are responsible for making sure your personal information is kept secure, confidential and used only in the way you have been told it will be used. All researchers are trained with this in mind, and your data will be looked after in the following way:

1. Recruitment
- A UoM-approved survey tool will be used (i.e. Select Survey).
- Once recruitment has ended, the data* will be transferred from the survey tool to the UoM server. The data on the survey tool will then be deleted in order to avoid duplication.
- Contact details will be stored in a separate password protected file held on the UoM server and will be deleted as soon as the objectives of the project allow.

2. Interview
- Skype will be used - all Skype-to-Skype voice, video, file transfers* (i.e. consent forms and facesheets) and instant messages are encrypted.
- Paper data records* (if any) will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location only available to the researcher before becoming digitised and stored on the UoM server.
- Transcripts* will be stored on the UoM server and once checked for accuracy, all audio files will be deleted from the UoM server.
- Case summaries* will be stored on the UoM server.

2.1. Audio device
- Olympus DS-9500 Digital Recorder Premium Kit incl ODMS R7 Software with 256 bit file encryption with DSS Pro audio codec and device lock by PIN code will be used in the field.
- The device used to make the recordings will not be shared, will never be left unattended and will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location only available to the researcher when not in use.

2.2. Audio recording
- Recordings will be transferred from the recording device to the UoM server as soon as possible to ensure that a master copy is backed up and the file is encrypted.
- A UoM-approved digital audio transcription typing specialist will be used (i.e. [1st Class Secretarial](#)).

2.2.1. Other

Version 2; Date 31/10/2019

- The location of the interview/ recording regarding the privacy and comfort of the participant and/ or any risk involved will be considered.
- Audio will consist of voice only taken at the time of the one to one Skype interview.
- The name of the interviewee will not be recorded.

*Person identifying information will be backed up on the UoM server and will not be stored on USB sticks or other portable devices.

*Only the study team at the UoM will have access to your personal information, but they will anonymise it as soon as possible. Your name and any other identifying information will be removed and replaced with a random ID number. Only the research team will have access to the key that links this ID number to your personal information.

*The primary supervisor is the data custodian for this research project and custody of all paper and electronic data will be transferred to them before I (Mr Lee Stringer) leave the University. The standard retention period for data once anonymised is 5 years.

When you agree to take part in a research study, anonymised data collected may be used in future studies and may be shared with researchers/ researchers at other institutions. The future research will be of a similar nature to this research project and will concern the gig economy. This information will not identify you and will not be combined with other information in a way that could identify you. The information will only be used for the purpose of analysis and data reporting.

Potential disclosures:

There may be instances where during the course of the interview information is revealed which means that the researchers will be obliged to break confidentiality. Specifically:

- If, during the study, you disclose information about misconduct/ poor practice, we have a professional obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform your employer/ professional body.
- If, during the study, you disclose information about any current or future illegal activities, we have a legal obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform the relevant authorities.

Please also note that individuals from the UoM or regulatory authorities may need to look at the data collected for this study to make sure the project is being carried out as planned. This may involve looking at identifiable data. All individuals involved in auditing and monitoring the study will have a strict duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant.

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints and wish to direct your complaint to someone within the research team, you should contact Mr Lee Stringer and/ or his supervisor(s) Prof. Tony Dundon and Dr. Stephen Mustchin. If you wish to direct your complaint to someone independent of the research team, this should be the RGEI Officer as listed below:

➤ **Contact details for complaints**

Version 2; Date 31/10/2019

If you have a complaint that you wish to direct to members of the research team, please contact:

PhD student Mr Lee Stringer

Email: lee.stringer@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Supervisors Prof. Tony Dundon and Dr. Stephen Mustchin

Email: tony.dundon@manchester.ac.uk Phone: +44 (0) 161 275 6339

Email: stephen.mustchin@manchester.ac.uk Phone: +44 (0) 161 306 8988

If you wish to make a formal complaint to someone independent of the research team or if you are not satisfied with the response you have gained from the researchers in the first instance then please contact:

The Research Governance and Integrity Officer, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning +44 (0) 161 275 2674.

If you wish to contact us about your data protection rights, please email dataprotection@manchester.ac.uk or write to The Information Governance Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, M13 9PL at the University and we will guide you through the process of exercising your rights.

You also have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office about complaints relating to your personal identifiable information Tel +44 (0) 303 123 1113
Web https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint

Contact Details

PhD student Mr Lee Stringer

Email: lee.stringer@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Supervisors Prof. Tony Dundon and Dr. Stephen Mustchin

Email: tony.dundon@manchester.ac.uk Phone: +44 (0) 161 275 6339

Email: stephen.mustchin@manchester.ac.uk Phone: +44 (0) 161 306 8988

Register and/ or Refer-A-Friend

Let me (Mr Lee Stringer) know if you have any queries or if you would like to participate, the next step would be a brief 4 - 5 minute questionnaire to confirm details here.

Or by copying and pasting the URL (http://ow.ly/fZXA50x3jQn) into your browser tab.

Version 2; Date 31/10/2019

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

Participant Consent Form

ONLINE FREELANCERS, DIGITAL LABOUR PLATFORMS AND CLIENTS:

A STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS

Consent Form

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

	Activities	Initials
1	I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet (Version 2, Date 31/10/2019) for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.	
2	I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself. I understand that it will not be possible to remove my data from the project once it has been anonymised and forms part of the data set. I agree to take part on this basis.	
3	I agree to the interviews being audio-recorded and transcribed.	
4	I agree to data being collected from my digital labour platform(s) profile page(s) and used in this study.	
5	I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books, reports or journals.	
6	I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.	
7	I agree that any anonymised data collected may be shared with researchers/ researchers at other institutions.	
8	I agree for my data to be used in future studies.	
9	I understand that there may be instances where during the course of the interview information is revealed which means that the researchers will be obliged to break confidentiality and this has been explained in more detail in the information sheet.	
10	I agree to take part in this study.	

Data Protection

Version 3; Date 03/01/2020

The personal information we collect and use to conduct this research will be processed in accordance with data protection law as explained in the Participant Information Sheet and the Privacy Notice for Research Participants.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of the person taking consent   Signature   Date

1 copy for the participant and 1 copy for the research team (original)

Version 3; Date 03/01/2020

Qualitative content analysis

The coding frame

1.   CONTROL OVER THE LABOUR PROCESS

1.1.   Present
1.1.1.   Collecting information

1.1.1.1. Registration, verification and approval

- *Must provide (and keep up-to-date) accurate information*
- *Information provided subject to approval (and periodically thereafter)*

1.1.1.2. Information collected through (and related to) use of service

1.1.2.   (Self-)employment status

1.1.2.1. Self-employment classification
1.1.2.2. DLP responsible for deciding whether to engage seller as employee or contractor
1.1.2.3. Buyer responsible for deciding whether to engage seller as employee or contractor
1.1.2.4. Agency account owner responsible for deciding whether to engage seller as employee or contractor

1.1.3.   Code of conduct must be followed

1.1.3.1. Bidding rules

- *Must not underbid to avoid paying DLP fees*
- *Must only bid on projects that you plan to complete*
- *Must not agree to do work which incapable of doing*

1.1.3.2. Payment rules

- *Minimum payment mandatory*
- *Must not request upfront payment*
- *Must use DLP services exclusively (for current and future work) to invoice, receive or pay amount due, or issue refunds to buyers*

1.1.3.3. User content rules

- *Must not post unacceptable content*
- *Must not advertise own website or service*
- *Must not post content that includes incomplete, false or inaccurate information*

1.1.3.4. Personal behaviour

- *Must act ethically and with integrity*
- *Must not harass, bully or discriminate*
- *Must not participate in any illegal practice*

1.1.3.5. Confidentiality rules

- *Must respect confidentiality and privacy*
- *Must not disclose information acquired (contingent)*

1.1.3.6. Communication rules

- *Must respond in a timely manner*
- *Must use DLP services exclusively for communication*
- *Must avoid exaggeration, derogatory remarks and inappropriate references*

1.1.3.7. Must not engage in fraud

- *Must declare (co/) workers*
- *Must not abuse feedback system*
- *Must not refer oneself for referral program*
- *Must not falsify hours, keystrokes or clicks recorded*
- *Must not copy, share, sell, trade or give away user account*
- *Must not lie about experience, skills or professional qualifications*

1.1.4.   Direction of work tasks

1.1.4.1. Control over working times

- *Time tracking*
- *Mandatory timeframe*
- *Mandatory progress updates*
- *Mandatory (optional) milestones*
- *Breakdown of billed hours (on request)*

1.1.4.2. Control over working methods

- *Screenshot sharing*
- *Must adhere to quality standards*
- *Must adhere to defined job requirements*
- *Mandatory breakdown of expected deliverables*
- *Mandatory description and examples of subjective elements*

1.1.5.   Evaluation of work done

1.1.5.1. Feedback automatically requested during work-in-progress
1.1.5.2. Feedback automatically requested upon completion of work

- *Rating from 1-5 and qualitative feedback*

1.1.6.   Rewarding of workers

1.1.6.1. Contests won
1.1.6.2. Bonus payments

1.1.7.   Disciplining of workers

1.1.7.1. Taking funds

- *Hold, refusal or reimbursement*

1.1.7.2. Disciplinary action

- *Demotion, suspension or dismissal*

1.1.8.   Obliging users to police one another

1.1.8.1. Obliged to report (offer of) circumvention
1.1.8.2. Obliged to report requested upfront payment

               1.1.8.3. Obliged to report unauthorised access or security breach
               1.1.8.4. Obliged to report false feedback or manipulative or coercive behaviour regarding feedback

1.1.9.   Access to buyers and tasks regulated

               1.1.9.1. Qualified projects
               1.1.9.2. Automated matching
               1.1.9.3. Proposal credits restricted

1.1.10.   In-house dispute resolution or arbitration

               1.1.10.1. Use of service(/s) contingent
               1.1.10.2. Must use/ follow DLP service(s)/ process

1.2.   Not (entirely) present
1.2.1.   Scope for job autonomy

               1.2.1.1. Autonomy over payment

                   -   *Discretion over budget type*
                   -   *Zero service fee for external clients and any hire contracts*
                   -   *Reduced fees for making referrals and continuity of engagement*

