

**Leveraging independent workers in the knowledge-based gig  
economy through supportive Human Resource Management  
practices**

**By**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The gig economy represents a new work arrangement which is characterised by on-demand, increasingly digitally-enabled, short-term relationships with an organisation. Due to the seemingly detached nature of this work, perceptions of organisation support may be low, which may present a challenge to organisations in terms of obtaining the full business value from the gig workforce, particularly in the knowledge-based context. Organisations will be required to reconsider the manner in which they engage with talent in the gig economy, in order to leverage them effectively towards the achievement of business objectives. The aim of this research therefore was to determine the supportive Human Resource Management (HRM) practices to be implemented by organisations in order to better leverage the knowledge-based gig economy. Furthermore, the research sought to understand how these HRM practices are influenced by the complexity of the task, as well as the role of digital labour platforms in supporting in the provision of HRM practices, given their increasingly prominent role within the gig economy.

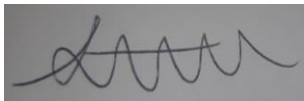
A qualitative, exploratory research methodology was used to gain insight into the specific HRM practices required for knowledge-based gig workers, which would lead to positive perceptions of organisational support. The study consisted of 16 semi-structured, in depth interviews with a range of independent workers within the knowledge-based gig economy. The supportive HRM practices were identified as engagement support, clear structures and processes, remuneration and rewards, autonomy and flexibility, fairly applied practices, learning and development, as well as performance feedback. To assist organisations in practically implementing these practices, specific actions were included relating to each. The study also provided insight on the preferred supportive HRM practices based on the complexity of the task, and recommendations on the role of digital labour platforms in the provision of HRM support to gig workers within an ecosystem with organisations.

## **KEYWORDS**

Knowledge-based gig economy, gig employment, human resource management practices, perceived organisational support

## DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.



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01 December 2020

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM

## 1.1 Definition of the research problem

The gig economy can be described as a labour market that connects independent workers to organisations, increasingly through digitally-enabled labour platforms, for the purpose of undertaking short-term engagements or “gigs” (Jabagi, Croteau, Audebrand, & Marsan, 2019; Gandini, 2019; Duggan, Sherman, Carbery, & McDonnell, 2020). It has been argued that this economy is set to challenge the manner in which companies source and manage talent in the future (Ernst and Young, 2016). Although the concept of the gig economy is not new, it has been gaining attractiveness as an alternative career path, due to the perceived levels of higher autonomy it offers (Pichault & McKeown). A Deloitte (2018) survey indicated that 62% of millennials who were looking to leave their employers over the coming two years considered the gig economy to be a viable substitute for full-time, traditional employment.

The gig economy is not limited to millennials, however. Josserand and Kaine (2019) stated that the gig economy attracts a diverse workforce, from students to individuals nearing retirement, with varying qualification levels. Recent technological advancements made possible through the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and now escalated by the COVID-19 pandemic, have allowed for a rapid rise in the utilisation of digital labour platforms, making the connection between organisations and gig workers more accessible (Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019). A combination of these factors is playing a crucial role in the anticipated future growth of this workforce model, and this is why it is becoming increasingly important to understand this component of the workforce population.

Organisations are increasingly leveraging the skills of workers in the gig economy, particularly in situations where their skills and capabilities are able to complement those of employees within the organisation in a manner that leads to improved performance and innovation levels (Liftshitz-Assaf, 2017). Organisations may also resort to utilising the gig economy workforce for specific work tasks that are required to be performed on an ad-hoc basis, which provide input into larger project deliverables. They may also utilise gig workers to gain access to specialised skills not available within the organisation, on a temporary basis, without being required to staff the role permanently. In doing so, this

allows the business to operate in an agile manner (Schroeder, Bricka, & Whitaker, 2019), which may also lead to the benefit of labour-related cost savings.

Current academic literature, however, has highlighted that workers in the gig economy do not feel sufficiently supported by organisations as part of this work arrangement, often feeling detached and required to self-manage in the absence of organisational support (Duggan et al., 2019; Jabagi et al., 2019). This may serve as an obstacle to organisations in terms of effectively leveraging the capabilities of the gig workforce, as the presence of perceived organisational support is associated with the higher engagement of individuals within their roles, resulting in improved performance and organisational and task commitment levels (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; McKeown, & Cochrane, 2012; Zhong, Wayne, & Liden, 2016). Additionally, given the short-term nature of this work context, organisations are required to engage and manage gig workers in a manner that is different from the current approaches utilised for the traditional workforce.

Current human resource management (HRM) practices are designed for the traditional employer-employee workforce model (Duggan et al., 2020), which may not be well-suited or applicable to the gig economy workforce, as it is characterised by short-term, often distributed, engagements that may be aided by digital labour platforms (Jabagi et al., 2019). Thus organisations may be required to modify their traditional approaches to HRM practices to better accommodate the gig economy if they are to effectively leverage this workforce in future (Bush & Balven, 2018).

Research conducted on existing practices relating to the management of gig workers indicated a lack of accountability for gig workers from the client organisation and digital labour platform, with workers often being left to self-manage and self-motivate without being empowered sufficiently to do so through relational support from the organisation (Jabagi et al., 2019). In the event of gig workers being unable to do so appropriately, in the absence of organisational support, this may lead to feelings of alienation for the gig worker, resulting in low levels of commitment to the task and the organisation for which the gig is being undertaken. There are also instances when the utilisation of a digital platform, which serves as an intermediary between the organisation and the gig worker, replaces aspects of HRM which would typically be undertaken by the organisation, such as gig worker selection, task assignment, and performance evaluation (Duggan et al., 2020).

As a result of the transactional manner in which HRM is applied in this context, the effect may lead to further erosion of the organisation-gig worker relationship and access to fair HRM practices for gig workers (Connellya, Fieselerb, Černec, Giessnerd, & Wong, 2020; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). Digital labour platforms have also been criticised for predominantly adopting a command and control approach (Gandini, 2019), as they are highly transactional and have the sole purpose of monitoring gig worker outputs, which may limit those workers' ability to engage with and contribute to the organisation in a way that maximises outcomes for both parties. This further highlights the need for organisations to review their HRM practices to enable them to derive improved value from their gig workers.

## **1.2 Research purpose**

Through this study, the researcher aims to understand supportive Human Resource Management practices that could be implemented by organisations in order to accommodate the growing knowledge-based gig economy. This should be done in a manner that improves commitment levels to the organisation for the duration of the engagement or "gig". This may be used to support organisations who plan to leverage the gig economy workforce in future. The academic lens through which the study was conducted is perceived organisational support theory, which is an employee's perception or "belief concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 1986, pp. 501). The more positively that organisational support is perceived by an employee, the higher their level of commitment (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017). It is for this reason that the theoretical lens of perceived organisational support is used, and given the low commitment nature that currently characterises gig work. The key antecedents of perceived organisational support are organisational actions associated with fairness, supervisor support, and organisational rewards, which may be driven through HRM practices (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

To date, most research conducted on the gig economy has focused on gig work associated with lower skills levels or the transactional exchange of services. Examples of these include ride-hailing, goods delivery and crowdsourcing marketplace services, including Uber, Deliveroo and Amazon Mechanical Turk (Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2019; Connellya et al., 2020). A limited amount of research has been conducted on the knowledge-based gig economy, and more specifically in the context of supportive

HRM practices (Duggan et al., 2020). For this reason, the findings of research conducted on different classifications of gig workers may differ, and thus the importance of this study. The focus of the study was therefore on the knowledge-based gig economy, which, drawing on the definition of knowledge-based workers, may be defined as workers who utilise knowledge and higher skills levels in the creation of products and services (OECD, 2005; Alvesson, 2001). Examples of these may include independently working professionals such as consultants, independent contractors, developers or freelancers (Pichault & McKeown, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to build on existing literature relating to perceived organisational support in a work context that is not characterised by traditional employment. Through the study, practical insights will be offered to organisations that may plan to utilise on-demand talent in the gig economy regarding HRM practices that are effective and will support the knowledge-based gig worker.

Whilst the knowledge-based gig economy currently represents a small part of the current gig workforce, a Deloitte (2018) study highlighting professional millennials' openness to gig employment may serve as an indicator that this workforce model will potentially extend to the professional, permanently employed, knowledge-based workforce. This highlights that organisations may be at risk of losing traditional employees to the gig economy, hence the focus on this group for the study. Workers' attraction to the gig economy is due to the level of work flexibility and autonomy it may offer, as there is a perception of greater worker control as well as financial benefit. In a separate study conducted by Deloitte (2019) on the future of work in technology, 73% of executives indicated that they had plans to access the talent they required by using gig economy workers, however a third of them felt unprepared to leverage this workforce adequately in terms of accessing and utilising the capabilities they would bring to the organisation.

The gig economy has been studied to some degree in developed markets such as the US and the UK (McKinsey & Company, 2019), but is only beginning to gain attention in South Africa as an alternative workforce option. Through this study, an improved understanding of the knowledge-based gig economy in the South African context will also be obtained.

The research objective was achieved by interviewing knowledge-based gig workers in South Africa – this group would typically be in higher demand due to the specialised nature of their skills. They have probably also deliberately chosen this work arrangement over traditional employment. As they may be specialists or experts in their field, knowledge-

based gig workers are also likely to be in high demand by organisations, who will be competing with a number of organisations for this talent.

### **1.3 Research questions**

Based on the research problem and purpose, this research aimed to explore how organisations are required to modify their HRM practices to accommodate the growing gig economy in a manner that improves commitment levels to the organisation for the duration of the engagement or gig. To accomplish the research aim, the following research questions were set out:

1. In what ways does a knowledge-based gig worker's experience of HRM practices influence their perception of organisational support, and impact task performance?
2. Which HRM practices are most pertinent in ensuring the knowledge-based gig worker's commitment?
3. What effect does task complexity have on the knowledge-based gig worker's preference for the type of HRM practices provided?
4. What is the perceived role of the digital labour platform in building task commitment among knowledge-based gig workers through HRM practices?

This research aimed to assess which key changes or additions are required by an organisation in terms of HRM practices for those not employed by the organisation, which would lead to positive perceptions of organisational support, thus fostering improved commitment levels and ensuring favourable outcomes for the organisation and the gig worker. In this way, the researcher aimed to make a contribution to the literature on perceived organisational support theory and the field of HRM for alternative work arrangements.

The research served to benefit organisations who intend to make use of the knowledge-based gig workforce within the organisation in future, or those who are currently doing so and aim to leverage the relationship in an improved manner to obtain the benefits that these workers have to offer in terms of their specialist skillset.

### **1.4 Scope of the research**

The scope of the research is focused on independent workers in the knowledge-based gig economy across a number of industries, with the objective of understanding their experiences of the organisational HRM practices they are exposed to during their

engagement, and how these have influenced their perceptions of support and related commitment to the engagement.

## **1.5 Significance of the research**

From an academic perspective, the research aims to fill a gap in the current academic literature with regards to supportive HRM practices, which must be provided by organisations if they are better accommodate or leverage workers in the gig economy in a way that will lead to improved perceptions of organisational support. In terms of business contribution, the study aims to provide practical insights into the supportive HRM practices required to leverage knowledge-based workers in the gig economy.

## **1.6 Research limitations**

As this research is exploratory and qualitative in nature, the limitations associated with this type of research must be highlighted:

- Researcher bias in the interpretation of the results, as well as respondent bias.
- Non-probability sampling and therefore a lack of generalisability (which will require a quantitative study to explore the validity of the findings) and a lack of replicability.
- As the interviews were conducted virtually, it was difficult for the researcher to make visual observations, as many interviewees asked that the interviews be conducted using audio only.

## **1.7 Research design**

The research design used was exploratory and qualitative, and used a mono method. The study was inductive from the gig workers' perspective, with data being collected through interviews.

## **1.8 Outline of the research study**

This chapter provided an introduction to the research, while the following chapter includes a review of the literature relating to HRM practices in the gig economy, as well as a review of the theory that informed the lens of the study, namely perceived organisational support. The research questions, which are based on the literature review conducted, are detailed in Chapter Three. Following this, the research methodology applied in the study is presented in Chapter Four. The results of the research, obtained through an analysis of the interviews, as well as a discussion of these results, are presented in Chapter Five and

Chapter Six respectively. The research report concludes with recommendations for future research.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the research problem pertaining to the HRM practices required by organisations to leverage independent workers in the gig economy, in order to support the achievement of their organisational goals.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

Chapter One outlined the research problem, highlighting both the academic and business rationale for the study, which was to gain insight into the supportive HRM practices required from the organisation to better leverage the capabilities of independent workers in the knowledge-based gig economy.

This literature review chapter begins by providing a baseline understanding and definition of the boundaries of the gig economy, as well as its implications for workforce management. Thereafter the organisational support theory is reviewed, with an outline of the antecedents of perceived organisational support, as well as its consequences, being provided. Literature has highlighted that the relationship between the organisation and gig worker is inclined towards being transactional and characterised by low levels of perceived organisational support, as gig workers are often perceived by organisations to be replaceable, inexpensive resources whose skill and value-add are not fully recognised (Schroeder et al., 2019).

The role of HRM practices as an antecedent to perceived organisational support will be described, however it is important that these be understood in the gig economy context as traditional approaches to HRM may not adequately accommodate this work context. The research constructs covered in the chapter include the gig economy, perceived organisational support which forms part of the broader organisational support theory, and HRM practices. Table 1 below provides an overview of the topics covered as part of the literature reviewed.

**Table 1: Overview of literature review**

Main Topic	Sub-topics	Brief overview of elements covered
<b>The Gig Economy</b>	Definition and classification	Definition and key features of the gig economy.
	Knowledge-based gig work	An explanation of the different categories of gig work, with a focus on knowledge-based gig work which informs the context of the study.
	Evolution of forms of work	Factors contributing to the evolution of employer-employee relations over time, and the outcomes thereof.
	Implications for workforce management	Key challenges faced by organisations and gig workers from a workforce management perspective.
<b>Organisational Support Theory</b>	Defining perceived organisational support	Definition of perceived organisational support within the employer-employee relationship.
	Antecedents of perceived organisational support	Discussion of antecedents including fairness of rules and processes and resource allocation, supervisor support and organisational rewards and job conditions.



	Consequences of perceived organisational support	Discussion of employee and employer-level consequences of perceived organisational support.
	Influencing perceived organisational support in a gig worker context	Applicability of perceived organisational support in the gig economy context, given the nature of the relationship with the organisation.
<b>Human Resource Management Practices</b>	The scope of HRM practices	Outline of key HRM practices that organisations typically implement to equip employees to perform at a high level.
	Supportive HRM practices	The manner in which each of the HRM practices contribute towards fostering perceived organisational support.
	The role of digital labour platforms	The manner in which platforms influence worker-organisation relationships and perceived organisational support through HRM practices.

