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CHAPTER

LINE MANAGERS AND THE GIG ECONOMY – AN OXYMORON?

PARADOX NAVIGATION IN ONLINE LABOR PLATFORM CONTEXTS

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the implications of platform-enabled gig work for line managers and asks the question if OLPs diminish the role and status of line managers, or in fact render them more important than ever? Platform-enabled gig work is defined as short-term work (or “gig”) assignments where supply and demand for labor is matched by an online labor platform (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). Intrinsic to this definition are two key terms – gig work and online labor platforms (OLPs) – that require further explanation. Gig work, as defined by Caza, Reid, Ashford, and Granger (2021), is “externalized paid work organized around “gigs” (i.e., projects or tasks) that workers engage in on a term-limited basis without a formal appointment within a particular organization” (p. 7). It is an inclusive term that covers several forms of contingent labor (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Fischer & Connelly, 2017), such as e-lancing (Aguinis & Lawal, 2013), app work (Duggan, Sherman, Carbery, & McDonnell, 2020), crowd work (Boons, Stam, & Barkema, 2015), on-demand work (Aloisi, 2016; Van Doorn, 2017), micro entrepreneurship (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017) and dependent contracting (Connelly & Gallagher, 2006). Each of these gig activities differ in duration, ranging from work that lasts a few seconds or minutes, like tagging a photo or delivering a meal (Boons et al., 2015; Gegenhuber, Ellmer, & Schüßler, 2021; Meijerink, Keegan, & Bondarouk, 2021b; Newlands, 2021; Veen, Barratt, & Goods, 2019), up to project work that continues for months (Rogiers, De Stobbeleir,

& Viaene, 2020a). Irrespective of duration, platform-enabled gig labor is organized by OLPs which are organizations that use information technology to create an online marketplace to mediate supply and demand for contingent labor (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). Well-known OLPs are those that operate in the ‘gig economy’ (McKinsey, 2016) where freelance workers offer on-demand services to consumers and organizations in industries such as transportation (e.g. Uber, Lyft), meal delivery (Deliveroo, Uber Eats), cleaning (e.g. Helpling), micro work (e.g. Amazon Mechanical Turk, Clickworker), programming (e.g. Fiverr, Upwork) and consultancy (e.g. GigNow, Toptal).

In an opinion piece for the New York Times in 2018, Alex Rosenblat asks us to consider the implications of “when your boss is an algorithm” (Rosenblat, 2018b), referring to the many individuals today who work in an OLP and are managed not by a traditional line manager, but instead by an algorithm. Here, an algorithm refers to a computational formula that autonomously makes decisions based on statistical models or decision rules without explicit intervention by a human manager (Duggan et al., 2020; Newlands, 2021), which is a common management technique applied by OLPs. One striking issue arising from Rosenblat’s (2018a) in-depth ethnographic study of Uber and Lyft platforms is how fundamentally different it is for workers to be managed by algorithms in OLPs rather than human managers, as well as how technology is being used to replace, or displace, human managers in various ways. In line with these observations, subsequent research has shown that OLPs may diminish the role of line managers in the labor processes in at least three fundamental ways. First, gig work – such as e-lancing and crowd work – takes place outside the confines of the standard employment relationship (Kuhn, Meijerink, & Keegan, 2021). As labor market intermediaries, many OLPs rely on a workforce of independent contractors that they match with consumers or organizations that request freelance services (Koutsimpogiorgos, van Slageren, Herrmann, & Frenken, 2020). Freelance gig workers neither have an employment relationship with the OLP, nor with the organizations that contract with them via an OLP (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019; Stanford, 2017). In platform enabled gig work, line managers are therefore no longer responsible for the kinds of activities that are associated with maintaining the employment relationship including communicating with and offering support to employees (Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, & Looise, 2013; Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg, & Croon, 2013). Second, OLPs automate human resource management (HRM) activities

traditionally performed by (first) line managers including organizing, allocating and coordinating work (Bondarouk, Looise, & Lempsink, 2009; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Sikora, Ferris, & Van Iddekinge, 2015). Their reliance on ‘algorithmic management’ (Duggan et al., 2020; Lee, Kusbit, Metsky, & Dabbish, 2015; Leicht-Deobald et al., 2019; Meijerink, Boons, Keegan, & Marler, 2021a) to control worker behaviors (Möhlmann, Zalmanson, Henfridsson, & Gregory, 2020; Veen et al., 2019) and automate the execution of HRM activities in areas such as staffing (e.g. granting workers access to the online marketplace), compensation (e.g. surge pricing and algorithm-based pay rates), performance management (e.g. algorithmic deactivation/dismissal) and workforce planning (e.g. allocating workers to tasks) replaces frontline managers with algorithms. By replacing managers as key HRM actors, and delegating HRM responsibilities to machines, the very role of line managers is called into question. Finally, HRM activities traditionally performed by line managers are also devolved to other (non-HRM) actors (Kuhn et al., 2021; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). OLPs devolve performance appraisal to consumers by means of online rating schemes (Rosenblat, Levy, Barocas, & Hwang, 2017), involve project managers in posting and organizing projects that gig workers can join (Rogiers et al., 2020a) and work with procurement managers as clients to facilitate the contracting of freelance workers similar to long-standing practices in project based organizations (Keegan & Den Hartog, 2019). Taken together, this implies that OLPs diminish and displace the role of line managers in coordinating the labor processes and implementing HRM activities.