               1.2.1.2. Autonomy over buyers and tasks

                   -   *Optional extras for sale*
                   -   *Job requirements required upfront*
                   -   *Disclosure of financial transactions*

               1.2.1.3. Autonomy over employing (co/) workers
               1.2.1.4. Autonomy over work times and methods
               1.2.1.5. Full autonomy from DLP for conversion fee

1.2.2.   Securing consent (or compliance)

               1.2.2.1. Consent assumed through use
               1.2.2.2. Clicking accept when prompted

1.2.3.   Potential for labour indeterminacy (and misbehaviour)

               1.2.3.1. No guarantees

                   -   *Optional extras*
                   -   *Purported user content*
                   -   *Seller services rendered*
                   -   *Ability or willingness of buyer to pay for services rendered*

               1.2.3.2. May modify agreement
               1.2.3.3. DLP protection contingent
               1.2.3.4. Mandatory iterations on work delivered
               1.2.3.5. Payment or refund at discretion of DLP

1.2.4.   Scope for collective identity and voice

               1.2.4.1. As articulation of individual dissatisfaction
               1.2.4.2. As contribution to management decision-making
               1.2.4.3. As expression of collective organisation (collective identity)

2.   MISCELLANEOUS

The coding sheet: Results of main coding

Digital labour platform	Terms of service and *related policies*	Unit nº	Category for dim. 1.1	Category for dim. 1.2
Upwork	User Agreement	1.1		1.2.2.1
		1.2		1.2.2.2
		1.3	1.1.1.1	
		1.4	1.1.1.1	
		1.5	1.1.7.2	
		1.6	1.1.3.7	
		1.7	1.1.2.4	
		1.8	1.1.1.1	
		1.9	1.1.8.3	
		1.10		1.2.3.1
		1.11		1.2.3.1
		1.12	1.1.7.2	
		1.13	1.1.8.4	
		1.14	1.1.10.2	
		1.15	1.1.3.5	
		1.16	1.1.2.3	
		1.17	1.1.3.2	
		1.18	1.1.3.2	
		1.19	1.1.10.2	
		1.20	1.1.3.2	
		1.21	1.1.3.2	
		1.22	1.1.7.1	
		1.23	1.1.7.2	
		1.24		1.2.3.1
		1.25	1.1.3.2	
		1.26	1.1.8.1	
		1.27	1.1.7.2	
		1.28	1.1.7.1	
		1.29	1.1.3.6	
		1.30	1.1.7.2	
		1.31		1.2.1.5
		1.32		1.2.3.1
		1.33	1.1.7.1	
		1.34	1.1.7.2	
		1.35	1.1.7.1	
		1.36		1.2.3.2
	Escrow Instructions (made up of 5 documents)	1.37	1.1.3.2	
		1.38		1.2.3.2
		1.39		1.2.2.2
		1.40		1.2.2.1
		1.41	1.1.6.2	
		1.42	1.1.7.1	
		1.43		1.2.3.3
		1.44	1.1.4.2	
		1.45	1.1.4.1	
		1.46		1.2.3.3
		1.47	1.1.10.1	
		1.48		1.2.3.3
		1.49	1.1.10.1	
		1.50		1.2.3.3
		1.51	1.1.10.2	
		1.52	1.1.7.2	
		1.53	1.1.7.2	
		1.54		1.2.3.1
		1.55		1.2.3.2
		1.56		1.2.2.2
		1.57		1.2.2.1
		1.58		1.2.2.2
		1.59	1.1.3.2	
		1.60	1.1.7.1	
		1.61	1.1.10.1	
		1.62	1.1.10.1	
		1.63	1.1.10.1	
		1.64	1.1.10.1	
		1.65	1.1.10.1	
		1.66	1.1.10.1	
		1.67	1.1.7.2	
		1.68	1.1.10.1	

		1.69	1.1.10.2	
		1.70	1.1.10.1	
		1.71	1.1.10.1	
		1.72	1.1.10.1	
		1.73	1.1.10.1	
		1.74	1.1.10.1	
		1.75	1.1.10.1	
		1.76	1.1.10.1	
		1.77	1.1.7.2	
		1.78	1.1.10.1	
		1.79	1.1.10.2	
		1.80	1.1.10.1	
		1.81	1.1.7.2	
		1.82	1.1.7.2	
		1.83		1.2.3.1
		1.84		1.2.3.2
		1.85		1.2.2.2
		1.86	1.1.3.2	
		1.87	1.1.7.1	
		1.88	1.1.10.1	
		1.89	1.1.10.1	
		1.90	1.1.10.1	
		1.91	1.1.10.1	
		1.92	1.1.10.1	
		1.93	1.1.7.2	
		1.94		1.2.3.1
		1.95		1.2.3.2
		1.96		1.2.2.2
		1.97		1.2.2.1
		1.98	1.1.3.2	
		1.99	1.1.7.1	
		1.100	1.1.6.2	
		1.101	1.1.10.1	
		1.102	1.1.7.2	
		1.103		1.2.3.1
		1.104		1.2.3.2
		1.105		1.2.2.2
		1.106	1.1.3.2	
		1.107	1.1.3.2	
		1.108	1.1.7.1	
		1.109	1.1.6.2	
		1.110	1.1.10.1	
		1.111		1.2.3.1
		1.112	1.1.7.2	
		1.113		1.2.3.1
	Privacy Policy	1.114		1.2.4.1
		1.115	1.1.1.1	
		1.116	1.1.1.2	
		1.117	1.1.1.1	
		1.118	1.1.1.2	
		1.119	1.1.7.2	
		1.120	1.1.1.2	
		1.121	1.1.4.1	
		1.122	1.1.4.2	
		1.123	1.1.7.1	
		1.124	1.1.1.1	
		1.125	1.1.3.6	
		1.126		1.2.4.3
		1.127	1.1.5.2	
		1.128		1.2.4.2
		1.129	1.1.1.1	
		1.130	1.1.1.2	
		1.131	1.1.1.2	
		1.132	1.1.7.2	
		1.133		1.2.4.1
		1.134		1.2.3.2
		1.135	1.1.7.2	
	API Terms of Use	1.136		1.2.2.1
		1.137	1.1.1.1	
		1.138		1.2.4.2
		1.139	1.1.3.5	
		1.140	1.1.7.2	
		1.141	1.1.2.1	
	Fee and ACH Authorization Agreement	1.142		1.2.2.2
		1.143		1.2.2.1
		1.144		1.2.3.2

251

		1.145		1.2.1.1
		1.146		1.2.1.2
		1.147		1.2.3.2
		1.148		1.2.3.2
		1.149	1.1.7.1	
	Any Hire Terms	1.150		1.2.3.1
		1.151		1.2.3.1
		1.152	1.1.2.2	
		1.153	1.1.2.3	
		1.154		1.2.3.1
		1.155		1.2.1.3
		1.156		1.2.3.1
		1.157		1.2.3.1
		1.158		1.2.3.1
		1.159		1.2.1.1
	Terms of Use	1.160		1.2.2.1
		1.161		1.2.3.1
		1.162		1.2.4.1
		1.163	1.1.7.2	
		1.164	1.1.7.1	
		1.165	1.1.3.4	
		1.166		1.2.4.2
		1.167		1.2.3.1
		1.168		1.2.4.1
		1.169	1.1.3.3	
		1.170	1.1.3.7	
		1.171	1.1.3.4	
		1.172	1.1.3.4	
		1.173	1.1.3.3	
		1.174	1.1.3.7	
		1.175	1.1.3.7	
		1.176	1.1.3.4	
		1.177	1.1.3.7	
		1.178	1.1.3.7	
		1.179	1.1.3.6	
		1.180	1.1.3.3	
		1.181	1.1.3.4	
		1.182	1.1.7.2	
	Upwork Payroll Agreement	1.183		1.2.2.1
		1.184	1.1.3.2	
		1.185		1.2.1.5
		1.186		1.2.3.1
		1.187		1.2.3.1
		1.188		1.2.1.1
		1.189		1.2.1.1
		1.190	1.1.3.2	
		1.191	1.1.10.2	
	Optional Service Contract Terms	1.192	1.1.2.1	
		1.193		1.2.1.4
		1.194		1.2.1.3
		1.195	1.1.3.7	
		1.196	1.1.3.4	
		1.197	1.1.3.5	
	'Upwork Team' Software License Agreement	1.198		1.2.2.1
		1.199	1.1.3.4	
		1.200	1.1.4.2	
		1.201		1.2.3.2
		1.202		1.2.2.1
	Direct Contract Terms	1.203	1.1.3.2	
		1.204	1.1.3.2	
		1.205		1.2.3.1
		1.206		1.2.2.1
	Cookie Policy	1.207		1.2.2.1
		1.208		1.2.3.2
		1.209	1.1.1.2	
		1.210	1.1.7.2	
	Upwork Mark Use Guidelines	1.211		1.2.3.2
	Freelancer Membership Policy	1.212		1.2.3.2
		1.213		1.2.2.1
		1.214	1.1.9.3	
		1.215		1.2.3.2
		1.216		1.2.3.2