## 2.2 The gig economy

### 2.2.1 Definition and classification

The gig economy can be defined as a labour market that connects independent workers to organisations, increasingly through digitally-enabled labour platforms, for the purpose of undertaking short-term work engagements or “gigs” (Jabagi et al., 2019; Gandini, 2019; Duggan et al., 2020). Also referred to as the “new world of work”, the gig economy is characterised by short-term contractual engagements that take place directly between independent workers or freelancers and organisations, or by selling to customers through a marketplace that is facilitated by an online labour platform (Kuhn, 2016; Ashford, Caza & Reid, 2018; Petriglieri et al., 2018). Although the gig economy is not a new concept, technological advancements, which have been further escalated by the COVID-19 pandemic, are anticipated to lead to accelerated growth in the gig economy, as online labour platforms have made it simpler for organisations and gig workers to participate in this form of work.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the broad scope of the gig economy, Cappelli and Keller (2013) developed a framework that classified work arrangements in the current economy according to three criteria; firstly according to the amount of control over work processes based on the location at which the work occurs. Secondly, Cappelli and Keller (2013) classified work arrangements based on whether the work relationship was permanent or of a contractual nature, as well as the parties forming part of the work relationship. According to this framework, work arrangements have been classified as being either a traditional employment relationship, or a contractual work relationship which is inclusive of direct contracting between the organisation and an independent worker as well as sub-contracting between the organisation and an independent worker through a

third party (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). In this context, the gig economy would be based on the contractual work relationship.

The work arrangement classification developed by Cappelli and Keller (2013) was expanded upon by Duggan et al. (2020) to highlight the role of digital labour platforms which serve as an intermediary between the independent worker and organisation. In a growing number of instances the online labour platform serves to facilitate the value exchange relationship (Gandini, 2019), helping an independent, or gig, worker and organisation connect in a more accessible manner based on the work requirements of the organisation and the gig worker's capability and capacity to complete the required work. On this basis, it could be argued that the platform has begun to replace the role of the third party that would typically facilitate the relationship between the organisation and independent worker, undertaking this function in a more efficient manner. Gandini (2019) and Dunn (2020) also argued that platforms primarily serve to ensure that work is contracted efficiently and according to requestor requirements stated on the platform, thus ensuring that basic minimum standards of quality in the execution of work are in place. This serves to highlight the increasingly prominent role that labour platforms are beginning to play in the growth of the gig economy.

### ***2.2.2 Knowledge-based gig work***

The skills of workers within the gig economy vary from transportation and delivery services, classified as low skills, to specialised or higher skills levels which may be inclusive of independent consulting, crowd work and freelancing (Jabagi et al., 2019). Much of the research conducted to date on the gig economy, however, has focused on gig work associated with consumer-led services, which is of a lower skill level, for example transportation and delivery services; with few studies available on the higher skilled or knowledge-based gig work (Duggan et al., 2020).

Pichault and McKeown (2019) highlighted that there has been increasing attention towards high-skilled, or knowledge-based, professionals working under this arrangement, claiming that this segment is the fastest-growing within the gig economy. The key skills of this segment range from consultants, IT specialists, project managers and creative workers (Pichault and McKeown, 2019). Within this context, the knowledge-based gig workforce may be characterised as workers who utilise knowledge and intellectual skills in the creation of products and services (OECD, 2005; Alvesson, 2001). Therefore workers in this context would typically possess high levels of expertise (McKeown and Cochrane, 2012), and due to the

non-permanent work arrangement, display low levels of attachment to an organisation (Ashford et al., 2018). It is within this context that the research was conducted.

Although the uptake of gig work among the knowledge-based workforce may be on the rise, a recent Deloitte (2019) survey indicated that leaders felt unprepared to leverage this workforce adequately in terms of accessing and utilising the capabilities they bring to the organisation. This was highlighted by Bush and Balven (2018) in a study on crowd workers, stating that organisational managers faced challenges regarding the effective structuring and management of tasks to obtain the most value from this type of labour arrangement. Employment relationships of this nature may be treated as transactional or perceived solely in terms of an economic exchange, thus short-changing both parties of the additional value that may potentially be derived.

### ***2.2.3 The evolution of forms of work***

Having become a fast-growing area of academic inquiry, the rise of the gig economy has opened a number of debates on the future of work (Kaine & Josserand, 2019). Among these is the disruption to the traditional employment model (Ashford et al., 2018) which has been in place over a large part of the past century. The traditional employment model has typically been defined by a full-time, structured and formalised relationship between permanent employee and employer, whereby work takes place according to a fixed schedule at the organisation's premises, allowing for control over work to be maintained, and with mutual expectations that employment will continue (Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000).

In the traditional employment relationship, organisations acclimate employees into the culture, provide training and development as well as performance management which is then rewarded through monetary means or promotion, thus creating mutual expectations for continued employment (Spreitzer, Cameron, and Garrett, 2017). In contrast to this, the gig economy is characterised by on-demand, increasingly digitally-enabled, short-term relationships, which organisations may leverage as needed to gain access to specialised skills and capabilities, based on business requirements (Duggan et al., 2020). It is based on the notion of an exchange of goods for compensation over a short time-span.

Ashford et al. (2018) argued that employers are increasingly offering less to workers in terms of benefits and job security, and are opting to utilise contingent staff in the gig economy to a larger degree, on the basis that worker expectations are lower in this labour arrangement and in order to control costs. This may be as a result of economic volatility, which, according to Petriglieri et al. (2019), has been a key contributor to the growth in the gig economy; organisations are staffing fewer permanent positions in an effort to manage costs by utilising

particular skillsets that are not available within the organisation only as and when required. The shift in work arrangements has occurred progressively over time, with a key outcome being that the nature of the relationship between organisations and workers have evolved to become less supportive, ultimately leading to lower commitment levels (Ashford et al., 2018).

More recently however, the emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), which has led to a range of technological advancements, one of which is the growth in digital labour platforms, has also served as an important contributor towards the growth and evolution in the gig economy (Connelly et al., 2020). Along with the impact of globalisation, this has led to higher levels of interconnectivity and a shift from the traditional workforce model. The COVID-19 pandemic is also expected to further escalate technological advancement in supporting a move towards a virtual working environment, through digital (labour) platforms. In addition to this, demographic shifts whereby both the older, more experienced workforce as well younger generations are seeking to work independently has resulted in the gig work arrangement being viewed as a more attractive option to traditional work as it is perceived to offer a range of advantages over traditional employment such as autonomy and flexibility with regards to work-life balance (Katz & Krueger, 2017).

According to Boudreau, Jesuthasan, and Creelman (2015), the largest growth in jobs is taking place beyond the organisation's boundaries. As an indication of its growth, research from Harvard indicated the number of workers who undertook alternative, or gig, work in the United States of America (USA) grew by 66% between 2005 up until 2015, representing 15.8% of the total workforce; compared against a 6% growth in overall employment over the same period (Katz & Krueger, 2017; Ernst and Young, 2018). Although fewer statistics on the growth of the gig workforce in South Africa are available, the increase in temporary employment from 2.6 million to 3.9 million from 2017 to 2018 (Investec, 2019) may serve as an indicator of the growth being experienced in the gig economy, or the potential for growth in this work model.

Yet whilst the gig economy presents numerous opportunities for workers and organisations, workers face a number of challenges, particularly with regards to the precarious nature of their working conditions which is characterised by uncertainty in the continuity of work and isolated working conditions (Petriglieri et al, 2019; Jossierand & Kaine, 2019; Aroles, Mitev, & Vaujany, 2019). This lessens its attractiveness as an alternative working model, and has led to questions regarding its sustainability as a workforce model.

#### ***2.2.4 Implications for workforce management***

Given the short-term and often transactional-based nature of gig work, the relationship between the gig worker and organisation is perceived to be one of low commitment

(Duggan et al., 2020). This implies that perceptions exist that gig workers are not supported by organisations in the same way that permanent employees are, in a manner that enables them to thrive and deliver on the organisation's expectations of the task (Duggan et al., 2020). A low commitment relationship may therefore serve as an impediment to organisations when it comes to leveraging the unique skills and capabilities provided by independent workers in the knowledge-based gig economy. Working in an isolated manner may lead to difficulty in experiencing meaningfulness in one's work, with the outcome being that only the required effort is applied to the task at hand, making this labour arrangement less sustainable (Kost, Fieseler, & Wong, 2018). This raises important considerations, particularly regarding the required response from the organisation to the gig workforce that will support their needs in a manner that allows organisations to gain a competitive advantage from the utilisation of this workforce on short-term engagements (Glaister, Karacay, Demirbag, & Tatoglu, 2017).

According to the theory of perceived organisational support (Kurtessis et al., 2017), effective human resource management practices are considered to be a key antecedent of perceived organisational support, meaning that employees perceive the presence of effective human resource management practices to be indicative of organisational support and commitment. As organisations are accustomed to managing according to the traditional human resource management practices established by the business (Josserand & Kaine, 2019), which are often not fully extended to non-permanent employees, gig workers may not be accommodated adequately. This highlights the argument put forward by Ashford, George, and Blatt (2007), who stated that existing theories describing the psychological work experience were developed to support the traditional employment relationship, and do not sufficiently capture the changing nature of work in the present day. These workers' needs may also differ, and given the short-term or non-permanent nature of the relationship, it calls for a different set of HRM practices to be implemented differently.

Based on this, a challenge that an organisation may encounter is obtaining the commitment of gig workers to ensure that a high quality service is delivered in support of organisational goals, as the nature of the relationship has been perceived to be one of marginalisation and liminality, which appears incompatible with achieving these goals (Josserand & Kaine, 2019). A key consideration could therefore be how the organisation could modify its human resource management practices towards gig workers to help foster a more committed, co-determined and relational work arrangement in order to effectively

leverage this workforce (Duggan et al., 2020). In addition to this, a further consideration has arisen with regards to the role of the digital labour platform in determining how an effective HRM approach would need to be structured for gig workers, since digital labour platforms, to an extent, support the implementation of select HRM practices (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019).

In addressing the research problem, this study was conducted through the theoretical lens of perceived organisational support to explore gig workers' experiences of supportive human resource management practices that ensure commitment during an engagement or gig. Commitment levels have been shown to lead to higher levels of role engagement (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The literature review provides a baseline understanding of the ways in which gig workers have been managed, with a focus on human resource management practices, and how this has supported or hindered their perceptions of organisational support and organisational or task commitment.

## **2.3 Perceived organisational support**

### ***2.3.1 Defining perceived organisational support***

Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986) defined organisational support as an employee's perception or "beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (pp. 501). Perceived organisational support is a reciprocal, social exchange relationship in which employees feel compelled to support the organisation in achieving its objectives, provided that they are rewarded appropriately in turn. This leads to self-enhancement as it satisfies an individual's needs for approval, esteem and affiliation with the organisation (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The reciprocal, social exchange relationship is based on social exchange theory, which states that the more desirable the benefits that individuals receive in their work environment, the higher their perceived organisational support. This in turn leads to higher levels of obligation and motivation to reciprocate these benefits through high performance behaviours (Zhong et al., 2016).

In the traditional employment context, the more positively organisational support is perceived, the higher the levels of organisational commitment and intention to remain with an organisation, as well as job satisfaction and work effort or job performance (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2017). However, Eisenberger et al. (1986) also highlighted that this depends on an individual's exchange ideology, meaning that individuals who possess a high exchange ideology feel or experience a higher need

to reciprocate perceptions of positive treatment from an organisation, based on the desirability of rewards received. These individuals would thus be more inclined to form a positive social exchange relationship with the organisation by demonstrating improved performance behaviours that benefit the organisation.

When considering perceived organisational support in a gig worker context, due to the seemingly detached and transactional nature of the relationship with the organisation which is largely based on economic exchange (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Jabagi et al., 2019), workers cannot rely on the organisation to provide the same support that is available to traditional employees. This creates a challenge in terms of the gig worker's perceptions of support; even in the case of the role of digital labour platforms, the relationship is largely transactional, with the platform serving primarily as an intermediary. As a result, in the absence of supervisory support, gig workers are often left to self-manage and self-motivate to drive performance that supports the achievement of the client organisation's goals (Jabagi et al., 2019). Therefore, within the context of this research, it needs to be understood how organisations can create conditions that lead to perceived organisational support, as well as the outcomes that this may lead to for the gig worker. According to McKeown and Cochrane (2012), perceived organisational support is largely impacted by interventions within the organisation's control, and thus remains relevant in the changing nature of work.

### ***2.3.2 Antecedents of perceived organisational support***

According to extant literature, three types of treatment by organisational members lead to perceived organisational support: the fairness of rules and procedures, and allocation of resources; supervisor or organisational support from the perspective of valuing one's contribution and well-being; and the provision of organisational rewards and job conditions (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger; 2002). Each of these antecedents is explored in further detail in the following section of the report.

#### ***2.3.2.1 Fairness of rules, procedures and allocation of resources***

Employees perceive higher levels of support from the organisation when they perceive that they receive fair treatment in relation to their peers. Fairness, or fair treatment, is often expressed in terms of distributive, procedural and interactional justice (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Distributive justice relates to the distribution of outcomes such as remuneration in a fair manner, based on employee effort or input, whereas procedural justice relates to the fairness of policies and practices in determining the distribution of outcomes or

organisational resources. Interactional justice concerns the treatment of employees by the organisation during decision-making, as reflected in the actions of organisational members such as supervisors (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Of the three, Kurtessis et al. (2017) argued that procedural justice has the largest impact on perceived organisational support, as its determinants are within the control of the organisation. Procedural justice may be broken down further into structural determinants, which are comprised of transparent policies and practices regarding processes followed and information shared, and allow for employee voice in decision-making; and social determinants such as fair treatment and respect, and sharing of information regarding organisational outcomes (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

### ***2.3.2.2 Supervisor support***

When a supervisor demonstrates that they care about an employee's work experience and expresses appreciation for their effort, employees perceive this to be representative of the organisation itself, as supervisors are organisational ambassadors (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017). This leads to improved levels of perceived organisational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Actions on behalf of the supervisor such as quality exchanges with employees or leader-member exchanges, as well as consideration of employee needs, also contribute to perceptions of organisational support, provided that they are aligned with the supportive treatment received from the organisation (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001).

### ***2.3.2.3 Organisational rewards and job conditions***

A range of rewards and job conditions have been determined to lead to perceptions that an organisation values an employee's contribution and regards their well-being, leading to feelings of higher perceived organisational support. Included in these are fair pay, recognition and promotion for excellent performance, job security, autonomy in one's work, opportunities for further training, and the management of role stressors (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). However, these factors do not carry the same weighting in forming perceptions of organisational support, and are largely dependent on individual exchange ideology (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and dispositional differences (Zhong et al., 2016).