Despite the seemingly stark implications of OLPs for line managers, we contend that the (HRM) role of line managers is still worthy of academic inquiry and far from irrelevant in the context of platform-enabled gig work. The gig economy gives rise to new managerial responsibilities and challenges, and raises questions about the management of workers and execution of HRM activities (Kuhn et al., 2021). Current labor management practices deployed by OLPs are increasingly under pressure, and even seen as exploitative or illegitimate by societal stakeholders (Frenken, Vaskelainen, Fünfschilling, & Piscicelli, 2020) suggesting that OLPs need managers who are able to navigate societal pressures (Meijerink et al., 2021b). Moreover, freelance platform workers may strongly influence internal employment in contracting organizations by collaborating with employees and joining projects that are supervised by line managers. Incumbent organizations are also increasingly

experimenting with establishing OLPs themselves to give line managers and employees the possibility to join projects in other organizational units (Rogiers et al., 2020a) as well as to attract scarce talent to (internal) projects. In line with the idea that technology replaces tasks, but also causes new tasks to emerge (Frey & Osborne, 2017), we see an urgent need for more research into the consequences of OLPs for line managers. The aim of this chapter is therefore to outline the ways in which managerial responsibilities take shape in the gig economy and to consider the implications for line managers. In doing so, we show the complexity that platform-enabled gig work presents to line managers and call for research into how line managers navigate paradoxical tensions in the context of OLPs.

THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF PLATFORM-ENABLED GIG WORK

Platform-enabled gig work is organized by OLPs that match supply and demand for contingent labor. Three key features that characterize platform-enabled gig work merit particular attention – the organization of online marketplaces, short-term contingent labor, and the use of information technology – which are critical to understand the implications of this type of work for line managers (as discussed further in this chapter).

The organization of online marketplaces

OLPs are (for-profit) organizations that assume the role of a labor market intermediary. The core value proposition of OLPs is the optimal matching of workers to those who are in need of short-term labor. These services rely on information technologies (such as smartphone applications, software algorithms, online databases, and review systems) that enable an online marketplace where labor supply and demand meet and where liquidity of transactions is optimized (Frenken et al., 2020) between ‘requesters (organizations and/or consumers) that post work assignments online and gig workers who react to, accept, and work on these assignments. OLPs take an active role in brokering the transactions between requester and workers in several ways: (1) they may break down work assignments into smaller tasks, assign workers to tasks, and coordinate the overall delivery to the requestor; (2) they may recommend to organizations/consumers which worker(s) to hire; (3) they may deploy reward and/or control systems that incentivize in various ways responsiveness of workers to

the (time-pressured) requests of customers. OLPs rely on economic control systems to organize their online marketplace (Frenken et al., 2020; Gegenhuber et al., 2021; Meijerink et al., 2021b; Veen et al., 2019). They decide which requesters and workers are provided access to the online marketplace, set terms and conditions, and sanction those who do not comply. They decide on (minimum levels of) worker pay, set performance criteria, and exert (partial) control over the allocation of work.

Accordingly, OLPs can be seen as corporations that organize markets (Frenken et al., 2020).

Accordingly, we need therefore to differentiate between ‘platforms as organizations’ versus ‘platforms as marketplaces’. When we write about an OLP, we refer to the organization that organizes a market for contingent labor, while a platform marketplace refers to the transactions between workers and requesters as orchestrated by an OLP.

Short-term labor

The transactions that workers and requesters engage in, and that OLPs orchestrate, are fixed-term in nature (Duggan et al., 2020; Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). Although OLP workers and requesters may repeatedly engage in transactions, they can, in principle, decide to disengage at any time. Moreover, gig workers are nominally free not to use the OLP to access work assignments, and can decide to discontinue using the OLP’s intermediation service and work for a requester just once. Given the episodic nature of platform-enabled gig work, most gigs are relatively short in duration. Depending on the tasks performed, gigs may last a few seconds (e.g. tagging a photo via the Amazon Mechanical Turk platform), several minutes (e.g. delivering a meal via Deliveroo or performing a taxi ride via Uber), a few hours (e.g. cleaning via the Helpling platform), a day (e.g. a freelance chef/cook that works via Temper) or several weeks/months (e.g. joining a project via the GigNow platform).