	Proprietary Rights Infringement Reporting Procedures	1.217		1.2.4.1
	Upwork Digital Accessibility Statement	1.218		1.2.4.1
		1.219		1.2.4.2
	Nondiscrimination Statement	1.220	1.1.3.4	
		1.221	1.1.7.2	
Freelancer	User Agreement	2.1		1.2.2.1
		2.2		1.2.2.1
		2.3		1.2.3.2
		2.4	1.1.1.1	
		2.5		1.2.2.1
		2.6	1.1.3.7	
		2.7	1.1.1.1	
		2.8	1.1.3.3	
		2.9	1.1.3.4	
		2.1	1.1.3.2	
		2.11	1.1.3.7	
		2.12		1.2.4.1
		2.13		1.2.3.2
		2.14	1.1.7.1	
		2.15		1.2.1.1
		2.16	1.1.3.4	
		2.17	1.1.3.3	
		2.18	1.1.3.7	
		2.19	1.1.7.2	
		2.20	1.1.3.3	
		2.21	1.1.3.6	
		2.22		1.2.4.3
		2.23	1.1.1.1	
		2.24	1.1.7.2	
		2.25	1.1.2.1	
		2.26	1.1.1.2	
		2.27	1.1.7.1	
		2.28	1.1.7.2	
		2.29	1.1.7.1	
		2.30	1.1.7.2	
		2.31	1.1.7.1	
		2.32	1.1.7.2	
		2.33	1.1.10.2	
		2.34	1.1.7.2	
		2.35	1.1.1.1	
		2.36	1.1.7.2	
		2.37	1.1.3.1	
		2.38	1.1.3.4	
		2.39	1.1.3.7	
		2.40	1.1.1.1	
		2.41	1.1.7.1	
		2.42	1.1.3.2	
		2.43	1.1.3.7	
		2.44	1.1.10.1	
		2.45	1.1.6.1	
		2.46	1.1.4.2	
		2.47	1.1.3.4	
		2.48	1.1.7.1	
		2.49	1.1.8.3	
		2.50	1.1.3.7	
		2.51		1.2.3.1
		2.52	1.1.7.2	
		2.53		1.2.3.2
		2.54	1.1.7.2	
		2.55	1.1.3.4	
		2.56	1.1.3.6	
	Freelancer Fees and Charges	2.57	1.1.3.2	
		2.58	1.1.3.2	
		2.59	1.1.9.3	
		2.60		1.2.1.2
		2.61		1.2.1.1
		2.62	1.1.10.1	
		2.63	1.1.7.1	
	Privacy Policy	2.64		1.2.3.2
		2.65	1.1.1.2	
		2.66	1.1.1.1	
		2.67	1.1.1.2	

		2.68	1.1.9.2	
		2.69		1.2.4.1
	API Terms and Conditions	2.70		1.2.2.1
		2.71	1.1.3.4	
		2.72		1.2.3.2
		2.73	1.1.10.2	
	Milestone Dispute Resolution Policy	2.74	1.1.10.2	
		2.75	1.1.10.1	
		2.76	1.1.10.1	
		2.77	1.1.10.1	
		2.78	1.1.10.1	
	Know Your Customer and ID Verification Policy	2.79	1.1.1.1	
		2.80	1.1.7.2	
		2.81	1.1.1.1	
		2.82		1.2.4.1
	Copyright Infringement Policy	2.83		1.2.4.1
		2.84	1.1.7.2	
	Code of Conduct	2.85	1.1.7.2	
		2.86	1.1.3.4	
		2.87	1.1.3.5	
		2.88	1.1.3.7	
		2.89	1.1.3.6	
		2.90	1.1.3.1	
		2.91	1.1.3.2	
		2.92	1.1.3.4	
		2.93	1.1.3.3	
		2.94	1.1.3.5	
		2.95	1.1.3.6	
		2.96	1.1.3.7	
		2.97	1.1.3.6	
		2.98	1.1.3.1	
		2.99	1.1.3.4	
		2.100	1.1.3.3	
		2.101	1.1.3.7	
	Exam Terms and Conditions	2.102	1.1.9.1	
Peopleperhour	People Per Hour - Terms & Conditions	3.1		1.2.2.1
		3.2	1.1.3.2	
		3.3	1.1.4.1	
		3.4	1.1.3.6	
		3.5	1.1.4.1	
		3.6	1.1.7.2	
		3.7	1.1.7.2	
		3.8		1.2.3.4
		3.9	1.1.3.2	
		3.10	1.1.7.1	
		3.11	1.1.3.2	
		3.12	1.1.7.2	
		3.13	1.1.8.1	
		3.14	1.1.1.1	
		3.15	1.1.3.7	
		3.16	1.1.7.2	
		3.17	1.1.3.7	
		3.18	1.1.3.6	
		3.19	1.1.4.1	
		3.20	1.1.3.6	
		3.21	1.1.4.1	
		3.22	1.1.7.2	
		3.23	1.1.3.6	
		3.24	1.1.5.2	
		3.25		1.2.3.4
		3.26	1.1.4.1	
		3.27	1.1.4.1	
		3.28	1.1.4.2	
		3.29	1.1.3.6	
		3.30	1.1.4.1	
		3.31	1.1.3.6	
		3.32	1.1.4.1	
		3.33	1.1.7.2	
		3.34	1.1.3.6	
		3.35		1.2.3.4

		3.36		1.2.3.3
		3.37		1.2.3.3
		3.38	1.1.4.2	
		3.39	1.1.3.6	
		3.40	1.1.3.1	
		3.41	1.1.3.4	
		3.42	1.1.9.2	
		3.43	1.1.3.2	
		3.44	1.1.8.2	
		3.45	1.1.7.2	
		3.46	1.1.3.2	
		3.47	1.1.7.2	
		3.48	1.1.7.1	
		3.49	1.1.8.1	
		3.50	1.1.1.1	
		3.51	1.1.7.1	
		3.52	1.1.7.2	
		3.53	1.1.5.2	
		3.54	1.1.3.7	
		3.55	1.1.8.4	
		3.56		1.2.3.3
		3.57		1.2.3.5
		3.58	1.1.7.2	
		3.59		1.2.3.3
		3.60		1.2.3.2
		3.61		1.2.3.1
		3.62		1.2.3.1
		3.63	1.1.3.2	
		3.64	1.1.9.3	
		3.65		1.2.1.2
		3.66		1.2.1.1
		3.67	1.1.3.7	
		3.68	1.1.7.2	
		3.69	1.1.1.2	
	Terms of website use	3.70		1.2.2.1
		3.71		1.2.3.2
		3.72	1.1.7.2	
		3.73	1.1.7.1	
		3.74		1.2.3.2
		3.75	1.1.1.1	
		3.76		1.2.3.1
		3.77		1.2.2.1
		3.78	1.1.1.1	
		3.79	1.1.3.4	
		3.80	1.1.3.7	
		3.81	1.1.3.3	
		3.82	1.1.3.5	
		3.83	1.1.3.4	
		3.84	1.1.7.2	
		3.85		1.2.3.2
		3.86		1.2.4.1
	Privacy Policy	3.87	1.1.1.1	
		3.88	1.1.1.2	
		3.89		1.2.4.1
		3.90	1.1.1.2	
		3.91		1.2.4.1
		3.92		1.2.3.2
	Posting policies (made up of 4 documents)	3.93	1.1.3.4	
		3.94	1.1.3.3	
		3.95	1.1.7.2	
		3.96	1.1.3.6	
		3.97	1.1.3.3	
		3.98	1.1.2.1	
		3.99	1.1.3.7	
		3.100	1.1.3.4	
		3.101	1.1.3.3	
		3.102	1.1.4.2	
		3.103	1.1.4.1	
		3.104	1.1.3.2	
		3.105	1.1.3.6	
		3.106	1.1.3.4	
		3.107	1.1.3.3	
		3.108	1.1.3.7	
		3.109	1.1.3.6	
		3.110	1.1.3.7	
		3.111	1.1.3.3	

		3.112	1.1.7.2	
		3.113	1.1.7.2	
		3.114	1.1.3.6	
		3.115	1.1.3.6	
		3.116	1.1.3.2	
		3.117	1.1.7.2	
		3.118	1.1.8.1	
		3.119	1.1.3.3	
Guru	Terms of Service	4.1		1.2.2.1
		4.2		1.2.3.2
		4.3	1.1.4.2	
		4.4	1.1.1.1	
		4.5	1.1.8.3	
		4.6	1.1.9.3	
		4.7		1.2.3.2
		4.8	1.1.4.2	
		4.9	1.1.2.1	
		4.10		1.2.3.1
		4.11	1.1.7.2	
		4.12	1.1.7.2	
		4.13		1.2.3.2
		4.14	1.1.3.2	
		4.15	1.1.7.1	
		4.16	1.1.7.1	
		4.17		1.2.3.1
		4.18	1.1.7.1	
		4.19	1.1.3.2	
		4.20	1.1.8.1	
		4.21	1.1.7.1	
		4.22		1.2.3.3
		4.23	1.1.10.2	
		4.24		1.2.2.1
		4.25	1.1.7.2	
		4.26	1.1.7.1	
		4.27	1.1.3.3	
		4.28		1.2.3.1
		4.29	1.1.7.2	
		4.30		1.2.4.1
		4.31	1.1.3.7	
		4.32	1.1.3.4	
		4.33		1.2.3.1
		4.34	1.1.3.7	
		4.35		1.2.4.1
	Privacy Policy	4.36	1.1.1.1	
		4.37	1.1.1.2	
		4.38		1.2.2.2
		4.39	1.1.1.2	
		4.40	1.1.1.2	
		4.41		1.2.3.2
		4.42		1.2.2.1
		4.43		1.2.1.2
	IP Policy	4.44	1.1.3.7	
		4.45	1.1.3.4	
		4.46	1.1.7.2	

Appendix N: Template analysis

<u>The final template</u>

1.   CONTROL OVER THE LABOUR PROCESS

1.1.   DLP control
1.1.1.   Reviewing, screening and sifting

    1.1.1.1. Suitability (lax)

        1.1.1.1.1. Optional skill testing

    1.1.1.2. Identity verification

        1.1.1.2.1. Email address
        1.1.1.2.2. Name or company name
        1.1.1.2.3. Optional face-to-face video calling
        1.1.1.2.4. Location verification (e.g. utility bill)
        1.1.1.2.5. Government-approved photo identification

    1.1.1.3. Application reviewed and approved by moderation team
    1.1.1.4. Application reviewed and approved by automated process