### ***2.3.3 Consequences of perceived organisational support***

In the traditional employee-employer relationship, high perceived organisational support may lead to outcomes that are favourable to both the employee in terms of higher levels of job engagement, as well as the organisation from an employee performance and commitment perspective (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The consequences of perceived organisational support from both perspectives is discussed below.

#### ***2.3.3.1 Employee level consequences***

According to McKeown and Cochrane (2012), employees' positive perceptions of organisational support are associated with positive outcomes relating to employee attitudes and behaviours, including improved satisfaction in one's role, high work attendance, and driving high performance levels on the job or assigned task. These outcomes are positively associated with employee engagement (Zhong et al., 2016). Additional extra-role behaviours also include assisting colleagues in the workplace environment and engaging in learning for the benefit of the organisation (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). Perceived organisational support enables individuals' socio-emotional needs to be fulfilled, and it is through this that they build a commitment to supporting organisational goal achievement (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

In contrast to this, low perceptions of organisational support may lead to reciprocation weariness, which refers to the application of caution in reciprocating support or assistance due to fears of exploitation or being treated inequitably. This is inversely related to job performance, both in-role and extra-role (Lynch, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 1999).

#### ***2.3.3.2 Employer level consequences***

From an organisational perspective, the outcomes associated with employees' perceptions of high organisational support include improved levels of commitment to the organisation, job engagement which leads to improved performance levels, and in certain instances, the adoption of organisational citizenship behaviours (Eisenberger et al., 1986; McKeown & Cochrane, 2012; Zhong et al., 2016).

In terms of organisational commitment, it must be noted that this may exist at different levels, although they are not mutually exclusive (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment, which is associated with feelings of identification and emotional attachment to an organisation, is positively associated with perceived organisational support and is largely a result of positive experiences and value congruence with the organisation (Meyer

& Allen, 1991; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). The second level of commitment, continuance commitment, relates to an employee's need to remain with an organisation as the cost of leaving exceeds the associated benefits (Meyer & Allen, 1991). An employee displaying commitment of this nature will perform at the level they believe is required by the organisation in order to continue employment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Thirdly, normative commitment relates to feeling obliged to stay with one's employer, which may be a result of one's value system, for example loyalty, or an obligation to a reciprocal relationship (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

### ***2.3.4 Influencing POS in a gig worker context***

A tension faced by organisations lies in how they may gain and maintain the commitment of the gig worker group, which is important to ensure the quality of service delivered, given their perceptions/feelings of liminality and the marginalisation of workers in the gig economy (Josserand & Kaine, 2019). Further to this, it is important to understand what level of commitment would be realistic for individuals not employed by an organisation.

In the gig economy context, workers come into contact with or experience organisations primarily through their HRM practices, and it is through these that their perceptions are shaped regarding organisational support. Kurtessis et al. (2017) described HRM practices as consisting of opportunities for professional development, job security, work autonomy and flexible work practices, as well as job enrichment through task variety and feedback. However, an individual's perceptions of organisational support will depend on the extent to which these factors satisfy their particular needs (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

The theory on perceived organisational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis et al., 2017) was applied within the knowledge-based gig worker context in order to obtain a better understanding of the factors that influence perceptions of organisational support whilst undertaking an engagement or task, with a specific focus on HRM practices. Furthermore, the ways in which gig workers' perceptions of organisational support influence their level of commitment was explored. Lo Presti, Pluviano and Briscoe (2018) argued, however, that in this context it may be more feasible to understand the level of task, or professional, commitment rather than organisational commitment, given that the very nature of gig work is task- or engagement-based, and oriented towards the short-term. In support of this, Flinchbaugh (2020), in a review of independent contractor studies, highlighted that they displayed higher levels of commitment to the job or client, compared against the organisation. Barlage, van den Born and van Witteloostuijn (2020) also claimed that freelancers' perceptions of project-related support received from an

organisation is key, which are based on interactions with the organisation representative supervising the project. Therefore, in this context, organisational commitment may not be applicable within the gig economy.

A number of studies have highlighted the factors that gig workers value most in choosing this form of work, which could be considered in the design of HRM practices. This could create higher levels of perceived organisational support, which would help strengthen gig worker task commitment. Among these is flexibility with regards to where one can work regarding location as well as timing, when to work in terms of allowing workers to exercise control over their schedules, as well as flexibility concerning the type of work the gig worker chooses to undertake (Spreitzer et al., 2017; Kost, Fieseler & Wong, 2020).

This is closely linked to autonomy at work, which Pichault and McKeown (2019) highlighted as an important feature of the gig economy, considering it from the perspectives of the status, content and conditions of the work. The status of work refers to one's ability to decide one's work status rather than being forced into the work arrangement, whereas work content relates to the manner in which work is designed and how that empowers the worker from a work crafting and decision-making perspective (Pichault and McKeown, 2019). Work conditions describe the environment in which work is undertaken; this relates to the level of involvement of the organisation in providing support to the gig worker, which may be in the form of skills development or the ability to negotiate on work conditions (Pichault and McKeown, 2019).

In a qualitative study to understand how digital micro-workers, who are also categorised as gig workers, find meaning in their work, Kost, Fieseler and Wong (2018) established that rewards, self-improvement and social as well as moral factors constitute key sources of meaningfulness for this work group, and are often experienced simultaneously. From an internal orientation perspective, rewards entail both monetary benefit as well as work-life balance relating to flexibility and autonomy (Kost et al., 2018). Self-improvement also leads to meaningfulness by creating the opportunity to harness one's skills, to feel valued, and to be challenged by a task with the potential for learning from the experience (Kost et al., 2018). In considering meaningfulness from an external perspective, or having an impact on others, social factors, or being part of something larger than oneself; and moral factors, or the feeling that one's work produces positive outcomes for others, serve as important positive contributors to meaningfulness (Kost et al., 2018). A key question, however, is how such factors may be translated into effective HRM practices in the gig economy.

## **2.4 Human resource management practices**

### ***2.4.1 The scope of HRM practices***

Drawing on the perspective of a high performance work system, Snape and Redman (2010) defined effective HRM practices as “a formal integrated system of HR activities that includes selective recruitment and selection, extensive training and development, regular performance appraisal, performance-contingent rewards, and high levels of employee involvement” (pp. 1222). This set of integrated HRM activities within the high performance work system aims to ensure that employees are well-equipped with the skills required for the organisation to achieve its key strategic goals, thereby leading to a sustainable competitive advantage (Snape & Redman, 2010). These activities form part of three broad categories, namely “employee skills” with a focus on attracting and developing employees, “motivation” through remuneration and rewards linked to performance, and “empowerment” to promote employee voice, decision-making and influence (Snape & Redman, 2010).

Zhong et al. (2016) further argued the importance of such high-performance practices, stating that this investment in employees signals to them that the organisation values and cares about them, which improves workers’ perceptions of organisational support and leads to higher levels of engagement. However, Zhong et al. (2016) also noted that dispositional differences or characteristics may play a role in and influence the relationship between HR practices and individuals’ perceptions of organisational support. This is particularly important in the gig economy, where the work context as well as the key characteristics of this work group may inform their perceptions of organisational support. It is thus important to determine which HRM practices lead to perceptions of organisational support, given the dispositional differences of this work group.

Jabagi et al. (2018) highlighted that HRM practices applied within the gig economy are mostly centred on monitoring and control, and ensuring compliance aimed largely at driving efficiency through extrinsic rewards. Employment relationships in such contexts are often of a low quality, as workers are deemed to be easily replaceable. This has brought HRM practices into the spotlight within this work context, as well as the potential negative outcomes that purely command and control practices may lead to in terms of task performance and engagement levels (Jabagi et al., 2018).

#### **2.4.2 Fostering POS through supportive HRM practices**

Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, Delery and Roumpi (2017) proposed that the interplay between both human capital resources and HRM practices is necessary for a firm to gain a competitive advantage. For this to happen, human capital resources need to be leveraged appropriately, which can be achieved through supportive HRM practices. HRM practices are traditionally based on the employee lifecycle, which is made up of key activities including talent pool development, recruitment and selection, onboarding, socialising and contracting, training and development, performance measurement and appraisal, administering of benefits and rewards, and retention (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). Given the short-term nature of gig work, the lifecycle is bound to look different.

Kost et al. (2020) highlighted that whilst careers may be considered to be boundaryless in the gig economy, workers are subjected to conditions that hinder their career and competency development. One of these is a lack of HRM support from the organisations with which they engage. Typically in the gig economy, neither the organisation nor digital labour platform or intermediary take accountability for the gig worker. The challenges faced by gig workers in such contexts relate to access to training and development, social networking with members within the organisation, and feedback on task performance (Kost et al., 2020). This raises concerns about the long-term prospects and sustainability of the gig employment model, in which there appears to be a lack of accountability in supporting the gig worker from an HRM perspective (Kost et al., 2020).

This shortfall may place workers engaged in this work arrangement at a disadvantage or precarious position, in that they are unable to develop the professional skills required for career progression. Ashford et al. (2018) argued that the gig economy is structured in such a manner that gig workers are rarely afforded the opportunity of professional career path development, as supporting mechanisms such as developmental feedback are absent. Kost et al. (2020) also argued that the definition of “employer” may need to be redefined in the gig economy as multiple parties may exist in the relationship, namely the gig worker, the digital labour platform and the organisation or client. This may require alternative ways for looking at how HRM support is provided (Kost et al., 2020).

Based on the engagement theory perspective, Bush and Balven (2018) offered practical propositions of how HRM practices may be adapted to improve the engagement levels of crowd workers, which is also considered a form of gig work. A number of these are outlined

in the section that follows, however the recommendations made do not consider the role of third parties, which may be online labour platforms, in the provision of HRM support. The perspective of the gig worker is also not considered in these propositions.

#### ***2.4.2.1 Recruitment and selection***

A gig worker's first point of contact with an organisation is through the recruitment and selection process, which may take place either through a digital labour platform or directly through networks within the organisation. Arguing for an ecosystem perspective of the platform, worker and organisation, Meijerink and Keegan (2018) highlighted that the key role of the platform is to act as a coordinator of the interaction by facilitating the supply and demand relationship for gig work, which it seeks to achieve through recruiting both gig workers and organisations onto the platform through the supply-side and demand-side respectively. It then manages the matching and selection of workers to organisational task requests based on skillset, selecting for efficiency and value from a commercial perspective (Meijerink & Keegan, 2018).

In order to positively influence worker perceptions during this phase, Bush and Balven (2018) proposed that organisations should emphasise the purpose of the task or engagement to be undertaken, or the purpose of the broader organisation, in a more meaningful manner. This, they argued, would lead to greater levels of perceived value alignment between the organisation and worker, which may result in improved engagement and commitment levels due to the workers' perceptions of a supportive work environment (Bush & Balven, 2018). Further to this, the authors stated that there is a need for organisations to consider the use of internal labour platforms for recruitment, as these may allow them to control gig workers' perceptions and improve their ability to attract talent; and making use of task assessments and personal value statements from gig workers to assess fit in the selection process (Bush & Balven, 2018).

#### ***2.4.2.2 On-boarding, socialising and contracting***

Barlage et al. (2020) argued that in the gig economy, organisations tend to drive transactional contracts based on the task-organisational fit and economic exchange, with no potential for development opportunities. Based on this, there is no incentive for gig workers to offer more than the required service according to the terms of exchange. This, they claimed, is in conflict with the ideal role of a knowledge-based gig worker, which is to bring their expert knowledge into the organisation which can be leveraged to create

benefits (Barlage et al., 2020). On this basis, transactional contracts may defeat the objective of leveraging the skillsets of workers.

Contracts should thus be more relational-based in such a context by allowing for greater flexibility pertaining to when and how to conduct knowledge-based engagements (Bryne & Pecchenino, 2019). Based on psychological contract literature (Barlage et al., 2020), relational contracts have a positive correlation with higher levels of perceived organisational support and organisational commitment, as well as improved levels of trust in the organisation and job satisfaction. On the other hand, lower levels of perceived organisational support, commitment, trust and satisfaction were observed for transactional contracts (Barlage et al., 2020).

Based on the results of a study on professional contractors, McKeown and Cochrane (2012) suggested that upfront engagement on-boarding, which covered the key elements of what the contract entailed, be conducted by client organisations to promote perceptions of organisational support.

#### ***2.4.2.3 Learning and development***

Vanhala and Ritala (2016) posited that opportunities for training and development in an organisation lead to an improvement in the quality of employee skills, as well as career advancement opportunities, over time. However, in the gig economy, freelancers bear the responsibility for their training and development, which forms an important part of their development as keeping one's skills up-to-date is important to be able to continue to secure work in the future (Ashford et al., 2018; Lo Presti et al., 2018; Meijerink & Keegan, 2018). Workers in this context might be challenged with a paradox in terms of career progression, as they are often hired based on their expertise in an area but tend to become engaged in repetitive work as a result (O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006).

In this context, gig workers may opt for stretch work which introduces new elements to an engagement of a similar nature, and in so doing, aids in the development of new skills and abilities and adds to their knowledge and experience base (O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006). In support of this, Bush and Balven (2018) recommended that organisations reconsider the nature of a task from being purely transactional to more complex and challenging, which would enable skill development as part of gig worker training and development. The nature of the tasks may also allow for workers to be involved in decision-making, and be provided with opportunities to communicate their views, which is positively associated with perceptions of being treated fairly (Vanhala & Ritala, 2016; Bush and Balven, 2018).

In order to better support gig workers' performance on the task, Flinchbaugh et al. (2020) suggested that organisations make provision for training on organisational processes and systems, to enable gig workers to tailor the task output according to the organisational needs; this is important to improving their performance on the task.

#### **2.4.2.4 Performance management**

Meijerink and Keegan (2018) highlighted that performance management and evaluation in the gig economy forms a key part of the success of this model, even in the absence of an employee-employer relationship, as it is important in supporting improved performance of gig workers during future tasks. Bush and Balven (2018) emphasised that in instances where future work would be undertaken for an organisation, performance management added greater value as it led to an improved understanding of future organisation expectations and therefore higher levels of task engagement. The authors argued that in the absence of performance feedback, workers may not feel that they are able to control the outcomes of tasks (Bush and Balven, 2018), as uncertainty exists on whether they were performing in a manner desired by the organisation. As feedback is also typically provided at the end of a task, organisations may consider more frequent feedback, particularly if tasks consist of definite milestones. Feedback may also be broadened beyond the specific task itself to enable the further professional development of the worker. However, whilst it was highlighted as an important to the success of the gig model, feedback is typically limited, or non-existent, and is not prioritised by client organisations, particularly for once-off tasks (Gandini, 2019). Thus gig workers' ability to further develop their professional competencies is limited.