Use of information technology for on-demand intermediation and control

OLPs are heavily reliant on the use of information technology to automate matching processes. This makes them different from labor market intermediaries such as temp agencies (Meijerink & Arets, 2021; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). Temp agencies employ human matchmakers to assign contingent workers to hiring organizations, while OLPs automate the assignment of workers to gigs by means of

software algorithms (Meijerink & Arets, 2021). For example, Uber deploys algorithms that match passengers to freelance taxi drivers without involvement by a human (Rosenblat, 2018a), while Deliveroo relies on an algorithmic system that automates the dispatching of orders to meal deliverers (Meijerink et al., 2021b; Newlands, 2021; Veen et al., 2019). In contrast to temp agencies, OLPs hire very few (or no) employees that meet with hiring organizations and/or search for job candidates (Meijerink & Arets, 2021). Accordingly, the matching activities of OLPs are less labor intensive – and thus involve lower operating costs – than those of temp agencies. While temp agencies have a financial incentive to intermediate work assignments that are longer-term in nature to compensate for their operating costs, OLPs broker short-term and on-demand activities against lower costs achieved by delegating the matching of workers to requesters to technology. The system works as follows: Requesters can turn to a website or smartphone app that is designed by the OLP to post a work assignment. Via similar interfaces, gig workers in turn can react to these posts, (sometimes) negotiate terms and conditions, and accept the work offer made by a requester – all with no or little involvement by the platform organization. This self-service matching not only lowers costs to the OLP, but also offers flexibility to workers and requesters who themselves can initiate transactions on-demand (Meijerink & Arets, 2021).

Although offering freedom and flexibility to workers and requesters as discussed already, OLPs nevertheless also control labor processes (Möhlmann et al., 2020; Newlands, 2021; Veen et al., 2019; Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2019). This makes OLPs different from other labor market intermediaries such as job boards, search firms or headhunters that withdraw from the triadic relationship with workers/requesters once labor supply and demand are matched (Bonet, Cappelli, & Hamori, 2013; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). In contrast, OLPs remain involved throughout transactions between workers and requesters. Specifically, OLPs operate algorithmic management systems to control worker-requester interactions at scale (Duggan et al., 2020; Newlands, 2021) and use a business model that involves skimming a fee from each transaction in their online marketplace to capture surplus value from labor power (Gandini, 2019; Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Veen et al., 2019).

VARIETIES OF ONLINE LABOR PLATFORMS

OLPs also come in different forms, and thereby impact line managers differently. For the purpose of this chapter, we differentiate between three types of OLPs. Although each type meets the defining characteristics of OLPs that we outlined earlier (i.e. online marketplace for short-term labor that is orchestrated and controlled by means of information technology), they differ in terms of corporate governance, business model and employment relationships. In line with the work by Kuhn et al. (2021) and Rogiers et al. (2020a), we distinguish three types of OLPs – standalone freelance platforms, spin-off freelance platforms of incumbent organizations, and intra-organizational gig platforms. We then detail the ways in which line managers confront and navigate the paradoxes posed by these platform types.

Stand-alone freelance platforms

Standalone freelance platforms are OLPs that match independent contractors to those that request freelance services in industries such as transportation (e.g. Uber, Lyft), meal delivery (Deliveroo, Uber Eats), cleaning (e.g. Helpling), micro work (e.g. Clickworker), programming (e.g. Fiverr, Upwork), leisure (e.g. Temper and YoungOnes) and consultancy (e.g. Toptal). Rather than instituting an employment relationship with workers, standalone freelance platforms work with solo self-employed workers who offer freelance services to consumers (e.g. Uber and Helpling) or organizations/businesses (e.g. Temper). The ‘standalone’ nature of these freelance platforms follows from their governance structure where one (or a small group of) individual entrepreneur(s) sees a business opportunity for an online marketplace, establishes an OLP and attracts venture capital (in return for stock options) to grow the online marketplace (van Doorn & Badger, 2021). Many iconic platforms in the gig economy such as Uber (founded by Travis Kalanick and Garrett Camp) and Deliveroo (founded by Will Shu) are new business ventures – ‘start-ups’ – that recently launched an initial public offering (IPO). These standalone platforms attempt to become a ‘winner takes all’ that outcompetes rival platforms by attracting a growing number of platform users (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013) and leveraging network effects which Katz and Shapiro (1994) refer to as “the value of membership to one user is positively affected when another user joins and enlarges the network” (p.

94). These competitive processes are costly as evidenced by standalone platforms' continued loss-making and alleged 'burning' of venture capital on discounts to attract workers and requesters to their online markets (van Doorn & Badger, 2021). In the expectation of making future profits (Birch, Cochrane, & Ward, 2021), standalone platforms attempt to control labor processes to ensure workers and requesters remain transacting via the OLP, increase the number of platform-generated transactions, and ultimately extract value from transactions once they are the last platform standing in a particular market space.

Spin-off freelance platforms

Spin-off freelance platforms are similar to their 'standalone' counterparts in that they work with freelancers and in most cases, are recently founded. Instead of being founded by an individual (or small group of) entrepreneur(s), however, spin-off platforms are established by incumbent organizations seeking to augment their current business activities by using a platform model to attract clients and freelance workers (Kuhn et al., 2021). There are broadly two reasons why incumbent organizations work with freelancers, based on which we distinguish two types of spin-off platforms. First, spin-off platforms allow temp agencies to offer novel labor market intermediation services and enter new markets for on-demand labor offered by independent contractors (Meijerink & Arets, 2021). An example is the YoungOnes freelance platform which is a spin-off of the YoungCapital temp agency. YoungCapital engages with temp workers who are co-employed at both the temp agency and hiring organization. Additionally, targeting an extra market for intermediation services, YoungOnes also augments its incumbent-owner by attracting workers (e.g. when freelance workers move from the spin-off platform to YoungCapital) and requesters (e.g. offering a one-stop shop for organizations looking for different types of contingent labor).