1.1.2.   DLP terms of services (direct technical control and indirect bureaucratic and concertive control)

    1.1.2.1. Rewarding engagement

        1.1.2.1.1. Lowering of fees
        1.1.2.1.2. More status or work
        1.1.2.1.3. Policing, safety and security

            1.1.2.1.3.1. Payment methods

                1.1.2.1.3.1.1. Escrow account
                1.1.2.1.3.1.2. Milestone payment

            1.1.2.1.3.2. Dispute resolution and/ or arbitration service

                1.1.2.1.3.2.1. Judge, jury and executioner
                1.1.2.1.3.2.2. Buyer-seller dispute mechanism to fall back on

    1.1.2.2. Consequences of (non-)compliance

        1.1.2.2.1. Punitive action

            1.1.2.2.1.1. Demotion
            1.1.2.2.1.2. Dismissal
            1.1.2.2.1.3. Suspension

        1.1.2.2.2. Automated messaging

            1.1.2.2.2.1. Automatic textual prompts
            1.1.2.2.2.2. Periodic performance evaluations

        1.1.2.2.3. Re. seller dependency (on DLP)

    1.1.2.3. Negotiated consensus among sellers

1.1.2.3.1. Policing one another
1.1.2.3.2. Ethics and/ or integrity (it is the right thing to do)

1.2.   Buyer control
1.2.1.   Reviewing, screening and sifting

1.2.1.1. Means via DLP

1.2.1.1.1. Utilising search features
1.2.1.1.2. Proposals or competing entries
1.2.1.1.3. Re. user profile and activity history

1.2.1.2. Taking the initiative

1.2.1.2.1. Trial period
1.2.1.2.2. Requesting a work sample
1.2.1.2.3. Requesting on-the-job experience
1.2.1.2.4. Preparation and interviewing (ongoing)
1.2.1.2.5. Seeking other information sources (e.g. seller's own webpage)
1.2.1.2.6. Requesting formal learning qualifications contingent on skill requirement

1.2.1.3. Preferences (or criteria) guided by tacit knowledge (contingent)

1.2.1.3.1. DLP, country, user profile and activity history, proposal or competing entry

1.2.1.4. Fail-safe

1.2.1.4.1. Ability to say no and foot voting (contingent)
1.2.1.4.2. Re. buyer-seller dispute mechanism to fall back on

1.2.2.   Algorithmic management (direct simple and technical control, indirect normative control and responsible autonomy approaches)

1.2.2.1. Allocation of work

1.2.2.1.1. Kick-off meeting

1.2.2.1.1.1. Offers of continuity or higher levels of pay
1.2.2.1.1.2. Unilaterally setting meetings, reviews and deadlines, or milestones

1.2.2.1.2. Breaking the work task down
1.2.2.1.3. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and expectations) and changes

1.2.2.2. Undertaking of work

1.2.2.2.1. Monitoring sellers

1.2.2.2.1.1. On-site
1.2.2.2.1.2. DLP-specific tools (e.g. milestone setting, screen sharing, time tracking or capping)
1.2.2.2.1.3. None DLP specific tools (e.g. screen sharing, online video calling, remote PC login and Google Docs)

1.2.2.2.2. Sending reminders

1.2.2.2.3. Requesting updates
1.2.2.2.4. Re. in-house training
1.2.2.2.5. Requesting templates
1.2.2.2.6. Non-disclosure agreement
1.2.2.2.7. Corporate guidelines and consistency
1.2.2.2.8. Responsible autonomy (for tried-and-tested sellers)

1.2.2.3. Completion of work

1.2.2.3.1. Withholding payment
1.2.2.3.2. Leaving seller feedback

2. SKILLS

2.1. Skill in the person
2.1.1. Education and training (hard skills)

2.1.1.1. Formal learning (taught)

2.1.1.1.1. Learning institutions
2.1.1.1.2. On-the-job experience

2.1.1.1.2.1. In-house training

2.1.1.1.2.1.1. Optional (via DLP)
2.1.1.1.2.1.2. Non-optional (via buyer)

2.1.1.1.2.2. Ratings and reviews

2.1.1.1.3. Personal research (on- or off-the-job)

2.1.1.1.3.1. Offline (e.g. club, institute)
2.1.1.1.3.2. Online (e.g. YouTube, online communities)

2.1.1.2. Informal learning (self-taught)

2.1.1.2.1. On-the-job experience

2.1.1.2.1.1. (Re)training
2.1.1.2.1.2. Tacit knowledge

2.1.1.2.2. Personal research (on- or off-the-job)

2.1.1.2.2.1. Museum (e.g. art)
2.1.1.2.2.2. Library (e.g. books)
2.1.1.2.2.3. Games console (e.g. games)
2.1.1.2.2.4. Online (e.g. Google, online communities)

2.1.1.3. Factors for engagement: Staying ahead of the curve

2.1.1.3.1. Finding a niche
2.1.1.3.2. Upskilling and reskilling
2.1.1.3.3. Re. (circumventing) labour competition
2.1.1.3.4. Re. (circumventing) deskilling and degradation

2.1.2. (Un)important for buyer when reviewing, screening and sifting

2.1.2.1. Hard (and soft) skills
2.1.2.2. Re. requesting on-the-job experience
2.1.2.3. Formal learning qualifications not typically required

2.1.2.4. Re. requesting formal learning qualifications contingent on skill requirement

2.2. Skill in the job
2.2.1. High skill level, high cost
2.2.2. Deskilling and degradation

2.2.2.1. Skills being made obsolete

2.2.2.1.1. Go out of fashion
2.2.2.1.2. Technological change

2.2.2.2. Task, job or project fragmentation
2.2.2.3. Eliminating or reducing existing skill

2.2.2.3.1. Automation
2.2.2.3.2. Buyers wish to acquire skill

2.2.3. Re. buyer demands and expectations (divergent interests)
2.2.4. Searching and matching undermined (potential for skills mismatch)

2.2.4.1. Re. suitability (lax)
2.2.4.2. Re. demonstrating skill
2.2.4.3. Re. fake it until you make it
2.2.4.4. Re. (lack of) technical know-how
2.2.4.5. Re. say "yes" – then learn how to do it later
2.2.4.6. Re. five-star ratings are the norm, rather than the exception
2.2.4.7. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and expectations) and changes

3. JOB AUTONOMY

3.1. Mobility power: Limited initiative and discretion
3.1.1. Tendering for different contacts limited

3.1.1.1. Scope for autonomy

3.1.1.1.1. Long tenure
3.1.1.1.2. Re. coping strategies
3.1.1.1.3. Re. skill in the person
3.1.1.1.4. Re. speculate to accumulate
3.1.1.1.5. Re. contextual (dis)advantage
3.1.1.1.6. Re. (just) a means of enhancing main source of income

3.1.1.2. Autonomy constrained

3.1.1.2.1. Re. DLP fees
3.1.1.2.2. Limited tenure
3.1.1.2.3. Re. coping strategies
3.1.1.2.4. Re. labour competition
3.1.1.2.5. Re. demonstrating skill
3.1.1.2.6. Re. subcontracting (issues)
3.1.1.2.7. Re. deskilling and degradation
3.1.1.2.8. Re. intra- and inter-role conflict
3.1.1.2.9. Re. regulated and constrained first contact
3.1.1.2.10. Continuity sought and encouraged (but on buyer's terms)

3.1.1.2.10.1. DLP encourage continuity
3.1.1.2.10.2. Uncertainty with new people
3.1.1.2.10.3. Re. investing in our relationship

      3.1.1.2.10.4. Go-to seller (hints of permanence)
      3.1.1.2.10.5. Re. ad hoc buyer-seller relationship
      3.1.1.2.10.6. Re. discount for new and repeat buyers
      3.1.1.2.10.7. Bread-and-butter buyer (hints of permanence)

    3.1.1.2.11. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and
      expectations) and changes
    3.1.1.2.12. Re. (buyer-seller) reviewing, screening and sifting (choice
      contingent on two-way process)

3.2.   Effort power: Limited initiative and discretion
3.2.1.   Negotiating prices for services limited

   3.2.1.1. Scope for autonomy

     3.2.1.1.1. Long tenure
     3.2.1.1.2. Re. coping strategies
     3.2.1.1.3. Re. skill in the person
     3.2.1.1.4. Re. speculate to accumulate
     3.2.1.1.5. Re. contextual (dis)advantage
     3.2.1.1.6. Re. digital work as social endeavour
     3.2.1.1.7. Re. buyer demands and expectations (divergent interests)
     3.2.1.1.8. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and
      expectations) and changes

   3.2.1.2. Sellers struggle to negotiate

     3.2.1.2.1. DLP fees
     3.2.1.2.2. Limited tenure
     3.2.1.2.3. Re. labour competition
     3.2.1.2.4. Re. subcontracting (issues)
     3.2.1.2.5. Re. investing in our relationship
     3.2.1.2.6. Regulated and constrained first contact
     3.2.1.2.7. Re. buyer demands and expectations (divergent interests)
     3.2.1.2.8. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and
      expectations) and changes
     3.2.1.2.9. Re. (buyer-seller) reviewing, screening and sifting (choice
      contingent on two-way process)

3.2.2.   Work method autonomy limited

   3.2.2.1. Scope for autonomy

     3.2.2.1.1. Long tenure
     3.2.2.1.2. Re. coping strategies
     3.2.2.1.3. Re. skill in the person
     3.2.2.1.4. Re. responsible autonomy
     3.2.2.1.5. Greater autonomy with repeat buyers
     3.2.2.1.6. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and
      expectations) and changes

   3.2.2.2. Lack of control over content of work

     3.2.2.2.1. Limited tenure
     3.2.2.2.2. Geographical constraints
     3.2.2.2.3. Re. investing in our relationship
     3.2.2.2.4. Re. regulated and constrained first contact
     3.2.2.2.5. Re. (buyer) control over the labour process
     3.2.2.2.6. Re. buyer demands and expectations (divergent interests)

3.2.2.2.7. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and expectations) and changes

3.2.2.2.8. Re. (buyer-seller) reviewing, screening and sifting (choice contingent on two-way process)

3.2.3. Work scheduling autonomy limited

3.2.3.1. Scope for autonomy

3.2.3.1.1. Long tenure
3.2.3.1.2. Re. coping strategies
3.2.3.1.3. Re. skill in the person
3.2.3.1.4. Re. responsible autonomy
3.2.3.1.5. Greater autonomy with repeat buyers
3.2.3.1.6. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and expectations) and changes