#### **2.4.2.5 Remuneration and rewards**

Gig workers are typically remunerated following the completion of a task, thus incentives may be considered to be purely extrinsic. Workers are not afforded the typical protections and benefits extended to full-time traditional employees, including medical insurance and pension provisions, leading to perceptions that the nature of gig work is precarious. In this context, compensation must be perceived to be fair to gig workers in order for work to be undertaken (Meijerink & Keegan, 2018). In addition to remuneration by the task, Bush and Balven (2018) recommended the inclusion of additional incentives by organisations, which should be linked to the number of tasks undertaken as part of organisational retention, as well as tied to performance management and evaluation systems that are rated objectively (Vanhala & Ritala, 2016).



#### **2.4.2.6 Retention**

Given the short-term nature of gig work, which may be once-off in a number of instances, retention in a traditional sense may not be applicable and would need to be reframed in the gig economy. In support of this, Bush and Balven (2018) stated that organisations could reconsider the structure of engagements by making future engagements available, as well as by providing opportunities for participation in future work engagements to high performing gig workers, thus leading to a greater sense of commitment over time.

However the HRM practices do not carry the same weighting in forming perceptions of organisational support, and largely depend on individual exchange ideology (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and dispositional differences (Zhong et al., 2016) of workers. Bush and Balven (2018) concurred with this, stating that not all HRM practices may need to be implemented to form perceptions of organisational support, and organisations may benefit from implementing certain practices over others, which may be informed by the nature of the task or engagement to be undertaken. In defining the nature of a task, Jabagi et al. (2018) characterised them according to their level of standardisation, with non-standardised tasks having more task variety and a higher level of complexity. These tasks may call for higher levels of worker autonomy and decision-making empowerment, thus it will be important to understand how the nature of a task may influence gig workers' preferences for HRM practices.

#### **2.4.3 The role of online labour platforms**

Based on research conducted by Accenture, digital labour platforms are set to bring about major transformations to existing workforce models in the near future (Jabagi et al., 2018). These platforms are beginning to replace the role of human supervisors, with the result being that many gig workers have become even further detached from organisations, and are required to self-organise and self-motivate to be able to perform effectively on tasks and help the organisation achieve its set objectives (Jabagi et al., 2019). This may serve as a risk from the organisation's perspective in terms of a loss of control and oversight with regards to task output, as well as low commitment from the gig worker, especially when they are not empowered with the necessary resources to create conditions that allow for self-management and self-motivation in their work context.

Duggan et al. (2020) and Connelly et al. (2020) also stated that such a working relationship leads to the erosion of interpersonal human resource management, which is seldom or unlikely to be replicated digitally. This may mean that the relationship becomes

one of a purely transactional nature, characterised by low commitment levels and with the potential for worker exploitation. Furthermore, workers may not receive access to HR practices that are deemed to be fair and beneficial to their effective functioning and the delivery of quality outputs for organisations, leading to low perceptions of organisational support (Gandini, 2019; Connelly et al., 2020). Kost et al. (2020) advocated for a model in which the provision of HRM practices is shared between platforms and organisations, where each would cover different elements. This relates to activities such as feedback, skills matching, and network building (Kost et al., 2020). On this basis, a deeper understanding is required regarding how digital labour platforms may be utilised to support organisational goals, but in a manner that does not lead to the erosion of interpersonal HRM support.

Gandini (2019) stated that digital platforms are mainly utilised to control or govern the labour process between the worker and the organisation, keeping close track on gig worker task performance to ensure the efficient exchange of required services. By controlling the labour process, it essentially sets the engagement terms (Dunn, 2020). However, given the nature of knowledge-based gig work, a command and control approach is not well-suited to gig workers, particularly as it may prevent organisations from capitalising on the value to be offered by this workforce. With a high focus on sustainable and fair work practices, Healy, Pekarek and Vromen (2020) also argued that digital labour platforms may need to re-consider their approach to the management of on-demand talent.

Whilst the gig economy may create the potential for autonomy and flexibility in work arrangements, it may also be used in an exploitative manner by organisations that utilise it purely as a means of lowering labour costs by offering the fewest benefits possible (Duggan et al., 2020; Fleming, 2017). Over the long-term this erodes employment standards (Josserand & Kaine, 2019), and also creates power imbalances between the gig worker, the organisation and the digital labour platform (Aroles, Mitev, & Vaujany, 2019). Exploitative conditions in the gig economy may lead to competitive conditions on digital labour platforms where workers may undermine each other by driving down wages and setting fierce performance expectations, leading to lower labour standards that may even extend to the traditional, full-time workforce over time (Josserand & Kaine, 2019). This leads to questions regarding the long-term prospects of the gig economy work model, including how organisations can go about mitigating these risks in the design of their HRM practices.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This literature review supports the need for existing HRM practices within organisations to be modified to create a sense of task commitment for the knowledge-based gig worker, which will enable the organisation to leverage the relationship more effectively. Perceived organisational support depends on the extent to which the type of treatment satisfies the needs of individuals (Kurtessis, 2017), therefore it will be important that HRM practices that are deemed to be beneficial to knowledge-based gig workers are identified. Furthermore, it is important to understand how the role of task complexity dictates which HRM practices will be the most supportive, as well as the influence or role of the digital labour platform in the provision of HRM support. These are outlined further in Chapter Three, which sets out the research questions that guided this study.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 3.1 Introduction

The literature review in Chapter Two highlighted the implications of the gig economy for workforce management, which is characterised by on-demand, increasingly digitally-enabled, short-term relationships with an organisation. Due to the seemingly detached nature of this work, perceptions of organisation support may be low, which may present a challenge to organisations in terms of obtaining the full business value from the gig workforce. The key antecedents of perceived organisational support, and the different HRM practices that may contribute towards this were highlighted, as were the worker- and employer-level outcomes.

The aim of this study was to gain insight into the specific HRM practices required for knowledge-based gig workers, which would lead to positive perceptions of organisational support. This would then foster improved commitment levels, in order to better leverage the relationship to enable organisations to obtain the benefits that gig workers have to offer in terms of knowledge and skillset. The four research questions that will support in achieving the aim of the study are discussed below.

### 3.2 Explanation of research questions

***Research question one: In what ways does a knowledge-based gig worker's experience of HRM practices influence their perception of organisational support, and impact task performance?***

The objective of research question one was to explore both the positive and unfavourable HRM practices experienced within the knowledge-based gig economy context, and how these experiences of the HRM practices would influence their perceptions of organisational support, and the subsequent performance on the task or engagement.

Gig work is characterised by short-term, on-demand engagements, which organisations may leverage as needed to gain access to gig workers' specialised skills and capabilities based on business requirements (Duggan et al., 2020). This workforce will require a set of HRM practices that may need to be applied in a manner different to that of the traditional workforce if they are to promote greater commitment levels (Bush & Balven, 2018). Such HRM practices must also consider the most important needs of this workforce to enable them to create value for the organisation during the task or engagement.

***Research question two: Which HRM practices are most pertinent in ensuring the knowledge-based gig worker's commitment?***

The objective of research question two was to understand which HRM practices are most important to knowledge-based gig workers in creating perceptions of organisational support, which would lead to higher commitment levels for the task or engagement from the gig worker. This is important given that literature highlights that HRM practices may not carry the same weightings when it comes to forming perceptions of organisational support, and largely depend on factors such as an individual's exchange ideology (Eisenberger et al., 1986) or dispositional differences (Zhong et al., 2016). Bush and Balven (2018) highlighted that organisations may benefit from implementing certain practices over others, thus the answer to this question may provide guidance to organisations on where to focus their HRM practices in a gig economy context.

***Research question three: What effect does task complexity have on the knowledge-based gig worker's preference for the type of HRM practices provided?***

Gig workers engage in tasks of varying levels of complexity, with some being transactional in nature and clearly defined in terms of deliverables and the path to achieving these, while others are more cognitive and less well-defined in terms of the specification (Nakatsu, Grossman, & Iacovou, 2014; Jabagi et al., 2019). The objective of research question three question was to understand how gig workers' required level of HRM support varies according to the complexity level of the task.

***Research question four: What is the perceived role of the digital labour platform in building task commitment among knowledge-based gig workers through HRM practices?***

Digital labour platforms are playing an increasing role in supporting gig workers registered and securing work through platforms from HRM perspective (Kost et al., 2020). This has led to the erosion of interpersonal HRM (Duggan et al., 2020; Connelly et al., 2020) resulting in higher levels of detachment between organisations and gig workers (Jabagi et al., 2019). The objective of research question four was to gain insight into how digital labour platforms may provide HRM support to workers in a way that fosters improved commitment levels. With the increasing utilisation of digital labour platforms to facilitate gig work, this will be important for determining how the relationship between the worker, organisation and platform may be optimally structured to support workers in their effective execution of tasks, as well as help the organisation to achieve its objectives.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This study sought to answer the four research questions set out in this chapter, which were identified to address the gaps in the extant literature presented in Chapter Two. The research questions will help organisations to better understand which HRM practices are needed to accommodate knowledge-based gig workers, which will in turn lead to positive perceptions of organisational support. The research methodology utilised in the study is presented in the following chapter.

# **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

## **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter Four provides an overview of the research methodology that informed the study. As the objective was to uncover HRM practices that workers in the knowledge-based gig economy context perceived to be supportive, an interpretivist research approach was adopted. An inductive, qualitative, exploratory research methodology was followed for the study.

## **4.2 Choice of research methodology**

### **4.2.1 Philosophy**

The objective of the study was to gain insight into the specific HRM practices required for knowledge-based gig workers, which would lead to positive perceptions of organisational support, and improve commitment levels to the organisation for the duration of the task or “gig”. An interpretivist research philosophy was adopted for this study, which Saunders and Lewis (2018) described as being utilised to understand the social world of the research subjects from their perspective. This research philosophy was appropriate as the researcher sought to discover what the key supportive HRM practices from the gig worker’s perspective were, which lead to organisational or task commitment.

### **4.2.2 Approach**

As academic literature on the impact that the growth in the gig economy will have on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices is under-researched (Kaine & Josserand, 2019), an inductive approach was followed. An inductive approach constitutes the collection of data, which is then analysed for the emergence of themes, which form tentative hypotheses that are used towards theory development and thus follows a ‘bottom-up’ process (Myers, 2013). This approach sought to build on theory from the analysis of the data that was collected (Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

### **4.2.3 Methodological choices**

A mono method exploratory research design was followed as only qualitative data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) were considered. A single data collection technique was used to collect data from the research participants, namely gig workers operating in the

knowledge-based economy. The data collection process took the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with research participants.

#### **4.2.4 Purpose of the research design**

The research design used was explorative in nature, which Lee, Mitchell and Sablynski (1999) and Saunders and Lewis (2018) noted as being well-suited to qualitative research methods. The objective was to explore the ways in which the HRM practices currently applied by organisations to manage the traditional workforce must be modified to accommodate the growing knowledge-based gig economy, in a manner that improves commitment levels to the organisation for the duration of the task or “gig”. An explorative research design is therefore appropriate for the objective of the study.

#### **4.2.5 Strategy**

A narrative research strategy was used, which Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark and Morales (2007) described as one in which the participants provide an account of events through chronological stories based on their personal experiences. Throughout the study, the researcher sought to understand the ways in which the HRM practices currently applied by organisations to manage the traditional workforce must be modified to accommodate the growing knowledge-based gig economy, in order to improve commitment levels to the organisation for the duration of the task or “gig”.

In addition, the researcher sought to understand which of these HRM practices are most useful for building organisational or task commitment. To achieve this, the researcher encouraged the research participants to draw on their experiences as knowledge-based gig workers in describing their experiences of the HRM practices they were exposed to during interactions with organisations, and the outcomes of these whilst on a gig work assignment. This was achieved through semi-structured, qualitative interviews, as this approach was best aligned with the research objective.

#### **4.2.6 Time horizon**

A cross-sectional time horizon was adopted, mainly due to research time constraints (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The cross-sectional time horizon allowed for the research to be conducted at a single point in time, which in this case was through the in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the research participants over an eight-week period.



#### **4.2.7 Techniques and procedures**

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were utilised to gather the required data. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with the ability to respond to changes or new insights that arose as the research was in progress (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It further allowed for depth to be achieved as the interviewer was able to inquire about, and expand on, the participants' responses. This was crucial as the research topic was of an exploratory nature, and having this level of flexibility to probe further on participants' responses in order to better understand their experiences of organisations' HRM practices, provided the scope to introduce new material that arose during the interview process.

### **4.3 Population**

A "gig worker" is defined as an independently-working individual who is engaged by an organisation for a short-term contract or work engagement, referred to as a "gig" (Jabagi et al., 2019; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019). The key examples of workers who fall under this definition include independent consultants across various areas of expertise, from HR to marketing, advertising, software and web development, and freelance workers.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the importance of selection criteria in order to determine an appropriate sample from which information relevant to the research topic may be extracted. In the context of this research, the population consisted of gig workers based in the knowledge economy in South Africa. Research participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- a) Based in the knowledge-economy, implying higher or specialised skills levels;
- b) Worked in the gig economy on various gigs in order to provide a reliable account of their experience with organisations' HRM practices;
- c) Worked on gigs for more than one organisation to be able to offer different perspectives on how HRM practices may be adapted to accommodate the gig workforce; and
- d) Interacted with organisational processes where the gigs were undertaken, for example exposure to on-boarding or induction processes, or interactions with organisational staff, in order to provide input into answering the research questions.

## 4.4 Unit of analysis

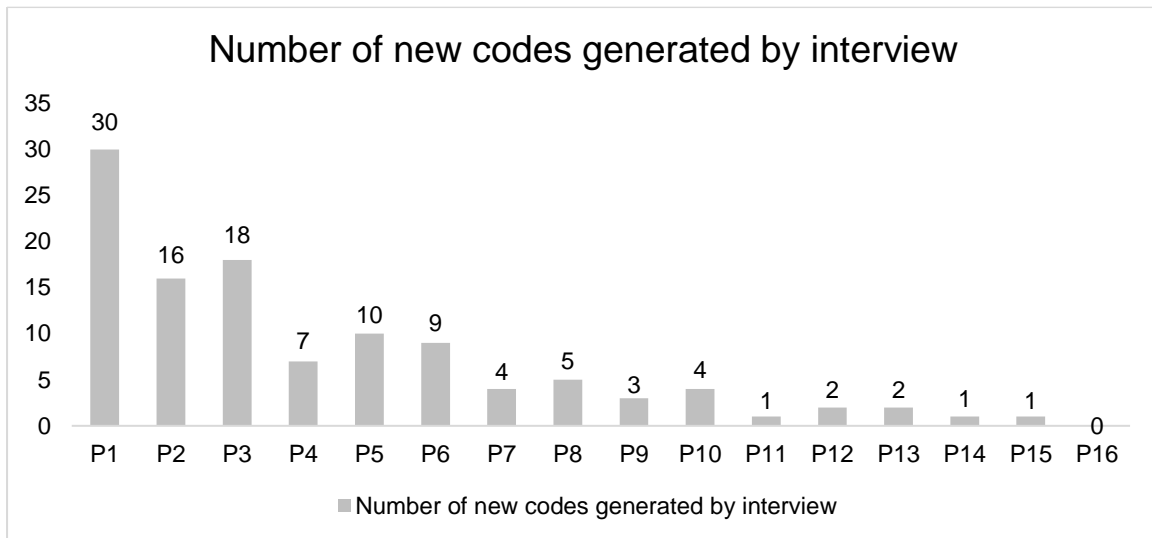
The unit of analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) constituted individuals who met the criteria for gig workers listed above in 4.3 (Population). This sample was able to provide the researcher with insights that highlighted and enhanced the relationships between constructs of HRM practices and perceived organisational support.