A second type of spin-off platform helps incumbent-owners with the possibility to augment their permanent workforce with on-demand freelance labor. An example is the GigNow platform which is a spin-off of the consultancy company Ernst & Young (EY). GigNow enables EY to recruit freelance workers that work alongside the permanent workforce of consultants on projects that EY executes for its clients, or performs for itself. EY attempts to leverage its brand image to organize

contingent labor itself, rather than outsourcing the hiring of project contractors to temp agencies of standalone freelance platforms, which is the traditional way in which these organizations procure additional resources to manage peak workloads on projects (Keegan & Den Hartog, 2019).

Intra-organizational gig platforms

Intra-organizational gig platforms (IGPs) differ from standalone and spin-off freelance platforms because their workforce consists of a pool of regular, salaried workforce employees. In fact, as IGPs operate within the bounds of a single organization, both workers *and* requesters of IGPs are employees to the same employer/organization. Inspired by the success of freelance platforms and driven by the need to reskill the workforce and encourage labour mobility (Schrage, Schwartz, Kiron, Jones, & Buckley, 2020), IGPs orchestrate an intra-organizational marketplace, enabling project leaders to recruit colleagues from other organizational units that want to join a project on a temporary and/or part-time basis (Rogiers et al., 2020a). This means that workers who join a project via an IGP do so in addition to their main job roles. Although working within organizational boundaries, project workers do not work under the authority of the IGP. Rather, the CLIP is an intra-organizational intermediary to employees who continue to report to ‘their’ line manager while simultaneously working on a part-time project that is organized by (an employee supervised) by another line manager (Rogiers et al., 2020a).

The three types of OLPs outlined above have their unique features in terms of governance structure and platform-worker relationships. OLPs are established for different reasons and may therefore engage with workers as freelancers or employees. These differences mean that OLPs impact on the role of line managers in different ways, and have different implications for them. To better understand the implications of OLPs for line managers in their different roles, we adopt a paradox theoretical lens (Smith & Lewis, 2011). As outlined next, each OLP type is characterized by paradoxical tensions that line managers need to address. Line managers engage with the gig economy in different ways: as an executive of a standalone freelance platform; as a supervisor that sources contingent labor through a stand-alone or spin-off platform; or as a direct report to employees who temporarily engage in another

project via an IGP. In what follows, we outline the impact of platform-enabled work on line managers in several of their roles and discuss how this is characterized by paradox navigation (Brandl, Keegan, & Aust, forthcoming; Fu, Flood, Rousseau, & Morris, 2020; Keegan, Bitterling, Sylva, & Hoeksema, 2018).

PARADOX NAVIGATION BY LINE MANAGERS IN THE GIG ECONOMY

Poole and Van de Ven (1989) define paradoxes as contradictory “well-founded, well-reasoned, and well-supported alternative explanations of the same phenomenon” which “are in some sense incompatible or hard to reconcile” (p. 565). In management and organization studies, paradoxes are defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). As noted by Jarzabkowski and Lê (2017), core to most definitions of paradox is the juxtaposition of contradictory interrelated elements that must be handled simultaneously, causing oftentimes far-reaching tensions for actors who must navigate “interrelated elements that seem consistent in isolation but incompatible or contradictory in conjunction” (p. 434). Examples of organizational paradoxes include the complex and persistent interrelationships between exploration and exploitation (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2013), standardization and localization (Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1990), or automation and augmentation (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021).

In HRM scholarship, numerous paradoxes have been identified and studied (see Aust, Brandl, and Keegan (2015); Keegan, Brandl, and Aust (2019)). For example, paradoxes relating to the distribution of HRM responsibilities among different actors (Keegan et al., 2018), and the demands on HR policies to meet the contradictory needs of different audiences (Brandl & Bullinger, 2017) have all been studied. To date, there has been less attention paid to paradoxical tensions linked specifically with the roles of line managers although this is slowly changing (Brandl et al., forthcoming). If not well-managed, paradoxes manifest as tensions which can be debilitating for actors due to clashes between interests, ideas, principles or actions. Paradoxical HRM tensions must therefore be viewed as complex and co-evolving dynamically over time (Keegan et al., 2018) and require active and reflexive engagement by actors (Fu et al., 2020). Research suggests that business models pursued by OLPs can cause tensions with organizational/societal actors both in the case of (standalone) freelance platforms

(Meijerink et al., 2021b) as well as internal labor platforms (Rogiers et al., 2020a). Although line managers are unlikely to be sheltered from platform-generated paradoxes and experience different tensions depending on the type of OLP considered, there has been almost no research on this issue to date. We therefore examine the implications for line managers of the further spread of OLP models to engage workers.

Managers employed by standalone freelance platforms

The organization of gig work by standalone freelance platforms involves balancing tensions between autonomy and control, which has implications for line managers that are employed by these platforms. On the one hand, freelance platforms favor working with freelancers to avoid paying for social security benefits (which freelancers are not entitled to) and offering financial compensation when gig workers are waiting for tasks to be completed. Legally, OLPs need to provide worker autonomy to affirm the freelance status of their contingent workforce. This involves the freedom for gig workers to decide on when, how, and for who they want to work. Moreover, as independent contractors, gig workers are nominally free to decide on the fee they charge to requesters. On the other hand, freelance platforms need to control gig worker behavior, which contradicts the autonomy that freelancers ought to enjoy. As corporations that organize online markets (Frenken et al., 2020), OLPs need to exercise control to balance supply and demand for labor, ensure that gig workers meet the needs of requesters, and avoid situations where requesters go against gig worker interests (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019; Veen et al., 2019). Ultimately, this ensures liquidity in transactions in the online marketplace from which the standalone freelance platform can capture economic rent.