3.2.3.2. Lack of control over working times

3.2.3.2.1. Limited tenure
3.2.3.2.2. Intra- and inter-role conflict

3.2.3.2.2.1. Families
3.2.3.2.2.2. Personal choice
3.2.3.2.2.3. Insufficient sleep
3.2.3.2.2.4. Re. (DLP) time drain
3.2.3.2.2.5. Working irregular hours
3.2.3.2.2.6. Working unsociable hours
3.2.3.2.2.7. Cannot afford to step away
3.2.3.2.2.8. DLP (en)forcing engagement
3.2.3.2.2.9. Work intensification or overwork
3.2.3.2.2.10. Juggling (past, current and new) buyers a challenge
3.2.3.2.2.11. Re. (just) a means of enhancing main source of income

3.2.3.2.3. Re. subcontracting (issues)
3.2.3.2.4. Re. investing in our relationship
3.2.3.2.5. Re. regulated and constrained first contact
3.2.3.2.6. Re. (buyer) control over the labour process
3.2.3.2.7. Re. buyer demands and expectations (divergent interests)
3.2.3.2.8. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and expectations) and changes
3.2.3.2.9. Re. (buyer-seller) reviewing, screening and sifting (choice contingent on two-way process)

4. CONSENT AND/ OR RESISTANCE AT WORK

4.1. Coping strategies
4.1.1. Reviewing, screening and sifting

4.1.1.1. Means via DLP

4.1.1.1.1. Posts

4.1.1.1.1.1. Invitations
4.1.1.1.1.2. Utilising search features

4.1.1.1.2. User profile and activity history

4.1.1.2. Taking the initiative

    4.1.1.2.1. Re. kick-off meeting
    4.1.1.2.2. Private and public questions
    4.1.1.2.3. Creating and utilising ad hoc tools
    4.1.1.2.4. Re. meeting (sellers) virtually (on- or off-the-job)
    4.1.1.2.5. Re. meeting (sellers) in-person (on- or off-the-job)
    4.1.1.2.6. Seeking other information sources (once in contact)

4.1.1.3. Preferences (or criteria) guided by tacit knowledge (contingent)

    4.1.1.3.1. Gut feeling
    4.1.1.3.2. Must foresee a relationship of mutual benefit
    4.1.1.3.3. DLP, country, industry, buyer, skill, task, job, project or contest, competition, post type, price and payment

4.1.1.4. Fail-safe

    4.1.1.4.1. Ability to say no and foot voting (contingent)
    4.1.1.4.2. Re. buyer-seller dispute mechanism to fall back on

4.1.2.   Managing buyer demands and expectations (contingent)

4.1.2.1. Kick-off meeting

    4.1.2.1.1. Minute
    4.1.2.1.2. Clarification
    4.1.2.1.3. Draw the line
    4.1.2.1.4. Setting milestones
    4.1.2.1.5. Undisclosed scepticism
    4.1.2.1.6. Setting clear deliverables
    4.1.2.1.7. Setting realistic expectations
    4.1.2.1.8. 'I'll say if I can't do something'
    4.1.2.1.9. Rewriting post because expert
    4.1.2.1.10. Lying (in one way or another)

        4.1.2.1.10.1. Exaggerating deadlines
        4.1.2.1.10.2. Unnecessary or extra work
        4.1.2.1.10.3. Re. fake it until you make it
        4.1.2.1.10.4. Rewriting post to fit skill set
        4.1.2.1.10.5. Portraying an acceptable truth
        4.1.2.1.10.6. Rewriting post because easier
        4.1.2.1.10.7. Say "yes" – then learn how to do it later

    4.1.2.1.11. Re. price and payment strategies
    4.1.2.1.12. Establishing regular communication
    4.1.2.1.13. Reluctant to sidestep DLP (in part or fully)
    4.1.2.1.14. Re. explaining and justifying why/ why not
    4.1.2.1.15. Ability to say no and foot voting (contingent)

4.1.2.2. On-the-job responses

    4.1.2.2.1. Go-fast
    4.1.2.2.2. Go-slow
    4.1.2.2.3. Self-blame
    4.1.2.2.4. Absenteeism
    4.1.2.2.5. Jumping ship
    4.1.2.2.6. Renegotiation
    4.1.2.2.7. Staying organised
    4.1.2.2.8. Utilising templates

4.1.2.2.9. Anticipating needs
4.1.2.2.10. Leaving buyer feedback
4.1.2.2.11. Lying (in one way or another)

    4.1.2.2.11.1. Progress
    4.1.2.2.11.2. Excuses for late work
    4.1.2.2.11.3. Portraying an acceptable truth
    4.1.2.2.11.4. Re. employing workers in addition to, or in place of, themselves

4.1.2.2.12. Offering a refund (contingent)
4.1.2.2.13. Re. investing in our relationship
4.1.2.2.14. Deliver what buyer can understand
4.1.2.2.15. Accept or reject ratings and reviews
4.1.2.2.16. Requesting good ratings and reviews

    4.1.2.2.16.1. Through compromise
    4.1.2.2.16.2. Through direct means
    4.1.2.2.16.3. Through indirect means
    4.1.2.2.16.4. Through coercive means

4.1.2.2.17. Working with buyer to game the system
4.1.2.2.18. Re. explaining and justifying why/ why not
4.1.2.2.19. Ability to say no and foot voting (contingent)
4.1.2.2.20. Re. buyer-seller dispute mechanism to fall back on (contingent)

    4.1.2.2.20.1. Reluctant if sidestepped
    4.1.2.2.20.2. Re. (but do not want to undermine) investing in our relationship

4.1.2.2.21. No one reads the terms of service (until they have to)
4.1.2.2.22. Employing workers in addition to, or in place of, themselves

4.1.3.   Price and payment strategies

    4.1.3.1. Pricing methods necessary

        4.1.3.1.1. Upselling
        4.1.3.1.2. Price bundling
        4.1.3.1.3. Competitive pricing
        4.1.3.1.4. Value-based pricing
        4.1.3.1.5. Negotiation techniques
        4.1.3.1.6. Workload-based pricing
        4.1.3.1.7. Fixed price over per hour
        4.1.3.1.8. Price includes expenditure
        4.1.3.1.9. Lying (in one way or another)

            4.1.3.1.9.1. Inflating the price
            4.1.3.1.9.2. Price discrimination
            4.1.3.1.9.3. Price allows room for error
            4.1.3.1.9.4. Portraying an acceptable truth
            4.1.3.1.9.5. Price includes anticipated post changes
            4.1.3.1.9.6. Re. price includes expenditure (contingent)
            4.1.3.1.9.7. Estimate over bid/ dummy amount (contingent)

        4.1.3.1.10. Price based on suggested rates
        4.1.3.1.11. Discount for new and repeat buyers
        4.1.3.1.12. Mid-task, job or project price increase

4.1.3.1.13. Re. explaining and justifying why/ why not
4.1.3.1.14. Ability to say no and foot voting (contingent)

4.1.3.2. Payment methods necessary

4.1.3.2.1. Upfront payment

4.1.3.2.1.1. Re. escrow account
4.1.3.2.1.2. Re. milestone payment

4.1.4. Cutting DLP out (in part and/ or fully)

4.1.4.1. Bypassing service fee
4.1.4.2. Bypassing portfolio tool
4.1.4.3. Bypassing payment tool
4.1.4.4. Bypassing communication tool

4.2. **Speculate to accumulate**
4.2.1. Investing in tools

4.2.1.1. Acquiring software

4.2.1.1.1. Enhances quality, is faster and saves money

4.2.1.2. Acquiring hardware

4.2.1.2.1. Enhances quality, is faster and saves money
4.2.1.2.2. Meeting buyers' expectations of professional equipment

4.2.1.3. Subscription services (e.g. Adobe, VPN)

4.2.2. Investing in our relationship

4.2.2.1. Going the extra mile
4.2.2.2. Free or discounted work

4.2.2.2.1. Aftercare
4.2.2.2.2. Free add-ons
4.2.2.2.3. Re. deviating buyers
4.2.2.2.4. Re. free no obligation consultation
4.2.2.2.5. Providing a work sample (contingent)
4.2.2.2.6. Re. discount for new and repeat buyers

4.2.2.3. Keeping buyers satisfied = positive outcome

4.2.2.3.1. Bonus
4.2.2.3.2. Repeat and new buyers

4.2.2.3.2.1. Word-of-mouth marketing
4.2.2.3.2.2. 'This will lead to more work'

4.2.2.3.3. Re. free or discounted work (pays off)
4.2.2.3.4. Re. greater autonomy with repeat buyers
4.2.2.3.5. Re. (maintaining) user profile and activity history (important)

4.2.2.4. Keeping buyers updated on off-the-job whereabouts
4.2.2.5. Re. buyer demands and expectations (divergent interests)

4.2.3. Standing out from the crowd

4.2.3.1. Means via DLP

      4.2.3.1.1. Purchasing optional extras
      4.2.3.1.2. Purchasing membership = perks

4.2.3.2. Taking the initiative

      4.2.3.2.1. Adverts
      4.2.3.2.2. Widening the net
      4.2.3.2.3. Tailoring proposals
      4.2.3.2.4. Warning off buyers
      4.2.3.2.5. Providing a resume
      4.2.3.2.6. 'It's a numbers game'
      4.2.3.2.7. Providing testimonials
      4.2.3.2.8. Providing a work sample
      4.2.3.2.9. Advertising quick turnaround
      4.2.3.2.10. Checking out the competition
      4.2.3.2.11. Describing and selling oneself
      4.2.3.2.12. Free no obligation consultation
      4.2.3.2.13. Adapting language to audience
      4.2.3.2.14. Re. price and payment strategies
      4.2.3.2.15. Contacting past buyer with a deal
      4.2.3.2.16. Research buyer and show an interest
      4.2.3.2.17. Providing formal learning qualifications
      4.2.3.2.18. Creating and utilising personal online space
      4.2.3.2.19. Explaining and justifying poor ratings and reviews
      4.2.3.2.20. Competing entry (contest) over proposal (bidding)

4.2.3.3. Fake it until you make it

      4.2.3.3.1. Re. (engaging in) bogus user activity

4.2.4.   The basics of promoting oneself

4.2.4.1. Means via DLP (free of charge)

      4.2.4.1.1. Competing entry
      4.2.4.1.2. Proposal (bidding limit)
      4.2.4.1.3. Re. user profile and activity history

4.3.   **Collective identity and voice (but with limitations)**
4.3.1.   Digital work as social endeavour