## 4.5 Sampling method and size

A purposive non-probability sampling method, also known as judgemental sampling, was followed, whereby the researcher's judgement was relied upon to select an appropriate sample based on the defined selection criteria (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The purposive sampling strategy was heterogeneous (add reference), because although the researcher sought to interview knowledge-based gig workers, the selection of participants was not limited to a specific industry. This allowed for higher variation in the data collected (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher relied on their professional network, to gain access to potential interview participants, who were screened according to the selection criteria in order to be included in the sample.

In considering the sampling size, the researcher aimed to select 20 participants for the interviews to ensure that the saturation point would be reached. The saturation point, which is defined as the point at which the researcher does not observe any new data or themes from the analysed interview data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), as determined by the number of new codes created, was reached at the 15th interview however. As a result of saturation being demonstrated earlier, the researcher adjusted the sample size to 16 research participants. Guest et al. (2006) noted that saturation is typically demonstrated by the twelfth interview, but emphasised that caution must be applied for instances whereby the selected group may be heterogeneous, in which case a larger sample size is required. Figure 1 below demonstrates the point at which saturation was reached, and is based on the number of new codes generated per interview. In total 113 new codes were generated from the data analysis. The codebook that was developed from the analysis of the transcribed interviews is included in Annexure D.



**Figure 1: Number of new codes generated by interview**

#### **4.6 Data collection tool**

Semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted virtually, utilising an interview guide (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with open-ended interview questions as the data collection tool during the semi-structured, qualitative interviews. The interview questions that were applicable to answering each research question, are mapped to each other Table 2.

The interview guide (Annexure C) began with an explanation of the context and objective of the study, to provide sufficient background for the research participants, which interview participants were taken through before the interview commenced. This was followed by stating the requirement for informed consent, which outlined the terms of confidentiality to the participants and required sign-off of an informed consent letter prior to the interviews being conducted, in line with ethical requirements. A sample of an informed consent letter that was signed off by participants, is available in Annexure B.

The interview guide consisted of general questions about the participants aimed at confirming the criteria defined for the sample, and collecting any additional information that may be useful to the study and to assist in easing the participant into the interview. These questions formed part of the preliminary interview questions. The general questions were followed with descriptive questions that served to lay the foundation of the research topic, asking research participants to share their experiences with organisations with regards to HRM practices. This was followed by open-ended interview questions that aimed to answer the research questions listed in Chapter Three of the research report.

**Table 2: Research questions and interview mapping**

Research question	Interview questions
<p><b><u>Research question 1:</u></b></p> <p>In what ways does a knowledge-based gig worker's experience of HRM practices influence their perception of organisational support, and impact task performance?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Think back to a time when you had a positive experience with an organisation during your time as a gig worker with regards to HRM practices. Please explain what this experience constituted and what made the experience positive?</li> <li>2. Think back to a time when you had an unfavourable experience with an organisation during your time as a gig worker with regards to HRM practices. Please explain what this experience constituted and what made the experience unfavourable?</li> <li>3. How did your experiences lead you to perceive the organisation in terms of being supportive?</li> <li>4. In what ways did these experience impact your performance on your task / deliverable?</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Research question 2:</u></b></p> <p>Which HRM practices are most pertinent in ensuring the knowledge-based gig worker's commitment?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. How would you recommend the organisation modify its existing HRM practices to lead to a higher commitment level to the task from you?</li> <li>6. Which of these HRM practices would lead to the highest commitment level to the task from you and why?</li> <li>7. If you had 100 points to allocate to each of these practices, how would you allocate them?</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Research question 3:</u></b></p> <p>What effect does task complexity have on the knowledge-based gig worker's preference for the type of HRM practices provided?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. In what ways do the complexity of the task impact / inform the level of support you require from the organisation with regards to HRM practices?</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Research question 4:</u></b></p> <p>What is the perceived role of the digital labour platform in building task commitment among knowledge-based gig workers through HRM practices?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. What role do you believe the digital labour platform should play in building organisational commitment for you through the provision of HRM support?</li> <li>10. Which of the HRM practices do you feel may be undertaken by the digital labour platform, and how this may be done in a way that does not diminish the co-determined and relational work arrangement, and commitment levels?</li> </ol>

As the interviews were semi-structured, the researcher had some flexibility to adjust the order of the main interview questions and to probe further on responses where necessary. This was done according to the interactions between the researcher and the participants, as well as their responses to the interview questions.

## 4.7 Data collection process

With the study being qualitative in nature, semi-structured interviews were used to allow the interviewer to probe further on a set of themes from the literature. Predetermined questions, which were asked in a varying order (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), were used as the data collection tool. The flexible nature of the semi-structured interviews allowed for the addition and omission of questions as an interview progressed, enabling the researcher to gather additional insights. It further allowed the researcher to confirm her understanding of the participants' responses (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Conducting pilot interviews prior to data collection also served to confirm the participants' understanding of the questions. Preparations for the semi-structured interviews included finalising the interview guide and consent forms for participant completion, and deciding on an appropriate data recording tool (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Jacob and Furgerson (2012) recommended the development of a script for use during interviews, as this can help to guide the process and ensure that no critical aspects are been omitted. The researcher's script included the background and details of the study, a request to obtain informed consent from participants verbally, comments to address any confidentiality concerns, and remarks to build rapport upfront to ensure a more successful interview process (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted one-on-one, and were held virtually using the Zoom video and audio conference platform. This was done to adhere with safety precautions given the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The researcher and participants tested the platform at the beginning of the interviews to ensure that it was functioning, and the participants were requested to situate themselves in a quiet location with no distractions. Prior to the commencement of each interview, the researcher highlighted the objective of the study and provided additional background on the research, and also allowed the participants to ask any relevant questions. This introduction was not recorded as part of the interviews.

The recorded interview included obtaining participant consent to partake in the interview as well as consent to record the interview, preliminary questions and the main interview questions. In closing the interview, the researcher established whether the participants would make themselves available for further questions or to provide clarification where necessary, through member checks (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The researcher also

made notes on important points and insights from each interview, both during and after each interview to refer to during the data analysis phase.

## 4.8 Data analysis approach

Data analysis is the process whereby meaning is derived from data, which is then used to inform the findings of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative data collected during the interviews were in text and audio form. Each interview was then transcribed and analysed as text data (Saunders & Lewis, 2018) using the Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. The key steps that comprised the data analysis phase are included in Table 3 below (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Table 3: Steps of the data analysis**

Step	Description of Process
<b>1. Data preparation</b>	Data preparation consisted of transcribing interviews into a common format, reading each carefully to obtain a sense of the main ideas that were emerging, and checking that all data were included.
<b>2. Generating of codes</b>	Coding, or category construction, which is a means of organising the data or interview transcripts in a way that assigns meaning and allows for easier retrieval at a later stage of the analysis and during report writing. It was also important to keep the research purpose and research questions in mind whilst completing this step, as it allowed for the gleaning of insights that were relevant to the research topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
<b>3. Categorisation of codes</b>	Categorisation, or the output of coding, which is a summary of the main themes that begin to emerge from the grouping or consolidation of codes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Some of the initial categories identified became sub-categories, as an iterative process was followed.
<b>4. Theorising</b>	Theorising, which moves to a more abstract level whereby the data is interpreted taking the literature into account. The purpose is to develop a theoretical framework such as a model or generation of theory to answer the research question and put forth suggestions for future research avenues (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016).

## **4.9 Data rigour and trustworthiness**

Assuring the quality of the data collected during the research is important as it verifies the trustworthiness or credibility of the research findings (Roulston, 2010). Roulston (2010) suggested a number of ways in which this could be achieved, which were incorporated into the data collection process. This included:

- Conducting two pilot interviews prior to conducting the main interviews with research participants to test the clarity of the questions, as well as the participants' ability to address the research questions adequately. The participants from the pilot interviews did not take part in the final interviews, although their characteristics were similar in terms of the sample criteria.
- Conducting multiple interviews with a number of participants across industries to obtain variation in the data.
- Using open-ended questions and avoiding leading questions in order to minimise researcher bias, as well as sequencing the questions from general to more specific as the interview progressed.
- Audio recordings of the interviews were made to support the researcher's handwritten notes. This was done to ensure the accurate transcription of the interviews, and therefore the reliability of the data.
- Sampling was done across industries in order to obtain a higher variation in data collected, as this influenced the validity of the research findings.
- Participants were assured of the confidentiality of any information that may be used to identify them, which put them at ease with regards to answering the interview questions honestly. Data were also stored without identifiers, including the names of the participants and any organisations they referred to.
- Making provision for member checks of the transcribed interviews with research participants to ensure accurate interpretation of the data.
- Storing all the raw data collected and used as part of the research electronically.

## **4.10 Research ethics**

Prior to the collection of data, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee. This was done to ensure that the researcher adhered to the ethical principles required to conduct research. To ensure adherence to the ethical clearance principles, informed consent was obtained from research participants before the commencement of each interview. The participants were also informed of their

right to terminate their interviews at any time, and were assured that confidentiality of all information shared in the interviews would be maintained, and any data stored would be done so without identifiers. Refer to Annexure A for the ethical clearance approval from the Ethics Committee.

#### **4.11 Research limitations**

Being explorative in nature, the findings from a qualitative research methodology are not quantifiable (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999); therefore quantitative research would be required to confirm the validity of this study's findings. Qualitative research also cannot be generalised from sample to population (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999) due to the small sample size. Furthermore, limiting the sample to knowledge-based gig workers within the Gauteng and Cape Town region meant that only a minority of all gig workers were represented.

Due to the possibility of researcher bias, post-interview checks were held with the research participants to ensure that their responses were interpreted correctly. Subject bias, whereby research participants may share information that is not truthful or reliable, may also have been a limitation to the study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). To mitigate this, the participants were assured of interview confidentiality, and the interview questions did not require the participants to disclose the names of organisations that they had worked with. Importantly, qualitative studies are not easily replicable as they are often not sufficiently detailed in terms of the decisions made throughout the process (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999).



# CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

## 5.1 Introduction

Chapter Five presents the results of the research questions that were outlined in Chapter Three of this report. The results are based on an analysis of the 16 semi-structured, qualitative interviews that were conducted virtually with independent workers in the gig economy. The chapter begins with a description of the research sample, followed by a presentation of the results for each research question, based on the qualitative data analysis.

## 5.2 Description of the sample

As part of the data collection process, interviews were conducted with 16 independent workers in the knowledge-based gig economy, who had a range of skills and areas of expertise ranging from human resources management to information technology (IT), engineering, copywriting, and marketing. They had been engaged across a range of industries including financial services, insurance, mining and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). The researcher aimed to obtain a variety of skills specialisations and industry experience in order to achieve heterogeneity in the sample, as this enhanced the richness of the findings from the data. In total, the study consisted of seven females and nine males, with experience of working independently ranging from six months to 24 years, who met the sample criteria set out in Chapter Four. For the purposes of the analysis, a code was created for each participant in order to maintain confidentiality. A summary of the research participants is presented in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Summary of research participants**

<b>Participant code</b>	<b>Skills specialisation</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Years working independently</b>
<b>P1</b>	General human capital	Mining and resources	6
<b>P2</b>	General human capital, leadership, culture	Financial services	5
<b>P3</b>	IT project management	Insurance	8
<b>P4</b>	Business optimisation consulting	Financial Services	8
<b>P5</b>	IT system and solution designs	Financial services	6
<b>P6</b>	Water engineering, water resources planning	Water engineering	9
<b>P7</b>	Enterprise supplier development	Management consulting	9
<b>P8</b>	Mechanical design, equipment performance	Mining and resources	1
<b>P9</b>	Bookkeeping, financial control	Financial services	7
<b>P10</b>	Copyrighting	Publishing	10
<b>P11</b>	Industrial forensic pathology (investigating machine, steel structures, related equipment failure)	FMCG	24
<b>P12</b>	Electrical engineering, manufacturing, software development	FMCG	1
<b>P13</b>	General human capital	Information Technology	1
<b>P14</b>	IT project management, finance	Information Technology	6
<b>P15</b>	General human capital	Information Technology	1
<b>P16</b>	Marketing, sponsorship and branding	Media	0.5

### 5.3 Data analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews over an eight week period. All interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, based on the time availability of the participants, and a request was made by the researcher for these to take place in a quiet location without distractions. As it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews, the researcher opted to make the Zoom video option visible to put participants at ease and to build trust, which was important in getting the participants to be open and share their perceptions freely. Permission was obtained to record each interview, following which each interview was transcribed by the researcher verbatim. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 53 minutes, with the longest interview lasting 71 minutes and the shortest interview taking place in just under 22 minutes. The key interview statistics are presented in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Key interview statistics**

Description	Key statistic
Total number of interview participants	16
Total length of interviews	14 hours, 12 minutes, 34 seconds
Average length of interviews	53 minutes, 28 seconds
Shortest interview length	21 minutes, 37 seconds
Longest interview length	1 hour, 10 minutes, 30 seconds
Data collection period	8 weeks

## **5.4 Presentation of results**

This section presents the results of each of the four research questions highlighted in Chapter Three of the report, as well as the interview guide which is included in Annexure C.

## **5.5 Results for Research Question One**

***Research Question 1: In what ways does a knowledge-based gig worker's experience of HRM practices influence their perception of organisational support, and impact task performance?***

The objective of this research question was to explore both the positive and unfavourable HRM practices experienced by knowledge-workers in the gig economy, and how these experiences have shaped their perceptions of organisational support. Further to this, the objective was to understand the resultant impact of perceptions of organisational support on knowledge-based gig worker's engagement deliverables. The findings of the research question are highlighted in the section that follows, beginning with the HRM practices, followed by the ways in which these HRM practices influence gig workers' perceptions of organisational support, and their subsequent delivery on the task or engagement.

### **5.5.1 HRM practices in the knowledge-based gig economy context**

The first and second interview questions posed to interview participants asked them to describe their positive experiences and their unfavourable experiences with the organisation from an HRM practices perspective, respectively. A number of participants described multiple experiences based on their lifecycle through organisations as part of the specific task or engagement that they had been brought on to complete, whilst others touched only on a specific experience that stood out for them in particular during their

engagements with various organisations as gig workers.