Such autonomy-control paradoxes (Wood et al., 2019) pervade platform enabled gig work and draw scrutiny from stakeholders which can challenge the legitimacy of OLPs (Frenken et al., 2020; Meijerink et al., 2021b). Tensions between these contradictory yet simultaneous elements are well-documented, as are their implications for the very existence of platform-based organizing. Legal scholars describe how autonomy-control paradoxes manifest as false self-employment by freelance platforms, which have led to labor unions around the globe initiating reclassification lawsuits (Aloisi, 2016; Meijerink et al., 2021b; Zekić, 2019). To understand the source of these paradoxical tensions, Frenken et al. (2020) conceptually show how freelance platforms create institutional complexity. In

the case of freelance platforms, institutional complexity manifests as incompatibilities between the market logic and corporation logic (Frenken et al., 2020; Meijerink et al., 2021b). The market logic propagates freedom and autonomy to ensure freelancers – as the smallest of small business – can engage in free, unregulated competition. The corporation logic on the other hand legitimizes the exercise of control over employees that receive a salary in return for helping their employer to gain market share. As (pre-IPO) startup ventures, freelance platforms control their freelance workforce to grow their marketplace to outcompete rivals and become a ‘winner that takes all’ of the market for intermediation services (i.e. corporation logic), which contradicts the freelance status that these OLPs also propagate (i.e. market logic) – which is consistent with freelancer autonomy rather than control. Ultimately, the institutional complexity created by this dynamic threatens freelance platform’s legitimacy, as evidenced by numerous reclassification court cases on the employment status of gig workers (Frenken et al., 2020; Meijerink et al., 2021b).

The managers of freelance platforms are responsible for addressing the institutional complexity associated with autonomy-control paradox (Meijerink et al., 2021b). OLPs employ a workforce of marketing, operations, programmers and legal specialists who are responsible for orchestrating the platform firms’ online marketplaces (Kuhn et al., 2021). These specialists can exercise control over freelance gig workers in both direct (e.g. giving instructions) and indirect ways (e.g. designing software algorithms that delegate authority over gig workers to clients) (Gandini, 2019; Meijerink et al., 2021b; Veen et al., 2019). This creates tensions when platform-directed control (i.e. corporation logic) negates the autonomy and freelance status of gig workers (i.e. market logic). As shown by Meijerink et al. (2021b), the managers of freelance platforms are responsible for balancing these tensions. These managers – and the employees they supervise – do so through response strategies to institutional complexity such as ‘playing with discourse’ (e.g. the platforms suggests tips-and-tricks to freelancers, rather than giving instructions), covert HRM implementation (e.g. increasing opaqueness of algorithmic management to mask platform-directed control), HRM outsourcing (e.g. offering training to gig workers via a third party) and HRM devolution (e.g. asking requesters to leave customer reviews) (Meijerink et al., 2021b). As such, the management of freelance platforms can be seen as an attempt to navigate paradoxes in terms of balancing between gig worker autonomy (i.e.

market logic) and control (i.e. corporation logic). However, the tensions arising also attract critical scrutiny from institutional actors observing these tensions as indications of institutionally illegitimate or questionable practices.

Managers that source labor using a freelance platform

Line managers of ‘contracting’ organizations face paradoxical tensions in terms of managing interactions between freelance workers. Contracting organizations are those that rely on freelance platforms to augment their permanent workforces (Kuhn et al., 2021). Although contracting organizations outsource work via freelance platforms that ‘core’ employees typically do not perform (e.g. cleaning), there are cases where freelance gig workers work alongside the permanent workforce of a contracting organization, as for example in project based organizations that augment project teams with contractors (Keegan, Huemann, & Turner, 2012). In such cases, line managers (or project managers) supervise teams where permanent employees and freelance gig workers are interdependent in completing work assignments. Examples include freelance cooks that a restaurant contracts with via the Temper platform and that work alongside the chef that is employed by that restaurant, or hospitals that hire freelance nurses and medical specialists via the Jellow platform. Paradoxical tensions occur when freelance workers – with scarce or unique skills – are able to negotiate terms and conditions that are more favorable than those of permanent workers.

As noted by McKeown and Pichault (2021), these challenges can be understood using the HR architecture model of Lepak and Snell (1999) that classifies workers into a two-by-two matrix depending on the strategic value and uniqueness of their human capital. The HR architecture proposes that organizations internalize human capital that is unique and of high strategic value. Human capital that is non-core to the organization and widely available in the labor market is outsourced and managed by means of arms-length relationships. Workers that possess unique/scarce competence may decide however to work as a freelancer and offer their services to the highest bidder via a freelance platform. This creates tensions for line managers of contracting organizations: the value and uniqueness of a freelancer’s human capital creates push-and-pull tensions between internalizing the

worker (as desired by the contracting organization) and externalizing the worker (as desired by the freelancer). As shown by McKeown and Pichault (2021), line managers therefore need to navigate paradoxical tensions between treating freelancers as a resource that needs to be committed to the organization and strategically managed, while simultaneously upholding their freelance status and establishing an arms-length relationships in terms of making them comply with contractual terms.