4.3.1.1. Meeting virtually (on- or off-the-job)

      4.3.1.1.1. Old acquaintances
      4.3.1.1.2. Online communities

            4.3.1.1.2.1. Web communities or communication tools via DLP
            4.3.1.1.2.2. Web communities or communication tools outside of DLP (e.g. Discord, Discourse, Facebook, GitHub, Instagram, IRC, Reddit, Slack, Stack Exchange, Skype, Stack Overflow, WhatsApp, YouTube, Zoom)

      4.3.1.1.3. Setting oneself up as a buyer
      4.3.1.1.4. Buyers connecting sellers via DLP

4.3.1.2. Meeting in-person (on- or off-the-job)

4.3.1.2.1. Local
4.3.1.2.2. (In)formal gatherings

4.3.1.2.2.1. Institute
4.3.1.2.2.2. Dribbble Meetups
4.3.1.2.2.3. Facebook Group Event

4.3.1.3. Factors for engagement: Building a support network

4.3.1.3.1. Making connections

4.3.1.3.1.1. Re. meeting virtually (on- or off-the-job)
4.3.1.3.1.2. Re. meeting in-person (on- or off-the-job)

4.3.1.3.2. Helping each other out

4.3.1.3.2.1. Mentoring
4.3.1.3.2.2. Translation
4.3.1.3.2.3. Peer review
4.3.1.3.2.4. Providing work
4.3.1.3.2.5. Working in teams
4.3.1.3.2.6. Recommendations
4.3.1.3.2.7. Information-sharing
4.3.1.3.2.8. Re. inflating the price
4.3.1.3.2.9. Growing a community
4.3.1.3.2.10. Partnership (or agency)

4.3.2.   Digital work as impersonal social endeavour

4.3.2.1. 'Mechanistic' dehumanisation

4.3.2.1.1. Nobody cares
4.3.2.1.2. DLPs are a cold service
4.3.2.1.3. Seller treated as a commodity

4.3.2.2. Ad hoc buyer-seller relationship

4.3.2.2.1. Disposable labour on demand
4.3.2.2.2. Buyer-seller interaction transient
4.3.2.2.3. Uncertain, unstable and insecure

4.3.2.3. Communication barriers and social isolation

4.3.2.3.1. Homeworking
4.3.2.3.2. Glued to a screen
4.3.2.3.3. Geographical constraints
4.3.2.3.4. Seller-seller coalescing avoided

4.3.2.3.4.1. Time drain
4.3.2.3.4.2. Trust issues
4.3.2.3.4.3. Imposter syndrome
4.3.2.3.4.4. Buyers might be put off
4.3.2.3.4.5. Expectation of providing work
4.3.2.3.4.6. 'You're not colleagues, you're competition'

4.3.2.3.5. Outside communication tools prohibited
4.3.2.3.6. Buyers specify and avoid languages or regions
4.3.2.3.7. DLP communications restricted and constrained

4.3.3.   Lack of voice but overcoming, circumventing, adapting, resisting or yielding

4.3.3.1. Re. skill in the job
4.3.3.2. Re. coping strategies
4.3.3.3. Re. speculate to accumulate
4.3.3.4. Re. digital work as social endeavour
4.3.3.5. No choice but to comply with (or sidestep) DLP

    4.3.3.5.1. Scope for voice (unheard)

        4.3.3.5.1.1. As articulation of individual dissatisfaction
        4.3.3.5.1.2. As contribution to management decision-making

    4.3.3.5.2. Views and concerns (go un)heard
    4.3.3.5.3. Unilaterally imposed terms of service

4.3.3.6. Little support for voice as expression of collective organisation

5. SOURCE OF CONFLICT

5.1. Buyer-seller

5.1.1. Employment status (blurring: Bogus) self-employment

5.1.1.1. Self-employment
5.1.1.2. Re. work method autonomy limited
5.1.1.3. Re. lack of control over working times
5.1.1.4. Re. negotiating prices for services limited
5.1.1.5. Re. tendering for different contacts limited
5.1.1.6. Re. continuity sought and encouraged (but on buyer's terms)
5.1.1.7. Re. (some) employing workers in addition to, or in place of, themselves

5.1.2. Buyer demands and expectations (divergent interests)

5.1.2.1. Economical solution

    5.1.2.1.1. Free work

        5.1.2.1.1.1. Re. competing entry
        5.1.2.1.1.2. Requesting endless revisions
        5.1.2.1.1.3. Re. requesting a work sample

    5.1.2.1.2. Make it cheaper

        5.1.2.1.2.1. Static pricing
        5.1.2.1.2.2. Negotiation tactics
        5.1.2.1.2.3. Lack of buying power
        5.1.2.1.2.4. Re. requesting templates

    5.1.2.1.3. Bid over estimate or quote
    5.1.2.1.4. Exploiting contextual differences
    5.1.2.1.5. Re. cutting DLP out (in part and/ or fully)

5.1.2.2. 'I need it done yesterday'
5.1.2.3. Specific languages or regions
5.1.2.4. Prefers if work done personally
5.1.2.5. Re. ad hoc buyer-seller relationship
5.1.2.6. Cutting DLP out (in part and/ or fully)
5.1.2.7. Re. go-to seller (hints of permanence)
5.1.2.8. Re. (buyer) control over the labour process
5.1.2.9. Good work, high performance and productivity

5.1.2.10. Give me what I want and not what I need (or vice versa)

    5.1.2.10.1. 'If it works, then leave it alone'
    5.1.2.10.2. Subjective (divergent) perceptions of work produced
    5.1.2.10.3. Re. post types (as initial expression of demands and expectations) and changes

5.1.2.11. Task, job, project or contest (from scratch, template or start over)

5.1.3.   Post types (as initial expression of demands and expectations) and changes

5.1.3.1. Miscommunicated

    5.1.3.1.1. (Un)decided
    5.1.3.1.2. Mistakes, unclear, inadequate
    5.1.3.1.3. Re. lack of technical know-how (buyer)

5.1.3.2. Well-communicated

    5.1.3.2.1. Decided
    5.1.3.2.2. Correct, clear, adequate
    5.1.3.2.3. Re. ~~lack of~~ technical know-how (buyer)

5.1.3.3. Flexible or inflexible

    5.1.3.3.1. Buyer (wrongly) knows best
    5.1.3.3.2. Deviating sellers (beginning)

        5.1.3.3.2.1. Re. rewriting post to fit skill set
        5.1.3.3.2.2. Re. rewriting post because easier
        5.1.3.3.2.3. Re. rewriting post because expert

    5.1.3.3.3. Re. buyer demands and expectations (divergent interests)

5.1.3.4. Evolving and drifting

    5.1.3.4.1. Iterative process
    5.1.3.4.2. Deviating buyers

        5.1.3.4.2.1. Change of mind
        5.1.3.4.2.2. Adjusting and adding

    5.1.3.4.3. Deviating sellers (midway)

        5.1.3.4.3.1. Price increase
        5.1.3.4.3.2. Change of plan

5.1.3.5. Bogus and dead end

    5.1.3.5.1. Test the water
    5.1.3.5.2. Not getting back

5.1.4.   Buyers knowledge

5.1.4.1. Educating the buyer

    5.1.4.1.1. Training

        5.1.4.1.1.1. Re. buyers wish to acquire skill

5.1.4.1.2. Questioning

5.1.4.1.2.1. Re. lack of technical know-how

5.1.4.1.3. Explaining and justifying why/ why not

5.1.4.1.3.1. Re. deviating sellers
5.1.4.1.3.2. Re. deviating buyers
5.1.4.1.3.3. Re. lack of technical know-how
5.1.4.1.3.4. Re. buyer demands and expectations
(divergent interests)

5.1.4.2. Lack of familiarity with DLP
5.1.4.3. (Lack of) technical know-how

5.1.5.   Receiving, rejecting and keeping work
5.1.6.   Improper and (possibly) unfair ratings and reviews

5.1.6.1. Improper use of ratings and reviews

5.1.6.1.1. Buyer feedback unrelated to task, job or project

5.1.6.2. Buyers leaving (possibly) unfair negative feedback

5.1.6.2.1. Re. buyer demands and expectations (divergent interests)

5.1.7.   Subcontracting ad infinitum: Manager or subordinate (> consultancy or agency) > DLP > seller(s) or agency > DLP

5.1.7.1. Delays
5.1.7.2. Miscommunication
5.1.7.3. Further exploitation
5.1.7.4. Lack of transparency
5.1.7.5. Shortened time frame
5.1.7.6. Re. searching and matching undermined (potential for skills mismatch)

5.2.   Buyer-DLP-seller
5.2.1.   Buyer dependency

5.2.1.1. Factors for engagement

5.2.1.1.1. Access to skill (on demand)
5.2.1.1.2. Re. economical solution (on demand)
5.2.1.1.3. Avoiding employment costs and regulation

5.2.1.2. Asset light and/ or people light
5.2.1.3. Re. policing, safety and security

5.2.2.   Seller dependency

5.2.2.1. (Not an) employer
5.2.2.2. Buyer-seller support
5.2.2.3. User profile and activity history

5.2.2.3.1. Skill and level, portfolio, test results, rank, price, task, job or project (or contest) history, ratings, reviews, endorsements and declaration of other workers

5.2.2.4. Re. policing, safety and security

5.2.2.5. Re. ad hoc buyer-seller relationship
5.2.2.6. Factors for engagement: (More than just) a means to an end

> 5.2.2.6.1. A means to an end

>> 5.2.2.6.1.1. DLP services

>>> 5.2.2.6.1.1.1. Bidding
>>> 5.2.2.6.1.1.2. Invitations
>>> 5.2.2.6.1.1.3. Search features
>>> 5.2.2.6.1.1.4. Payment methods
>>> 5.2.2.6.1.1.5. Advertising services
>>> 5.2.2.6.1.1.6. Protection insurance
>>> 5.2.2.6.1.1.7. Communication tools
>>> 5.2.2.6.1.1.8. Dispute resolution and/ or arbitration service

>> 5.2.2.6.1.2. Source of income

>>> 5.2.2.6.1.2.1. A means of obtaining main source of income
>>> 5.2.2.6.1.2.2. A means of enhancing main source of income