The constructs presented Table 6 provide a summary of the positive and unfavourable experiences that emerged from an HRM practices perspective, applied by the organisation in the gig worker context. On the left side are the rankings of each construct from a positive perspective, and on the right side are the rankings of each construct from an unfavourable perspective, based on frequency count. The frequency highlights the number of participants who mentioned aspects relevant to each construct.

Table 6: Overview of the HRM practices applied by organisations

Positive experience: Rank (Frequency)	Construct	Unfavourable experience: Rank (Frequency)	Total mentions of constructs: (Frequency)
1 (15)	Engagement support	2 (9)	24
2 (10)	Clear structures and processes	2 (9)	19
7 (6)	Remuneration and rewards	3 (7)	13
3 (9)	Autonomy and flexibility	5 (3)	12
7 (6)	Fairly applied practices	4 (6)	12
7 (6)	Learning and development	6 (2)	8
4 (7)	Performance feedback	- (0)	7

The construct relating to engagement support was referred to most frequently by participants, followed by clear structures and processes, and remuneration and rewards. The key findings relating to each of the constructs are presented in further detail below.

### **5.5.1.1 Engagement support**

#### On-boarding and socialisation

The research participants described the provision of engagement support as first and foremost upfront on-boarding from the organisation in relation to their engagement, to ensure that they better understand the requirements of the task or engagement in order to support the successful completion thereof:

*“So, it was actually as simple as having a meeting with my direct supervisor (on the engagement) who in this case was the CFO. Then also with the GM, where they*

*obviously explained in more detail, "This is what the organisation is about, this is what we need your help with, these are our expectations of you." (P9)*

To receive adequate engagement support at this level, participants P1, P3, P4, P7 and P13 believed that it is important to be introduced to key stakeholders within the organisation, who are the owners of the task or engagement. The justification for being introduced to these stakeholders is that it enables the gig worker to receive sufficient information to be able to successfully commence with the engagement, as highlighted by one of the interview participants:

*"For example, I was reporting to a manager responsible for software delivery at Organisation B. He only introduced me to his boss, who was the general manager. And that is very lean. And the purpose is to really give you enough information that enables you to get started." (P3)*

An additional benefit of on-boarding and socialisation is that it facilitates the formation of a support network for the engagement. Regarding the networks created as a result of the on-boarding and socialisation process, P4 stated that:

*"When you need something immediately you can say to this person, 'Who is the right person to talk to in this department?'"*

This highlights how having support networks may assist gig workers to seek solutions to engagement-related challenges.

From an unfavourable perspective, research participants P1, P7, and P13 highlighted inadequate levels of on-boarding, which did not set engagement expectations upfront, as a key negative experience in terms of HRM practices. Typically, engagements are kicked off in a sudden manner, which may not allow for sufficient on-boarding to take place. This normally has negative implications for the engagement from a delivery perspective:

*"So things were done in a rush, the processes of the organisation, the etiquette. Well there was no time for doing that full orientation, I had to hit the ground running. So only later after I was fully on-boarded, was I able to understand, 'Oh, these are their ways of working'." (P7)*

### Internal organisational sponsorship

Participants highlighted being granted access to an internal organisational sponsor as positive, as this assists them by having a key touchpoint within the organisation to engage

with on task requirements, should the requirement to do so arise:

*“And the process I suppose is that at every step of the way, I usually ask for somebody that I'm in touch with, every day, just checking in on where we are, this is what I'm finding, and so on and so forth.” (P2)*

However, a challenge experienced by gig workers is that organisational employees who are supposed to support the gig worker are not briefed beforehand regarding the support to be provided. They also may not have sufficient capacity to provide support due to their own job demands. In certain instances this has led to conflicting priorities between the organisational sponsor and gig worker, heightening tensions further:

*“Because what happens then is when you've got to get somebody like in this case, put everybody together and say this guy here to do this and give your time for that. And by then they are cross with you because now you've told the boss so it doesn't allow for work to flow easily and outcomes to be achieved easily. It's a start-stop-start head butting all the time to get the work done.” (P1)*

Further to creating challenges in terms of obtaining engagement-relevant information and support, participant P8 stated that when organisational employees do not understand the type of work being conducted by a gig worker, they do not have an appreciation of why the gig worker charges the organisation the rate that they do.

### Crucial engagement-related interactions

Given the knowledge-based nature of the task or engagement, it is important to the gig worker to be able to engage on a continuous basis with the organisational representatives who are ultimately responsible for the engagement; on a relational basis to understand their needs as part of the engagement or task to be undertaken; and to provide solutions that may bring about value. This was emphasised by a number of participants:

*“The key to that is the process beforehand is more just really spending time understanding what they need. I typically would have one or two conversations with clients on understanding their needs, really understanding what it is that they are wanting for me, to help them with. So, you know, defining and clarity around what the needs are is very important because once you get that right, everything else kind of follows through.” (P2)*

Inclusion in crucial engagement-related interactions and forums is an important aspect of engagement support, as it allows gig workers to remain up to speed and provide specialist

input on the organisation's needs as well as the latest decisions regarding the engagement, as such decisions may have repercussions for their deliverables. Given the short-term nature of the task or engagement, the organisation is also required to be responsive to gig worker requests so as not to delay engagement progress.

Not being included in interactions or forums in which decisions are made regarding gig worker engagements is perceived to be an unfavourable experience. In addition to this, gig workers may not receive timely communication on such decisions, which ultimately impacts their deliverables:

*“This was just around the other forms of decision-making taking place within the organisation, which I did not have visibility of, or missed those strategic decisions, being an outsider. For example a decision was made to cut budgets and this would see the engagement launch at a later time. So that aspect of not having a full view of the decisions being made and how that would impact on my deliverables ultimately.”*  
(P15)

In certain instances, engagement-related decisions also lead to scope changes, with the result being that the engagement becomes unfavourable for the gig worker from a cost and timing perspective. Lastly, not being able to engage with an organisation prevents gig workers from highlighting the type and level of resource support that is required as the engagement progresses.

In summary, the provision of engagement support is required at both the transactional level, which primarily consists of being briefed regarding the requirements of the engagement; and the relational level, where organisational support is provided to the gig worker on a continuous basis throughout the execution of the task. The latter takes the form of organisational sponsorship and inclusion in key task interactions, which enables them to clarify the needs of the organisation.

#### **5.5.1.2 Clear structures and processes**

##### Specific terms of contracting

Six of the participants described the presence of contracts, which outline very specifically the key terms of the engagement, as a positive experience. The key terms that should be incorporated into a contract include specific milestones, with associated timings; how success of those milestones will be determined through measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs); as well as key payment terms.

The presence of specific terms of contracting assures gig workers that their interests will be covered, along with those of the organisation, as noted by P9:

*“Then obviously the contract management, always ensuring that our contracts were in place, up to date, they obviously cover the company but also cover me, just making sure that, that is in.”*

This also serves as a signal of the organisation’s transparency:

*“And what the KPIs were, they were very transparent with that, even before I was on-boarded, before I even met the people that I was going to do the work for.” (P14)*

When describing their unfavourable experiences, participants stated challenges in terms of understanding exactly what is required of them as part of the engagement when contract terms are not stated specifically. They then have to rely on their own interpretation of the meaning of specific terms, which makes it difficult to engage with the organisation:

*“So with some of the less established organisations who don't have systems in place, especially like clarifying what the policies are towards certain things, it's quite difficult to work with them.” (P6)*

In addition to contract terms not being stated specifically, certain terms were also described to have been misrepresented in terms of the engagement scope:

*“But as we undertook the work, we then realised that what they had communicated to in terms of the current state was very different to what was actually found on the site.” (P12)*

### Structured and simplified engagement process

Having a structured process in place throughout the engagement, in which the organisation communicates with the gig worker on key steps of the process, was viewed as a positive experience, as it instils confidence and a sense of professionalism in the organisation, and puts the gig worker at ease regarding the engagement. This, in turn, allows for better focus on the task itself:

*“It was the most pleasant experience for me, in that the communication was transparent, there was somebody from HR that contacted me and told me this is the next step, this is what's going to happen next. The communication was done better with the HR people.” (P14)*

Whilst the gig workers highlighted the presence of structured processes, these need to be



simplified given the short-term nature of gig engagements. As an example, a participant reflecting on the bidding and selection process stated that:

*“There wasn’t a whole lot of vetting processes, if I can put it like that, a lot of bureaucracy in getting the person involved.” (P10)*

Ultimately it should come down to the ability to perform the required task, and the negotiation of rates and contracting terms.

Five of the participants highlighted the lack of a structured engagement process as a key hindrance in that it creates challenges for the delivery of the engagement itself. This included missing important deadlines, and can cause issues regarding clarity of communication and billing / remuneration:

*“For instance, when it's time to pay, then there's issues there, because perhaps maybe this department didn't follow finance procedures in order to make sure that you get paid within the times that you're supposed to get paid.” (P10)*

There may also be a level of uncertainty regarding the conclusion of an engagement, particularly when organisations have hinted at the possibility of extensions but with no certainty or guarantee provided. This hinders the gig worker’s ability to plan for alternative tasks or engagements.

*“Then the next thing they say they are only going to renew for a shorter period, then it ends up going to a month to month and things like that so it just creates that uncertainty that doesn't really help.” (P5)*

In certain instances the terms of contracting are also changed by organisations, with little communication regarding these changes being provided in a timely manner to the gig worker. This can cause a disruption to the structure of the engagement.

### Systemic nature of gig model

One participant commented that unfavourable HRM practices are a result of the systemic shortcomings of the gig model:

*“So look, the shortcomings that I find in the process, and I think, in both organisations, are systemic. In other words, they arise from the arrangement and this is usually the standard arrangement in any company.” (P3)*

The participants’ perceptions were that the HRM practices applicable within the gig economy are not structured to assist in climbing the ladder from a developmental

perspective. They are very much focused on a short-term encounter, with the key purpose of delivering on a piece of work. The participants accepted this as the nature of the job, which is a key downside to working in the gig economy.

### **5.5.1.3 Remuneration and Rewards**

#### Access to future gig engagements through value-add

A number of participants highlighted that there are seldom monetary rewards in place upon the completion of a task, beyond the remuneration that was contracted upon. However, participant P3 did highlight that:

*“You are there to simply execute on a task and if you do it well, you will be rewarded by being invited again.”*

This indicates that gig workers perceive being considered for repeat engagements with an organisation in future as a reward for current performance. This may also be closely linked to retention within the gig economy. Being allowed to conduct future engagements with an organisation is a reward for the value which the gig worker contributed towards the organisation through the engagement:

*“I was meant to be there for a couple of months and then I don't know, I guess, from my interaction and my experience, I guess the value that the company saw in me, you know, they extended my contract further and it was a good thing. Which is great, but I think there's also, when you are so called gig worker, that uncertainty because you don't know. Sometimes when they give you these short term contracts, you actually don't know what the future holds.” (P9)*

#### Remuneration based on milestone achievement

It was also highlighted that remuneration tied to the achievement of specific milestones could be a better remuneration structure. This would be positive, given that certain tasks or engagements may be conducted over a longer period of time, and remuneration is normally received after the completion of the entire engagement:

*“And usually, in terms of when it comes to my rates, is that my professional fees then are crafted in such a way that I get paid on an achievement of specific outcomes or key milestones. So, which is why probably, I never have problems.” (P2)*

#### Remuneration amount and timing

Uncertainty regarding remuneration amount was highlighted by participants six as an

aspect of the HRM practices that they experience unfavourably. They felt that they were viewed by organisations as an easy target for payment rate reductions, particularly in instances of extended engagements or repeat work. In support of this, participant P8 specifically highlighted:

*“They either don’t pay you or they just rip you off.”*

Participant P10 also shared an experience whereby the organisation delayed payment:

*“It seems to always be a problem, whether it has to do with agreements about when I’m getting paid. Sometimes it’s how much you’re getting paid.”*

Further to this, it was highlighted that organisations perceive that gig worker rates should be lower than traditional consulting houses:

*“So you find in the industry that especially when you’re starting, that people tend to think because you are not a big company, they then expect that your rates or your benefits should be lower.” (P8)*

In certain instances, engagement-related decisions also lead to scope changes, with the result being that the engagement becomes unfavourable for the gig worker from a remuneration perspective. The reason for this is that it takes away from time that would have been allocated to another gig. In the examples provided by the participants, it was not possible to revise the rates that had already been agreed to, which was based on the achievement of deliverables and not hours worked.

#### **5.5.1.4 Autonomy and Flexibility**

##### Autonomy to customise deliverables

Given that the research participants conduct knowledge-based work and are specialists in their respective fields, having the autonomy to customise aspects of the engagement or task was perceived as a positive experience by seven participants. These participants highlighted their ability to provide a level of customisation to the engagement based on their expertise, as noted below:

*“And finally with them, we developed the new [cool drink can] end, and I developed my own experimental methods with which to test the end. Okay, so I developed my own technology, implemented it and it worked.” (P11)*

*“Having ownership over the engagement by the organisation, and being seen as the true expert in the field, the expert needing to own the process end-to-end versus being*

*inside where there are dependencies on many people who decide on the way forward with regards to the project. I was also trusted by the organisation to make the decision on the engagement, and come up with a solution.” (P15)*

Due to the gig workers' skills specialisations, organisations may also have higher levels of confidence in their ability to deliver solutions that are suited to the needs of the organisation. It is precisely for this reason that the organisation may hire these workers - their ability to address problems which the organisation may not have internal capacity for.

Participants raised as an issue not having the ability to customise work was, whereby they were made to follow the detailed steps set out in the scope and have no freedom to customise any aspects. This leads them to feel like unskilled workers:

*“The unfavourable experience was around the micromanagement; it's almost like you're an unskilled person. You feel like your skills are not actually being, you're not using your skills to their full potential, because you get you get told specifically what to do and how to do it and then you get tracked every step of the way, then it doesn't actually even give you the chance to provide an input to even raise concerns when some things are not being done properly.” (P5)*

Being in a situation where they lacked autonomy, also discouraged the voicing of issues relating to the engagement, as this was not taken to kindly by the organisational sponsor.

In an example where the engagement was not going according to plan, one participant highlighted that they were not given autonomy to rectify the unfavourable situation, stating that the organisation took control. As a result, the participant felt that their performance was mocked.

### Flexibility to negotiate contracts

Having the opportunity to influence contract terms and conditions, including the ability to negotiate payment rates, key milestones and the engagement or task methodology to be followed, and not accepting a standard proposed contract from the organisation, was highlighted as a positive experience for gig workers:

*“Maybe it's also due to who I work with, at what level I work and what kinds of conversations we have, and the contracting and how I do my own, for lack of a better word, how I influence my own contracting.” (P2)*

The level of specialisation of the gig worker, as well as the priority of the task or

engagement within the organisation, may play a factor in having the flexibility to negotiate contract terms.