Even in cases where contracting organizations and their line managers wish to outsource work to individuals with non-strategic and non-unique human capital via a freelance platform, paradoxes may occur. Theory predicts that managers rely on freelance platforms to source contingent labor to lower transactions costs (Lepak & Snell, 1999). The online marketplace of freelance platforms lowers barriers to transactions and allows workers and requesters to be matched without much human involvement (Rosenblat, 2018a). Moreover, when human capital is widely available in the labor market and of little strategic value to the firm, there is little need to incur governance costs (i.e. organizational control over workers). Instead, market dynamics are considered a more efficient way of controlling the individuals that an organization contracts with. As said before, freelance platforms however need to delegate (organizational) control over gig workers to requesters to limit institutional complexity and avoid reclassification lawsuits (Meijerink et al., 2021b). In doing so, requesters spend time on managerial activities such as the selection and/or appraisal of gig workers that nominally are enacted by a labor market intermediary such as temp agencies (Capelli & Keller, 2013). Put different, while turning to freelance platforms to lower (transaction) costs (Fisher & Connelly, 2017), managers of contracting organizations simultaneously incur (governance) costs that freelance platforms put onto them. For instance, Rahman and Valentine (2021) show that the use of platform-provided control tools (e.g. review systems) by ‘client managers’ – those using freelance platforms to hire and manage workers – resulted in higher costs to these managers in terms of uncompleted project outcomes by a freelancer. Similarly, Claussen, Kretschmer, Khashabi, and Seifried (2020) showed that organizational control mechanisms that platforms delegate to client managers were negatively related with perceived project success as rated by both the manager of the contracting organization and the freelancer (Claussen et al., 2020). As these examples show, managers that contract with freelance gig workers need to navigate between paradoxical tensions related to cost reduction and market mechanisms, on the one hand, and the

freelance platform requiring them to deploy organizational control mechanisms that drive up governance costs to the hiring organization, on the other.

Managers employed by organizations with a spin-off freelance platform

Spin-off platform like the GigNow platform are set up by an incumbent organization to contract with freelancers that join projects to be coordinated by the incumbent. Paradoxical tensions in project work that is organized by spin-off platforms become manifest when organizational line managers or project managers are asked to evaluate freelance contractors, even though there is no formal employment relationship with these workers and at the same time, these workers remain dependent on such evaluations for their further career development and employability in ways that may influence their commitment to projects and loyalty to project managers (Keegan and Den Hartog, 2019). Likewise, from an organizational perspective, even though meeting core psychological needs of project workers for competence development is likely to contribute to project success and other outcomes including health and well-being of project workers (Gagné & Deci, 2005), platform-enabled hiring of project contractors places line (and project) managers in a tension-filled position of having to both support workers (to ensure their commitment to projects and competence to perform) while maintaining boundaries with them consistent with their freelancer status. These dynamics create paradoxical situations and place organizational line and project managers in a bind of being damned if they do, and damned if they don't. Such dilemmas are not entirely new for project-based organizations (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011; Keegan et al., 2012) but the increased spread of OLP type constructions for hiring project workers might expose such tensions between the need to support, and the need to maintain distance from, project workers hired through platforms.

Managers that organize intra-organizational gig platforms

Intra-organizational gig platforms, or IGPs, are run by line managers that face the critical challenge of balancing the platform's supply and demand of labor. This problem consists of two related challenges:

(1) drawing sufficient users to the platform and (2) maintaining user activity. While freelance OLPs especially struggle with the first challenge, IGPs mostly wrestle with the latter – for two reasons (Rogiers, Viaene, & Meijerink, 2020c). First, IGPs are less exposed to competition from other platforms as they operate inside an organization and can tap into a continuous potential source of labor supply and demand, corresponding to the collective of workforce employees in an organization. Second, IGPs rely on employees' voluntary participation in part-time and fixed-term projects (e.g., for a maximum of twenty percent of their weekly work time) without the lure of additional remuneration (Rogiers et al., 2020a). These platform characteristics require IGP managers to be particularly considerate of platform users' goals when designing and managing user interactions.

Nevertheless, reconciling platform users' goals can be a daunting task, especially when the goals of users misalign in paradoxical ways. On one side of the spectrum are the employees who decide to take on projects in the IGP (i.e., project workers). These individuals are motivated to learn new things and expand their horizons; but often also feel limited in their ability to pursue these goals in their regular jobs (Stengård, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, & Leineweber, 2017; Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020). While side-hustles or freelance activities can offer resolve (Sessions, Nahrgang, Vaulont, Williams, & Bartels, 2021), working outside the organization's bounds can be a step too far for many. To these people, the IGP offers a space where they can pursue their developmental goals within their broader organization but outside of their regular work environment (Rogiers et al., 2020a; Schrage et al., 2020). On the other side of the spectrum, then, are the employees who post projects in the online marketplace of the IGP—to whom we refer as project posters. These people often come to the IGP with a specific project requiring an extra pair of hands. To them, the IGP embodies a convenient tool to source a volunteer from the platform's intra-organizational pool of workers without the administrative and HR-related burdens associated with bringing in temporary workers from outside the organization.