> 5.2.2.6.2. More than just a means to an end

>> 5.2.2.6.2.1. Positive feelings

>>> 5.2.2.6.2.1.1. Enjoyment
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.1.2. Excitement
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.1.3. Satisfaction

>> 5.2.2.6.2.2. Achieving something

>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.1. Flexibility
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.2. Higher pay
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.3. Open doors
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.4. Back-up plan
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.5. Expands network
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.6. Starting a company
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.7. Avoiding the commute
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.8. Continuity of engagement
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.9. Gaining skills and experience
>>> 5.2.2.6.2.2.10. Choice over task, job, project or contest

5.2.3. DLP unfit for purpose

5.2.3.1. Technical difficulties

> 5.2.3.1.1. DLP merger issues
> 5.2.3.1.2. Incurring incorrect fees
> 5.2.3.1.3. Unsuccessful bids not reinstated

5.2.3.2. One size does not fit all

> 5.2.3.2.1. Terms of service
> 5.2.3.2.2. Re. location verification
> 5.2.3.2.3. Re. buyer-seller support (issues)
> 5.2.3.2.4. Re. skill labelling and ratings system

5.2.3.3. Payment method issues

    5.2.3.3.1. Loopholes

        5.2.3.3.1.1. Buyers gaming the system
        5.2.3.3.1.2. Re. milestone payment (uncertainty)

    5.2.3.3.2. Not user-friendly

5.2.3.4. Communication tools issues

    5.2.3.4.1. Lacking in tools
    5.2.3.4.2. Not user-friendly
    5.2.3.4.3. Unreliable video-calling
    5.2.3.4.4. Buyers might be put off
    5.2.3.4.5. Unreliable messaging system
    5.2.3.4.6. Need to be signed in and present
    5.2.3.4.7. Upload speed slow and capacity limited

5.2.3.5. Screening and policing issues

    5.2.3.5.1. Bogus user activity

        5.2.3.5.1.1. Scammers
        5.2.3.5.1.2. Re. fake it until you make it
        5.2.3.5.1.3. Sellers in low income countries responsible?
        5.2.3.5.1.4. Bogus profiles, pictures, IP address, skill labels
                and levels, portfolio, test results, rank, ratings,
                reviews and endorsements, declaration of other
                workers and posts

    5.2.3.5.2. Demonstrating skill

        5.2.3.5.2.1. Portfolio limitations
        5.2.3.5.2.2. Re. optional skill testing
        5.2.3.5.2.3. Skill labelling and ratings system

            5.2.3.5.2.3.1. Seller discretion
            5.2.3.5.2.3.2. Invitation issues
            5.2.3.5.2.3.3. Search feature issues
            5.2.3.5.2.3.4. Sellers subjective input
            5.2.3.5.2.3.5. Skill labelling too broad

        5.2.3.5.2.4. Formal learning qualifications not required

    5.2.3.5.3. Disappearing sellers
    5.2.3.5.4. Disappearing buyers

        5.2.3.5.4.1. Re. bogus and dead end (post)
        5.2.3.5.4.2. Receiving, rejecting and keeping work

    5.2.3.5.5. Multiple user profiles
    5.2.3.5.6. Lack of an effective dispute mechanism
    5.2.3.5.7. Five-star ratings are the norm, rather than the exception

        5.2.3.5.7.1. Re. (engaging in) bogus user activity
        5.2.3.5.7.2. Re. accept or reject ratings and reviews
        5.2.3.5.7.3. Re. requesting good ratings and reviews
        5.2.3.5.7.4. Additional ratings and reviews for a single job
        5.2.3.5.7.5. Buyers (or sellers) defaulting to five-star ratings

5.2.3.5.7.6. Re. continuity sought and encouraged (but on buyer's terms)

5.2.4. Unfair

5.2.4.1. Fees
5.2.4.2. Minimum withdrawal
5.2.4.3. Purchasing (not so) optional extras

5.2.4.3.1. Bidding limit not enough (contingent)

5.2.5. Time drain

5.2.5.1. Lots to do
5.2.5.2. Must be active
5.2.5.3. Reminders to buy
5.2.5.4. They want us involved
5.2.5.5. Re. DLP unfit for purpose

5.2.6. Buyer-centric

5.2.6.1. Free work

5.2.6.1.1. Re. competing entry

5.2.6.2. Skewed policy
5.2.6.3. Re. dispute resolution and/ or arbitration service (bias)

5.2.7. Lack of voice

5.2.7.1. Re. views and concerns go unheard
5.2.7.2. Re. unilaterally imposed terms of service

5.2.8. Lack of transparency

5.2.8.1. Posts
5.2.8.2. Algorithms
5.2.8.3. Task, job or project
5.2.8.4. Buyer (and seller) identity obscured

5.3.   Seller-sellers
5.3.1. Labour competition

5.3.1.1. Overpopulation

5.3.1.1.1. Buyer's market

5.3.1.2. Underbidding practices

5.3.1.2.1. New starters
5.3.1.2.2. Re. (circumventing) labour competition
5.3.1.2.3. Re. (circumventing) regulated and constrained first contact

5.3.1.3. Contextual (dis/)advantage

5.3.1.3.1. Labour arbitrage

5.3.2. Re. seller-seller coalescing avoided

A. LABOUR INDETERMINACY
(INTEGRATIVE THEME)

B. STRUCTURED ANTAGONISM
(INTEGRATIVE THEME)

C. LABOUR PROCESS HINGES ON (SHIFTING) CONTEXT
(INTEGRATIVE THEME)

D. LABOUR PROCESS HINGES ON TENURE, SKILL AND CONTINUITY
(INTEGRATIVE THEME)

Appendix O: Ethical approval letter

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

Alliance Manchester Business School Panel

Alliance Manchester Business School
Harold Hankins Building 6.06
Tel: 0161-275-6572

The University of Manchester

Manchester

M13 9PL

Email: ethics@mbs.ac.uk

Ref: 2019-7972-12179

05/11/2019

Dear Mr Lee Stringer, , Dr Stephen Mustchin, Prof Tony Dundon

Lee, Thank you for submitting the revised version and explaining the changes made. Please see the text below.

Study Title: Tech workers across distinct evolving work contexts: a study of the challenges and tensions

Alliance Manchester Business School Panel

I write to thank you for submitting the final version of your documents for your project to the Committee on 31/10/2019 21:22 . I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the application form and supporting documentation as submitted and approved by the Committee.

Please see below for a table of the titles, version numbers and dates of all the final approved documents for your project:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Data Management Plan	Data Management Plan	13/10/2019	1
Letters of Permission	Introductory letter(s)	13/10/2019	1
Advertisement	Social media recruitment text	13/10/2019	1
Additional docs	Interview guide(s)	13/10/2019	1
Advertisement	Web advertisement text	14/10/2019	1
Additional docs	Questionnaire	16/10/2019	1
Consent Form	Participant Consent Form	31/10/2019	2
Participant Information Sheet	Participant Information Sheet (PIS)	31/10/2019	2
Additional docs	Letter	31/10/2019	1

This approval is effective for a period of five years and is on delegated authority of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) however please note that it is only valid for the specifications of the research project as outlined in the approved documentation set. If the project continues beyond the 5 year period or if you wish to propose any changes to the methodology or any other specifics within the project an application to seek an amendment must be submitted for review. Failure to do so could invalidate the insurance and constitute research misconduct.

You are reminded that, in accordance with University policy, any data carrying personal identifiers must be encrypted when not held on a secure university computer or kept securely as a hard copy in a location which is accessible only to those involved with the research.

For those undertaking research requiring a DBS Certificate: As you have now completed your ethical application if required a colleague at the University of Manchester will be in touch for you to undertake a DBS check. Please note that you do not have DBS approval until you have received a DBS Certificate completed by the University of Manchester, or you are an MA Teach First student who holds a DBS certificate for your current teaching role.

Reporting Requirements:

You are required to report to us the following:

1. Amendments: Guidance on what constitutes an amendment
2. Amendments: How to submit an amendment in the ERM system
3. Ethics Breaches and adverse events
4. Data breaches

We wish you every success with the research.

Yours sincerely,

Julie

Prof Julie Froud

Alliance Manchester Business School Panel

Appendix P: Data management plan

ONLINE FREELANCERS, DIGITAL LABOUR PLATFORMS AND CLIENTS: A STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS

A Data Management Plan created using DMPonline

Creator: Lee Stringer

Affiliation: University of Manchester

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

Template: ESRC Template Customised By: University of Manchester

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-9925-9191

Project abstract:
The purpose of this study is to understand the work and employment challenges and tensions, from the expansion and evolution of (web-based) digital labour platforms (DLP) for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) who work and manage through DLPs.

Last modified: 19-07-2020

ONLINE FREELANCERS, DIGITAL LABOUR PLATFORMS AND CLIENTS: A STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS

Manchester Data Management Outline

1. Is this project already funded?

- Yes

2. If you will be applying for funding from multiple sources who else will you be applying to?

- Not applicable

3. Is The University of Manchester the lead institution for this project?

- Yes – only institution involved

4. What data will you use in this project (please select all that apply)?

- Acquire new data

5. Where will the data be stored and backed-up during the project lifetime?

- University of Manchester Research Data Storage Service (Isilon)

6. If you will be using Research Data Storage, how much storage will you require?

- < 1 TB

7. If you have a contractual agreement with a 3rd party data provider will any of the data associated with this project be sourced from, processed or stored outside of the institutions and groups stated on your agreement?

- Not applicable

8. How long do you intend to keep your data for after the end of your project (in years)?

- < 5 years

1. Data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

Questions about personal information
Personal information or personal data, the two terms are often used interchangeably, relates to identifiable living individuals. Special category personal data is more sensitive information such as medical records, ethnic background, religious beliefs, political opinions, sexual orientation and criminal convictions or offences information. If you are not using personal data then you can skip the rest of this section.
Please note that in line with data protection law (the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018), personal information should only be stored in an identifiable form for as long as is necessary for the project; it should be pseudonymised (partially de-identified) and/or anonymised (completely de—identified) as soon as practically possible. You must obtain the appropriate ethical approval in order to use identifiable personal data.