### Flexible work arrangements

Lastly, the flexible nature of the work arrangement was emphasised, whereby gig workers' working hours are not controlled by strict policies, but are rather based on the agreed upon outputs or engagement deliverables, and close communication with the organisation regarding their progress.

*"I think that when you feel that you've been given responsibility, then you take that, well, personally. I take that and run with it, as opposed to being micromanaged. Because you get almost tracked or appraised if I may use that word by your outputs, as opposed to how many hours you are working and that." (P5)*

#### **5.5.1.5 Fairly applied practices**

### Fair access to HRM practices

A number of participants were appreciative of what they perceived to be fairly applied practices by organisations, stating that they were treated equitably in this regard. These practices included policies around work conduct, access to organisational resources such as training, and flexibility in working arrangements, provided that this was communicated to the organisation and deliverables were completed. Having these conditions extended to gig workers made them feel less like external members who had been brought on to temporarily support the organisation, and made them feel more like part of the team.

*"I will say in both companies that I have done gigs for, starting with Organisation B, the experience was really positive. And it consisted of the fact that there was to a very large extent equal treatment of the contracting or gig employees as well as permanent employees. The policies around conduct were applied across, I mean, we were all made aware of what constitutes good or bad conduct. And we were, to a large extent, given the same fair play, so to speak." (P3)*

A further example provided by a participant regarding fair access to HRM practices was in the recruitment, or bidding and selection process, which provided them with an opportunity to compete fairly, based on what the gig worker offered to the organisation:

*"I think it's positive in that it's competitive...They invite you to submit a full proposal. If you are successful, they might interview, so you just have to keep your financial and technical proposal tight, because you're competing with others." (P6)*

A participant noted that, in instances where gig workers contribute towards the targets of the organisation, they are not considered for an additional financial benefit that is afforded to permanent employees, which they perceived to be unfair:

*“So, I felt like I should have also earned that because I contributed towards their organisational targets, and I felt that I had assisted in contributing to that, through improving processes, saving money in certain aspects or what have you. So in that respect, I felt after all this work, and then they don't even consider me. It's a bit unfair, but I mean, obviously, I couldn't really do anything or say anything because in my contract I wasn't entitled to it.” (P9)*

However, the participant did acknowledge that not much could be done about this, as it had not been included in their contract.

#### Organisational delivery on agreed terms of exchange

Gig work may come with low levels of security, whereby organisations may not fully compensate workers for the tasks completed, or not honour other aspects of the contract. Hence, organisations delivering fully according to the agreed terms of exchange is viewed as a positive experience. Gig workers may also have a preference for organisations that are well-established as a result, perceiving them to be more trustworthy in terms of delivering according to the agreed terms:

*“I also feel comfortable working with them, because you know that you do your work and they'll pay you, so that's kind of my comfort working with established organisations. So it's been positive all around.” (P6)*

A key challenge encountered by gig workers during engagements concerns organisational actions that lead to their values being compromised. This normally occurs when deliverables are adjusted to be in line with the sponsor's objectives, rather than on what may be best for the business based on the advice of the gig worker:

*“Nobody had seen the process I did and what I recommended or the report, and then he goes and does something else and as if I'm the one that advised the team like that so it kind of created... a very uncomfortable time for me in the sense that it was very compromising because one of the things that is very, very important for a gig worker, is independence.” (P2)*

Examples such as this can lead a gig worker to question why organisations contract with them, only to dictate the work that they do. Gig workers have also encountered situations

in which they are compelled to go along with such practices, even though they know that it may be to the detriment of the organisation, in order to protect their contracts. This may violate the initial contract, which is based on their being independent.

Another key common area in which organisations do not deliver on the agreed terms of exchange is the payment of remuneration, which is often delayed and leads to a falling out between the worker and the organisation.

#### **5.5.1.6 Learning and Development**

##### Engagement-specific training

From a learning and development perspective, the participants stated that the provision of training specific to the engagement is an important positive experience, as it improves the likelihood of successful outcomes because they have a better understanding of the unique characteristics of the organisation and the nature of the task. This type of training includes technical aspects such as organisational systems, or specific processes and procedures that are unique, which a gig worker, even though operating as an expert, may not be familiar with as they are organisation-specific.

*“But there was certain key technical training that they just wanted everybody to have and they will make sure of that, for example, I went to several training [sessions] with the company.” (P3)*

When asked about the level at which training is provided by organisations, and whether training aimed at development is provided, one participant responded that:

*“While permanent employees will have a well-defined training and development plan, the contracting guys will typically not have [because] as an independent consultant, it's my job to make sure that I upskill myself and my skills are up to date so that I'm able to sell these skills to this client.” (P3)*

The response above indicates that gig workers acknowledge that the professional development of their skillset is their responsibility, and not that of the organisation. This requires investment on the part of the gig worker to ensure that their skills are kept current, as this will enable them to remain competitive within the market and offer attractive solutions to clients as a result. However, the provision of improvement-oriented feedback from the organisation may be useful in directing gig workers where to focus their personal development.

With regards to the provision of training to support the execution of an engagement, one

participant highlighted a negative experience when training was not provided. This was detrimental as it made it difficult for the gig worker to tailor a solution for the organisation, based on their unique characteristics:

*“I was working with platforms at that organisation... So in order for you to be effective, you need to understand first what they do. You've got a model of what it should be, but it doesn't mean that that's what they're doing. But if you don't then understand, if no one takes you through that platform, even when you have asked them to explain the importance, it then affects the success of your deliverable.” (P4)*

### Capability-enhancing engagements

A second important aspect that promotes learning and development in the gig worker context is the ability to work on stretch tasks, as these provide opportunities for further learning and growth, as well as enhancement of skills. As gig worker tasks are specialised by nature, they may experience a high level of repetitiveness in this regard which could lead to boredom, however the opportunity to work on a variety of projects in different contexts and with variations in the scope mitigates this. Participants mentioned being able to secure engagements or tasks that enable further skills development. These are often associated with being granted the opportunity to work on tasks or engagements that contain multiple elements or work streams, thereby allowing gig workers to broaden their experience:

*“The engagement also allowed for focus, in that it was multi-dimensional, and involved in many aspects of the business. I also felt that there was less ‘busyness’ which allowed me to think and be more strategic by being able to research potential solutions, and design and develop improved solutions.” (P15)*

### Professional development

Participants also experienced a lag in career development, as performance management or any development-related interventions are generally absent from the process:

*“But what I found is that my development as a person falls back, and you are likely, if you work in an economy, that if you're a developer and you work in the gig economy, you will remain a developer. Because there is no performance appraisal or performance management, there is no career plan.” (P3)*

#### **5.5.1.7 Performance feedback**

### Short interval control



In instances when tasks or engagements are not going according to schedule, participants P6, P12 and P15 found it helpful to engage in short interval control with their organisational sponsor in order to identify how both parties can work together to mitigate some of the challenges that have arisen. An example from P12, who had an initial project plan fall behind schedule, is provided to illustrate this:

*“In terms of not only managing expectations, but also if things do not go according to plan, sort of have a short interval control, such that you're able to detect anomalies quicker and correct them... And going back to reference the scope, what the standard was that was required, and then really facilitating a problem solving session and to draft a possible solution that would work for everyone.” (P12)*

### Post-engagement performance feedback

The participants highlighted that receiving helpful performance feedback post an engagement helps them to understand what worked well in the engagement, and to improve their capabilities for future engagements. This is crucial in helping gig workers identify where to re-direct their efforts in terms of skills specialisation and tailored solutions for customers. This is illustrated below:

*“But looking back, I had not delivered what they were looking for. So that feedback helped me to put things into perspective and work better, especially in a space that I'm not very familiar with. So when another organisation tried to give me some research work in an area I didn't know very well, I was able to say no, because I didn't want that experience again, and getting myself a bad name.” (P13)*

In summary, the most positive experiences highlighted by participants were in relation to engagement support, inclusive of up-front on-boarding and socialisation, organisational sponsorship, and being able to engage with the organisation at key touch points. This was followed by clear structures and processes, which consisted of clear contract terms as well as a structured, yet simplified, engagement process.

Similarly to the positive experiences, participants highlighted engagement support and clear structures and processes most frequently with regards to unfavourable HRM practices, followed by remuneration and rewards. As part of the clear structures and processes, a new sub-theme emerged relating to the systemic nature of the gig model in terms of negative HRM practices. Here, participants viewed HRM practices as not being structured to support professional advancement. This was highlighted as a downside of the gig economy, however the participants acknowledged that it was a shortcoming of the

model itself, and not necessarily of the organisations.

In terms of remuneration and rewards, a new sub-theme which emerged related to uncertainty regarding remuneration amount and timing. The participants were asked to reflect on how their positive and unfavourable experiences led them to perceive organisations from a support perspective, the results of which are outlined in the following section.

### 5.5.2 Perceptions of organisational support

Having described their positive and unfavourable HRM experiences when answering question one and question two respectively, the participants were asked to reflect on how these experiences influenced their perceptions of organisations in terms of being supportive in the third interview question. Most of the participants perceived the organisations to be supportive when, through the positive HRM practices, they felt their work contribution was valued.

In relation to the negative HRM practices, the most frequently mentioned construct was also value of worker contribution, in that the participants did not feel that their value-add was appreciated. This was followed by organisational values, where the experience led to perceptions of a fearful environment and not being able to trust the organisation. Table 7 below provides a summary of the participants' perceptions of organisational support, with each being discussed in further detail below.

**Table 7: Perceptions of organisational support**

Positive experience: Rank (Frequency)	Construct	Unfavourable experience: Rank (Frequency)	Total mentions of constructs: (Frequency)
1 (11)	Value of worker contribution	1 (8)	19
3 (4)	Organisational values	2 (6)	10
2 (5)	Inclusive practices	4 (3)	8
- (0)	Lack of support inherent to gig economy	3 (4)	4

### **5.5.2.1 Value of worker contribution**

#### Understanding and appreciation of value-add

In total, nine participants stated that they perceived an organisation to be supportive when their value-add to the engagement was understood and appreciated. This was demonstrated through meaningful interactions between organisational members and the gig worker:

*“From the interactions that I’ve had, there’s been an appreciation of having a third eye, an independent individual that is not necessarily within the framework of the business on a day-to-day basis. So that appreciation from the end user that you as an independent consultant coming in and having a more meaningful interaction and being appreciated that there is knowledge that I can impart, that was a good interaction from an HR perspective.” (P8)*

The participants felt that when HRM practices are unfavourable, particularly regarding engagement support, their value-add is not appreciated. In certain instances it also leads to a sense of having to compete with members within the organisation, causing gig workers to question why the organisation contracted with them in the first place:

*“The one time I worked with a CEO, who “knew everything”. Okay, so it was almost like a competition. I mean, at some point I actually said to him, so why did you hire an independent consultant then?” (P2)*

#### Open-mindedness towards external influence

Further to this, the participants perceived organisations as having an open mind toward external influence through the various engagements as a further indication of being supportive. This demonstrates that an organisation is open to the alternative solutions proposed by gig workers, which serves as further encouragement to perform. It also creates the feeling that the gig worker is trusted by the organisation to deliver solutions that will be beneficial in the long-run.

### **5.5.2.2 Organisational values**

#### Value-orientation

Based on their engagements with various organisations, the participants noted the positive demonstration of organisational values associated with fair treatment in terms of HRM practices and ethical practices. The values that are instilled by organisations in these

instances are perceived to be supportive:

*“And it really all comes from the fact that management emphasises that we are here to deliver, perhaps how we got here is less of a matter. They didn’t say it explicitly in those words, but I think their actions and how they applied HR policy it was very clear that that is the philosophy and the thinking in the organisation.” (P3)*

*“And they share with you the policies around corruption and things like that. So, if you’re doing work for Organisation A for example, and you’re a consultant, you cannot receive a gift. If you have to take the gift, you have to go and declare it to them. So it’s things like that, that that keeps you covered, and you feel like this is quite supportive in terms of the values that they also instil in the independent consultant.” (P6)*

Participants stated that not being provided with a measure of task autonomy leads to feelings of being micro-managed, and a resultant fear of voicing issues or an opposing view. This is because the environment was not conducive to gig workers speaking up, even when they know better, as protecting their contract becomes their priority.

*“I did not feel supported then. Because, part of that, then what happened because you are being micromanaged so you feel it almost does not stop with that one level. It goes a lot higher than that, and you get in a position where it created a fearful environment as well.” (P5)*

When uncertainty exists regarding the organisation upholding its side of the agreement, the participants question whether the organisation can be trusted. Unfavourable HRM practices also create the impression that the organisation does not care about people, which is a poor reflection of the existing culture.

Feelings of being exploited or misused by an organisation were also highlighted, mainly from a remuneration perspective, where the participants faced uncertainty regarding the timing and the amount of remuneration. In this regard, one participant highlighted that in certain instances where the organisation may themselves be awaiting payment from another party before remunerating the gig worker, they are perceived more positively as they are seen to be sharing the risk with the gig worker.

Participant P10 mentioned that they felt competitive remuneration was used as justification for lack of support:

*“You know, although the money’s been really good considering the amount of time you spend on the work, but it feels like the money is sort of a justification of why you should*

*be abused or not supported in other ways.” (P10)*

### **5.5.2.3 Inclusive practices**

#### Feeling part of the team

Being made to feel part of the team, or an extension of the firm who is available as required, through inclusion in interactions and decision-making during the engagement, was emphasised by participants P1, P3, P4 and P5 as being supportive:

*“You are exposed to the performance and also the engagement piece, and working with the teams, and you eventually become part of, or it feels like you become part of an extension of the firm that is needed as when you're required.” (P1)*

A reason for this may also be that the specific participants who raised this point had conducted more than one engagement with an organisation, which had allowed them to form closer relationships with organisational members.

#### Support for the engagement

When they were working with organisational employees on a task, the participants observed that having everyone pull in the same direction created a sense that there would be support for the engagement. Being exposed to on-boarding to understand the organisational expectations on the engagement also created a feeling that there would be support.

When participants are not included in on-boarding regarding the task or engagement, and do not receive the support necessary to execute, they perceive the organisation to be lacking a focus on the engagement. They are also not behaving in an inclusive manner to gig workers, who are often left to navigate the situation alone in order to execute the task.