While workers' and posters' goals (i.e., development vs. labor outsourcing) are not contradictory in and of themselves, either side can pursue them in ways that are in tension with their counterparts' goals in the platform (Rogiers et al., 2020c) potentially creating paradoxes. For instance, our ongoing study of the U.S. government's Open Opps platform suggests that project workers may want to venture outside of their comfort zone by taking on projects that lie beyond their expertise, yet they may

sometimes do so without considering the output or competence expectations of project posters. As a result, workers may oversell their ability to deliver on a project or leave a project prematurely when their interest wanes. Such behavior, in turn, can be experienced as a significant burden by project posters, who hoped to source a reliable and competent worker to help them get their project done. These interactions can leave users disillusioned and create tensions in the IGP's online marketplace. We also find that the reverse can be true, as some project posters may not care about creating a long-term reciprocal relation with project workers. If project posters' enact their role this way, they may negate workers' expectations of practicing new skills and receiving mentorship and support from project posters. In short, tensions are likely to arise when project posters or project workers set off to realize their goals without considering the goals of others, and their mutual dependence in the realization of each other's goals, which can generate paradoxical tensions that IGP managers need to navigate (Rogiers et al., 2020c; Schrage et al., 2020).

As IGP managers navigate these emerging tensions, they face a paradoxical question: who's preferences do they prioritize first when posters and workers' goals misalign? That is to say, if they adopt an either/or approach, and do not simultaneously cater to both users, this will leave the IGP managers ineffective as matchmakers of labor supply and demand and risk creating imbalances in the platform (Weller, Hymer, Nyberg, & Ebert, 2019). As IGP managers address tensions between project workers and posters, arising from users' interdependence combined with contradictory goals (Smith & Lewis, 2011), IGP managers' actions must carefully consider both sides' goals and aim to achieve both/and outcomes rather than siding with one or the other. The context of Open Opps in the U.S. government illustrates this balancing act. In response to emerging tensions between project workers and project posters, for instance, IGP managers introduced a new platform feature that allowed project sponsors to re-open the project to new applicants when a project worker had dropped out. This feature reduced the impact on project posters when workers could not follow through on their promises of delivering on a project; yet, without punishing project workers in such a situation. Another example is IGP managers' introduction of a positive performance evaluation system in Open Opps that accommodates posters' desire to vet their prospective project workers as well as workers' aversion to negative performance feedback (which would cause them to refrain from taking risks and stepping

outside of their comfort zone). In the newly introduced performance evaluation system, workers can earn badges that signal positive achievements while avoiding negative feedback on their profiles. These examples illustrate how IGP managers can develop both/and solutions (Smith & Lewis, 2011) to the tensions that emerge between project posters and workers in the IGP (Rogiers et al., 2020c). These examples also highlight that IGP managers' responses to paradoxes must be seen as dynamically co-evolving with previous solutions to tensions which generate new paradoxes over time and which resist one-off solutions (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013). While these solutions to IGP tensions need not be complex, they must cater to *both* project posters *and* project workers simultaneously, in order to accommodate both sides as well as acknowledging the interdependence (Smith & Lewis, 2011) that characterizes these platforms (Weller et al., 2019). It is further critical for IGP managers to realize that working dynamically through tensions (Keegan et al., 2018) between workers and posters is a continuous occupation and inherent to IGP managers' role as paradox navigators. Paradoxical tensions are by nature unavoidable, and they require both/and responses based on constant monitoring and, at times, preventive actions, to avoid escalations that can offset the matching equilibrium in an IGP.

Managers of workers that perform work via an intra-organizational gig platform

Seen from a line managerial perspective, IGPs further create several opportunities for organizations and their line managers to fill critical skills gaps, identify untapped potential, and match employees to work where they can add the most value (Bidwell, 2017; Boudreau, Jesuthasan, & Creelman, 2015; O'Shea & Puente, 2017). As line managers allow (and encourage) employees' practicing of new skills in the IGP beyond their usual work environment and job responsibilities, employees' internal employability can also be expected to increase (van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011), thereby shaping a new source of workforce flexibility (Fuller, Raman, Wallenstein, & de Chalendar, 2019). These benefits primarily stem from IGPs' ability to identify and mitigate skills gaps that formerly remained hidden in the organization. For instance, as employees sign up to work in the platform, they start by creating an online profile where they list their current skillsets and the areas they would like to develop themselves in further. Worker profiles in IGPs also offer a view into people's achievements and platform work history, affording them an outlet to unveil their hidden talents and give voice to their developmental aspirations (Rogiers,