9. What type of person identifying information will you be processing (please select all that apply)?

- Special categories and criminal convictions
- Personal information
- Commercial or otherwise sensitive data
- Anonymised personal data
- Pseudonymised personal data
- Audio and/or video recordings

Specifically, I will need to collect information regarding:

- Digital labour platform (DLP) use

- Employer(s)/ client(s)
- Opinions or thoughts
- Country of residence
- Industry and sector
- Employment status
- Email address
- Date of birth
- Occupation
- Full name
- Job title
- Gender

Special category data:

- Trade union membership

Data will be gathered through the use of a University of Manchester (UoM) -approved survey tool (i.e. Select Survey), audio recorded semi-structured Skype interviews, consent forms and facesheets.

10. Please provide details of how you plan to store, protect and ensure confidentiality of the participants' information as stated in the question above.

1. Recruitment

- A UoM-approved survey tool will be used (i.e. Select Survey).
- Once recruitment has ended, the data* will be transferred from the survey tool to the UoM server. The data on the survey tool will then be deleted in order to avoid duplication.
- Contact details will be stored in a separate password protected file held on the UoM server and will be deleted as soon as the objectives of the project allow.

2. Interview

- Skype will be used - all Skype-to-Skype voice, video, file transfers* (i.e. consent forms and facesheets) and instant messages are encrypted.
- Paper data records* (if any) will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location only available to the researcher before becoming digitised and stored on the UoM server.
- Transcripts* will be stored on the UoM server and once checked for accuracy, all audio files will be deleted from the UoM server.
- Case summaries* will be stored on the UoM server.

2.1. Audio device

- Olympus DS-9500 Digital Recorder Premium Kit incl ODMS R7 Software with 256 bit file encryption with DSS Pro audio codec and device lock by PIN code will be used in the field.
- The device used to make the recordings will not be shared, will never be left unattended and will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location only available to the researcher when not in use.

2.2. Audio recording

- Recordings will be transferred from the recording device to the UoM server as soon as possible to ensure that a master copy is backed up and the file is encrypted.
- A UoM-approved digital audio transcription typing specialist will be used (i.e. 1st Class Secretarial).

2.2.1. Other

- The location of the interview/ recording regarding the privacy and comfort of the participant and/ or any risk involved will be considered.
- Audio will consist of voice only taken at the time of the one to one Skype interview.
- The name of the interviewee will not be recorded.

*Person identifying information will be backed up on the UoM server and will not be stored on USB sticks or other portable devices.
*Anonymization procedures will be followed.
*Information will be pseudonymised ensuring adequate key management procedures.
*The primary supervisor is the data custodian for this research project and custody of all paper and electronic data will be transferred to them before I leave the UoM.

11. If you are storing personal information will you need to keep it beyond the end of the project?

- No

12. Sharing person identifiable information can present risks to participants' privacy, researchers and the institution. Will the participants' information (personal and/or sensitive) be shared with or accessed by anyone outside of the University of Manchester? This includes using 3rd party service providers such as cloud storage providers or survey platforms.

- Yes - Third party service provider/supplier

1. A UoM-approved survey tool will be used (i.e. Select Survey).
2. A UoM-approved transcription service will be used (i.e. 1st Class Secretarial).

13. If you will be sharing personal information outside of the University of Manchester, will the individual or organisation you are sharing with be outside the EEA?

- Not applicable

1. Select Survey is a UoM-approved survey tool.
2. 1st Class Secretarial is a UoM-approved survey tool.

14. Are you planning to use the personal information for future purposes such as research?

- Yes

1. Expressed in the written consent form in the following way:

- "I agree that any anonymised data collected may be shared with researchers/researchers at other institutions".
- "I agree for my data to be used in future studies".

15. Who will act as the data custodian or information asset owner for this study?

Prof. Tony Dundon and Dr. Stephen Mustchin

16. Please provide the date on which this plan was last reviewed (dd/mm/yyyy).

13-10-2019

Assessment of existing data

Provide an explanation of the existing data sources that will be used by the research project, with references

1. A large number of academic sources will underpin the literature review and methodology.
2. Information that is publicly available may also be used from DLPs.

Provide an analysis of the gaps identified between the currently available and required data for the research

1. Where 'gaps' have been identified, and where no suitable data is available, new data will be created. No new data exists to answer the research question(s) from a labour process perspective.

- Sources being considered are a content analysis of DLPs (albeit, this "is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts rather than a means of generating data" [Bryman and Bell, 2015:298]), a UoM-approved survey tool will be used when recruiting participants (i.e. Select Survey) and semi-structured interviews.

Information on new data

Provide information on the data that will be produced or accessed by the research project

N.B. Full methodological specifications are currently under design and review.
It is expected that a content analysis of DLPs will be carried out (albeit, this "is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts rather than a means of generating data" [Bryman and Bell, 2015:298]), a UoM-approved survey tool will be used when recruiting participants (i.e. Select Survey) and qualitative interview transcripts will be generated during the project.

1. Based on purposive sampling, organisation(s) (i.e. client organisation[s] and web-based digital labour platforms) and people (i.e. online freelancers [esp. tech workers] and their clients [e.g. their hiring managers]) will be selected with the research goals in mind.

2. A UoM-approved survey tool will be used when recruiting participants (i.e. Select Survey).
3. 60 (approx.) semi-structured interviews will take place and be audio recorded lasting 60 (approx.) hours in total. A case summary will be created after each interview.
4. Olympus DS-9500 Digital Recorder Premium Kit incl ODMS R7 Software with 256 bit file encryption with DSS Pro audio codec and device lock by PIN code will be used in the field.
5. Audio will be transcribed verbatim, the transcripts line numbered, double-spaced and wide margins added. This will be done via a UoM-approved service (i.e. 1st Class Secretarial).
6. Template style data analysis will be carried out prior to interpretation and write-up.

Quality assurance of data

Describe the procedures for quality assurance that will be carried out on the data collected at the time of data collection, data entry, digitisation and data checking.

1. The UoM survey tools guidance will be followed:file://nask.man.ac.uk/home$/Downloads/Survey%20Tools%20Guidance.pdf
2. The UoM standard operating procedure of taking recordings of participants for research projects will be followed:
http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=38446

- Audio will be transcribed verbatim, the transcripts line numbered, double-spaced and wide margins added. This will be done via a UoM-approved service (i.e. 1st Class Secretarial).

3. Quality assurance will be enhanced also from following previously validated protocols (such as content analysis, semi-structured interview design, case summaries and template analysis).

Backup and security of data

Please describe the data back-up procedures that you will adopt to ensure the data and metadata are securely stored during the lifetime of the project.

1. Recruitment

- A UoM-approved survey tool will be used (i.e. Select Survey).
- Once recruitment has ended, the data* will be transferred from the survey tool to the UoM server. The data on the survey tool will then be deleted in order to avoid duplication.
- Contact details will be stored in a separate password protected file held on the UoM server and will be deleted as soon as the objectives of the project allow.

2. Interview

- Skype will be used - all Skype-to-Skype voice, video, file transfers* (i.e. consent forms and facesheets) and instant messages are encrypted.
- Paper data records* (if any) will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location only available to the researcher before becoming digitised and stored on the UoM server.
- Transcripts* will be stored on the UoM server and once checked for accuracy, all audio files will be deleted from the UoM server.
- Case summaries* will be stored on the UoM server.

2.1. Audio device

- Olympus DS-9500 Digital Recorder Premium Kit incl ODMS R7 Software with 256 bit file encryption with DSS Pro audio codec and device lock by PIN code will be used in the field.
- The device used to make the recordings will not be shared, will never be left unattended and will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location only available to the researcher when not in use.

2.2. Audio recording

- Recordings will be transferred from the recording device to the UoM server as soon as possible to ensure that a master copy is backed up and the file is encrypted.
- A UoM-approved digital audio transcription typing specialist will be used (i.e.1st Class Secretarial).

*Person identifying information will be backed up on the UoM server and will not be stored on USB sticks or other portable devices.

*Anonymization procedures will be followed.

*Information will be pseudonymised ensuring adequate key management procedures.

*The primary supervisor is the data custodian for this research project and custody of all paper and electronic data will be transferred to them before I leave the UoM.

Management and curation of data

Outline your plans for preparing, organising and documenting data.

N.B. Coding of data is under review and validated coding protocols will be followed.

1. Audio will be transcribed verbatim, the transcripts line numbered, double-spaced and wide margins added. This will be done via a UoM approved service (i.e. 1st Class Secretarial).
2. A case summary that captures the participant's story and the dynamics of the interview will be created after each interview.
3. Template style data analysis will be carried out prior to interpretation and write-up.

Difficulties in data sharing and measures to overcome these

If you expect obstacles to sharing your data, explain which and the possible measures you can apply to overcome these.

1. Informed consent will be requested in all cases, and will include sharing data for research purposes only.

- Data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

Consent, anonymisation and strategies to enable further re-use of data

Make explicit mention of the planned procedures to handle consent for data sharing for data obtained from human participants, and/or how to anonymise data, to make sure that data can be made available and accessible for future scientific research.

1. Consent
   1.1. Informed consent will be requested at three stages:-
   1.1.1. Implied consent at the beginning of the survey tool for everyone, but especially for those only wishing to Refer-A-Friend;
   1.1.2. Further implied consent on page four of the survey tool for online freelancers (esp. tech workers) and their clients (e.g. their hiring managers) seeking to register their interest; and
   1.1.3. Written consent for all those that go on to be interviewed.

- Data will not identify any individual and only pseudonymised and anonymised data will be used in aggregate form for the purposes of analysis and data reporting.

Copyright and intellectual property ownership

Please state who will own the copyright and IPR of any new data that you will generate.

Mr Lee Stringer, Prof. Tony Dundon and Dr. Stephen Mustchin will own the data.

Any published academic work from the data (following quality assurance, pseudonymisation and anonymisation), then copyright typically reverts to the publisher publishing an academic book, report or journal.

Responsibilities

Outline responsibilities for data management within research teams at all partner institutions

N.B. The primary supervisor is the data custodian for this research project.

Responsibilities for data management also reside with Lee Stringer and he and others (i.e. supervisors, PGR reviewers) will agree to abide by quality assurance and privacy requirements.