Viaene, & Leysen, 2020b). Extrapolated, the data provided and created by workers in the platform then shape the potential for line managers to better identify and utilize available skills in the workforce (Gantcheva et al., 2020; Schrage et al., 2020) and share internal talent across departmental boundaries (Bidwell, 2017; O'Shea & Puente, 2017; Weller et al., 2019). Through this function, IGPs can be a critical aid to line managers, who often do not sufficiently tap into employees' skills and full potential (De Boeck, Dries, & Tierens, 2019) and often do not possess the insights or tools to do so effectively (Fuller et al., 2019; Gantcheva et al., 2020; Schrage et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, employees' participation in IGPs involves a paradox from the standpoint of individual line managers, which can keep them from realizing the IGP's benefits. Through the IGP, personal knowledge becomes public, such as employees' untapped skills or willingness to try different tasks, jobs, and locations (Schrage et al., 2020). While rendering this information public yields several benefits for organizations and their line managers, as discussed above, line managers may simultaneously have reservations. In particular, they may fear that letting employees work beyond their purview would negatively affect their power and status in the organization. For instance, while line managers formerly could use private knowledge to reward high-performing employees and tie them to their team through the promise of promotions (Weller et al., 2019), IGPs start to take this discretion out of the manager's hands (Schrage et al., 2020), reducing the latter's sense of control and authority. Additionally, the work of Rogiers et al. (2020a) shows that image concerns may also arise among line managers whose employees request to participate in an IGP. Managers were especially concerned with what signal would be sent to the broader organization as employees took on part-time projects outside of their formal responsibilities and beyond their assigned work units. Would it signal to colleagues and superiors that their employees are not satisfied, sufficiently challenged and optimally deployed by the line manager? Altogether, these dynamics constitute important explanations for the line managers' resistance to IGPs.

While it is easy to critique line managers for putting their needs above those of their employees, it should be acknowledged that their position as paradox navigator is not an easy one. As IGPs are a new phenomenon in most workplaces where they appear, these platforms are often not yet explicitly endorsed by senior (line) management (Rogiers et al., 2020b). This lack of leadership endorsement then puts all

the weight on individual line managers' shoulders to decide whether to endorse employees' participation in the platform or not (Rogiers et al., 2020a). This is especially true in large organizations consisting of multiple business units and/or departments and multiple layers of leadership, such as large multinational enterprises or governmental organizations that have started to experiment with IGPs (Gantcheva et al., 2020; Schrage et al., 2020). There, line managers often fear repercussions for letting their employees take on projects that do not directly contribute to the targets or performance indicators of the units for which they are accountable. In environments where the pressure to perform is high and resources are limited (Rogiers et al., 2020a), IGPs risk being perceived as a threat by individual line managers rather than as an opportunity (Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, & Cogliser, 2010), resulting in managers' steadying—instead of easing—of their (perceived) grip over organizational rules and conventions (Langfred & Rockmann, 2016).

Despite these power struggles, ample opportunities exist for line managers to rethink their role vis-à-vis IGPs' entrance into today's organizations. Evidence from a pioneering IGP suggests that managers who participate in IGPs can benefit in several ways. For instance, as managers encourage their employees to gain new experience by taking on part-time projects with new people in new places, these employees are ideally positioned to identify new practices and build new networks that can further their original business units' goals (Rogiers et al., 2020a). Moreover, by fostering initiative and becoming ambassadors for this new working style (e.g., by posting projects and hiring workers from other departments), line managers can further take the IGP as an opportunity to brush up their image and reputation within their respective organizations. In short, ample opportunities exist for line managers who dare rethink their stance toward new phenomena like IGPs. Creating a managerial culture that supports managers in navigating emerging paradoxes associated with IGPs is critical, for these managers are key gatekeepers to the successful adoption and operation of these new work platforms that challenge existing assumptions and generate new, and possibly fruitful, tensions.

CONCLUSION

At a first glance, line managers seem to play a minor role in platform-enabled gig work. Traditionally, line managers are responsible for managing employment relationships and executing HRM activities;

these organizational artifacts are diminished by online labor platforms that erode the standard employment relationship and operate software algorithms to automate people management. Moreover, online labor platforms devolve responsibilities to non-managerial actors such as consumers and workers themselves, thereby putting line managers at the side line of labor processes.

At the same time, and if we look beyond the obvious, we see that online labor platforms bring about opportunities for line managers, and may even change line managerial roles. Throughout this chapter, we discussed how the role of line managers in a gig economy context can be seen as that of a paradox navigator. Specifically, and depending on what type of platform-enabled labor is concerned, line managers need to address different paradoxical tensions. For instance, line managers within freelance platforms like Uber and Deliveroo need to strike a balance between controlling and granting autonomy to gig workers, while line managers that source labor from online labor platforms need to strike a balance in terms of integrating freelance platform workers within their teams of standard workers. Where intra-organizational gig platforms are concerned, line managers need to align the conflicting goals of different platform users (e.g. project workers that want to learn, while project poster are in need of on-demand, short-term labor) as well as manage tensions between the regular work activities of workers and the project work they engage in via an internal gig platform.

Rather than diminishing the role of line managers, our analysis shows that the gig economy changes and challenges the conventional work of line managers. A paradox-theoretical lens is valuable and useful as it allows us to see which challenges (and opportunities) online labor platforms bring to managers, together with the strategies that line managers can rely on to address and handle tensions. We hope that this chapter offers fertile ground for future studies at the intersection between line management, gig work, and online labor platforms.

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