*“So for the training and development one, I actually thought it was a lack of focus from the leadership or an inability to manage because you don't bring in people and pay them so that they fail. I thought that they did not look at the bigger picture and they lost the essence of what they were trying to achieve.” (P4)*

### **5.5.2.4 Lack of support inherent to gig economy**

#### Systemic limitations

The response from two participants, when asked how an unfavourable experience influences their perceptions of organisational support, was that they “did not make anything of it”. This alludes to the fact that unfavourable practices may have come to be

accepted as the nature of work, or the norm, in the gig economy. Participant P8 highlighted a similar view:

*“So it does not necessarily tarnish the image of the industry because it's business, you know, sometimes you lose on business, sometimes you gain on business. But it gives you a better perspective, and you become a better judge of character going into other deals in terms of what you need to be looking out for.” (P8)*

An experience such as this may not change the gig workers' perceptions of an organisation, but it does lead to questions regarding the gig model. The participants' perceptions were also not influenced negatively when the unfavourable HRM practice had been part of the conditions of the contract, as noted below:

*“In the contract it specifically said that I wouldn't be entitled to (the financial incentive). So it was one of those, yes, I had my feelings, I had my thoughts, but it really didn't change the way that I perceived the organisation or impact the work that I was doing.” (P9)*

In summary, based on their positive experiences, the participants perceived the organisation to be supportive in that their contribution to the task was understood and valued, and the organisation demonstrated an open-mindedness towards the unique solutions that they presented. Having a positive experience with the organisation also led to feelings of being included as part of the team.

In contrast to the positive HRM practices, the participants perceive organisations as not appreciating their value-add to a task when they are not given autonomy to voice issues. Their experiences also reflect the type of culture in place, which is characterised by micromanagement and exploitation. A number of participants appeared to be unaffected by the unfavourable treatment, however, stating that it was the nature of the work itself. In the last section of research question one, the manner in which gig workers' experience of the HR practices and the perceptions formed, impact their engagement deliverables is highlighted.

### **5.5.3 Impact on engagement deliverables**

The participants were asked to highlight the ways in which their experiences of the HRM practices impact their performance on a particular task or deliverable in the fourth interview question. The application of discretionary effort and higher levels of engagement were the most frequently mentioned outcomes. Table 8 provides a summary of the outcomes of HRM practices, with each being discussed in further detail below.

**Table 8: Outcomes of HRM practices**

Positive experience: Rank (Frequency)	Construct	Unfavourable experience: Rank (Frequency)	Total mentions of constructs: (Frequency)
3 (6)	Commitment to delivery	1 (9)	15
2 (8)	Task engagement	2 (5)	13
1 (9)	Discretionary effort	5 (3)	12
5 (3)	Delivery timing	3 (4)	8
4 (4)	Task accountability	5 (3)	7

### **5.5.3.1 Commitment to delivery**

A continuous commitment to high quality deliverables, irrespective of organisational support, was highlighted by participants as being crucial to thriving in this nature of work. They also stated that they cannot afford to fail on engagements as this would tarnish their credibility, which would jeopardise their ability to secure future work. This is because i.e. the next job depends on one's current performance.

*"It's crucial, we are in a competitive world, you have to give your best because you want the next job, you want (the organisation) to give you as a reference to another company." (P11)*

*"And so it affected me negatively from a feeling perspective, but as a person who's coming from outside you say to yourself, 'This is my credibility'. I signed up for this and said, 'I can do this'. So if I fail, it will look like I don't have the capability." (P4)*

Although they aim to ensure high quality deliverables, one participant noted that a lack of support from the organisation may hinder them from performing to their full potential:

*"I don't think in that case you will perform at your full working potential as I said earlier, because first, you don't actually get to use your skill to its full potential or to the extent that you can use it." (P5)*

When probed further on this point, a number of participants emphasised that they are guided by their values of honesty in their work, as well as consistent delivery and independence.

*“So that did not influence me; one of the things that is important to me is independence and consistency. So, you can be doing something there and doing something different elsewhere, you know, especially because it speaks to the values, your own personal values. And which is why for me one of the times where I feel forced to take a different decision is what I feel my values are being compromised.” (P2)*

*“There is a certain moral code that I personally I apply. So even if I'm getting a bad deal, so to speak, I will still finish my work.” (P8)*

### **5.5.3.2 Task engagement**

From an attitudinal perspective, the participants stated that they felt motivated to engage further with the organisation in relation to the task:

*“And what it does is it makes you feel more engaged if your whole set-up and contracting with a company is in place.” (P1)*

Feeling welcome, or being well-received by an organisation that clearly states its expectations, also leads to a higher level of comfort and positivity to perform, as participants do not have to second guess what the expectations are. This ultimately leads to improved performance.

*“If I go into the field as a consultant for Organisation A, I know what the organisation expects, so I don't second guess things, and that improves my performance, because I'm more comfortable and more positive.” (P6)*

This instils a greater sense of confidence to deliver on the engagement, particularly when the organisational requirements are well-understood. The participants also feel a higher level of connection to the organisation, or the outcome of the particular engagement, as noted below:

*“And then if you do work for Organisation B, you will have people that are always complaining about one thing or two at a social level, so it was easy for me to always be defending the company around the pricing of the products and everything around the service.” (P3)*

Having a positive engagement with the organisation from the initial stages also positively influences the gig workers' impressions of the organisation in terms of its attractiveness.

*“So that initial settling or that initial unsettled space needs some support for one to actually like stand on their feet. So when it happens properly, it just sets the ground for success and that's how I felt, I actually felt supported. And from that I thought that this*



*organisation was a good company to work for, satisfaction levels were high for me.”*  
(P4)

Unsupportive actions lead participants to question whether they would be willing to engage with the organisation in the future, with participant P8 stating that:

*“The negative is that I just don’t want to work with them anymore.”*

### **5.5.3.3 Discretionary effort**

It was highlighted by the participants that a key outcome of positive HRM practices is the application of discretionary effort as a result of feeling supported. Discretionary effort was mainly in the form of additional number of hours worked, and solutions being enhanced in order to improve the outcomes for the organisation.

*“And actually it also helped me to, can I say on my own re-scope on certain things that were not part of the initial scope of the project, because then I realised that there were certain things that the guys in Kenya could do, which would be beneficial in the market that I was working on.”* (P4)

*“Anything that is positive reinforcement, it makes you do more. So the fact that someone is willing to engage you further into the services that you are rendering, it opens you to offer more information than what has been asked of you.”* (P8)

One participant highlighted that, due to being treated positively by an organisation, they felt more driven to prove themselves and to demonstrate their value-add and capability, which resulted in them putting additional effort into tasks. Despite the possibility of this leading to scope creep, the participants felt that they were able to engage in comfortable level of scope creep without feeling exploited as it further improved client relations:

*“If people are willing to actually engage and appreciate your value-add, your scope tends to creep, you may not necessarily be paid for that scope creep, but your scope tends to creep because you get a good client-supplier relations.”* (P8)

Participant P10 drew a distinction between the organisation and organisational representative, stating that:

*“I don’t look at the person who got me the job and the organisation as the same person. So I might over-extend myself for the person who got me the job, you know, but as a result the organisation might benefit.”*

This highlights that a gig worker may engage in discretionary effort due to their

commitment to an individual within the organisation who they are completing the work for. Not receiving the required support leads to a missed opportunity to benefit an organisation, especially given the specialised skills of knowledge-based gig workers.

*“In that case, you know that could actually provide an input here to make this process or this task here, the output of it better but because maybe the person that you're dealing with has got a big ego and they may view it in a certain way, then you end up keeping silent kind of.” (P5)*

In certain instances, however, as per participant P5, the organisation and the engagement sponsor are viewed separately, with the participant applying discretionary effort due to a commitment to their sponsor:

*“I usually split it, I don't look at the person who got me the job and the organisation as the same person. So I might over-extend myself for the person who got me the job, you know, but as a result the organisation might benefit.”*

Although they remain committed to the deliverables outlined in their contract terms, two participants stated that they would not go above and beyond what had been agreed to.

*“I wouldn't necessarily end up doing more than what was asked for.” (P8)*

#### **5.5.3.4 Delivery timing**

From a delivery perspective, the participants highlighted that having the necessary support assisted in speeding up the engagement delivery time.

*“It created a network of support which then helped me in terms of achieving my deliverables. And also I think in terms of the project because everyone was more productive, or maybe quicker in finding and resolving issues, compared to if each person did it on their own and each culture worked separately.” (P4)*

A second aspect highlighted in regards to engagement delivery was the fact that due to the repetitive nature of the work that sometimes occurs, gig workers are able to gain high levels of efficiency.

With regards to the timing on the delivery of an engagement, bureaucratic administration such as having to complete excessive amounts of paper work to access required resources was stated as slowing down task completion.

Further to this, a lack of clarity on the engagement, in terms of the correct scoping or desired deliverables, leads to poor project delivery from both a timing and cost

perspective.

*“And I just felt that the lack of, like there wasn't a purpose that was being driven all the way down and that then leads to poor delivery of projects.” (P4)*

In summary, a higher level of discretionary effort was observed to be the main outcome of feeling supported. This sees participants put additional hours into their work and tailor solutions based on organisational needs, even though this brings about slight scope creep, as they feel the need to demonstrate their value-add to the organisation.

#### **5.5.3.5 Task accountability**

As a result of being given autonomy, having a high sense of accountability for engagement outcomes was also noted by the participants, with participant P5 highlighting:

*“I think that when you feel that you've been given responsibility, then you take that, well personally, I take that and run with it, as opposed to being micromanaged.”*

The participants also stated that when all stakeholders involved in an engagement pull together in the same direction, it enables them to hold each other accountable for deliverables. In instances where the engagement becomes derailed, a mind-set of acting proactively to rectify the situation is adopted.

*“So I think that picking it up early, and then having that mind-set of wanting to fix it really was the thing that differentiated it from the situation going in a different direction.”*  
(P12)

This highlights that gig workers hold themselves fully accountable for tasks as part of their commitment to ensuring delivery on what has been agreed to with the organisation.

When aspects of a task are not progressing according to plan, the participants highlighted that they take steps to proactively initiate corrective action. This ranges from seeking support through alternative channels or further upskilling themselves professionally to be able to mitigate any potentially negative outcomes.

*“So I had to actually now find ways of doing things and find ways of, instead of getting the organisation to say, this is the framework, someone will be allocated to take you through the system, I had to now find people to unofficially say to, “You know what I need help with this”. (P4)*

Even in the absence of support from the organisation, the participants emphasised that their commitment to delivering on the agreed terms of the task or engagement remains

high. This is strongly influenced by their professional values and a need to maintain their reputation, which is key to securing future engagements. As a result they proactively seek to mitigate negative situations, however they may be hindered from performing at their full potential if support crucial to their success is not provided.

### 5.5.4 Summary of findings for Research question one

#### HRM practices in the knowledge-based gig economy context

Seven key themes relating to gig workers' experiences of HRM practices arose from research question one: Engagement support, clear structures and processes, reward and remuneration, autonomy and flexibility, fairly applied practices, learning and development, and performance feedback. The sub-themes linked to each of these are illustrated in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2: HRM practices in the knowledge-based gig economy context**

The practices most frequently mentioned related to engagement support, clear structures and processes, and remuneration and rewards. When describing their experiences, a number of participants highlighted the practices in combination with each other, demonstrating that a positive or unfavourable experience is not tied to a single practice but a combination thereof.

#### Perceptions of organisational support

Based on the participants' reflections regarding their perceptions of an organisation being supportive, four themes emerged, namely: Value of worker contribution, organisational values, inclusive practices, and lack of support inherent to gig economy. Value of worker contribution was mostly highlighted by the participants. It relates to a worker's perception regarding whether the organisation appreciates the value that they bring in terms of skills, as well as being open-minded to being influenced by members who are external to the

organisation through the engagement. These aspects lead the participants to perceive that there is support for their task or engagement, which motivates them further.

Engagement deliverable outcomes

From the analysis on the resultant outcomes of the engagement, five themes emerged: Commitment to delivery, engagement, discretionary effort, engagement, delivery timing, and task accountability. The participants mostly emphasised their commitment to delivery against contracted terms, even in the absence of organisational support. This is strongly linked to their personal values of consistency and independence, as well as a need to uphold their reputation, which they argue is key to their success. It also demonstrates a high level of commitment to the work that they engage in.

**5.6 Results: Research question two**

***Research question two: Which HRM practices are most pertinent in ensuring the knowledge-based gig worker’s commitment?***

The objective of this question was to understand which of the HRM practices are most pertinent to knowledge-based gig workers from a support perspective. This is important to understand as it will benefit both the gig workers and organisations if focus is placed on those practices that are perceived to be the most important. This is explored in interview questions five through seven.

**5.6.1 Recommendations regarding supportive HRM practices**

Having considered both their positive and unfavourable experiences, the gig workers were asked to recommend which HRM practices organisations are required to make accessible to gig workers to improve commitment levels. The participants drew from their experiences to answer this question, with the constructs in Table 9 below highlighting the key required HRM practices.

**Table 9: Recommendations on supportive HRM practices**

Rank	Construct	Frequency
1	Engagement support	12
2	Clear structures and processes	9
3	Autonomy and flexibility	7
4	Performance feedback	6
6	Remuneration and rewards	4
6	Learning and development	4
7	Fairly applied practices	3

The construct relating to engagement support was the most commonly referred to by the participants, followed by clear structures and processes, and autonomy and flexibility. The findings related to each of the seven constructs follows.

#### **5.6.1.1 Engagement support**

##### Upfront on-boarding

The participants emphasised the need for upfront on-boarding to be inclusive of the relevant aspects of how the organisation is structured, the key policies and guidelines to be adhered to, and the strategic priorities to be considered in the execution of engagement. Such a session need not be long, but would be helpful in guiding engagement-related decisions, as gig workers often feel rushed into their task and only understand these aspects at a much later stage.

##### Internal organisational sponsor

The provision of an internal organisational sponsor was highlighted by participant P1 as important, as it allows for workers to have someone to engage with regarding the requirements of the task. In order to support the success of the gig worker, keeping the organisational sponsor accountable for success was also noted as being important.

*“So, whoever is responsible for that in the organisation has to have that on their own KPIs so that if there is lack of delivery from the gig worker, it affects the person responsible in the organisation, just so that they actually make sure that this gig worker succeeds.” (P4)*

##### Inclusion in crucial engagement related interactions

Being included in key forums relating to an engagement was highlighted as being very important, as it ensures visibility of the decisions being made, which impacts final outcomes. Two participants emphasised that regarding engagement meetings or discussions, there is no need to separate gig workers from employees as both parties are working towards the same outcomes, and therefore information should be shared transparently, unless confidential.

An understanding within the organisation of the gig worker's engagement is also required, as this helps to unlock the required resource support and enables gig workers to better justify the rates they charge, as their value will better understood and appreciated.

#### **5.6.1.2 Clear structures and processes**

### Specifically stated contract terms

Organisations must make it very clear what the key contract terms of the engagement are, as noted by participant P1:

*“This is what I expect, this is the outcome, this is what it’s going to look like, this is the time you are going to have to do it in.”*

Further to this, the contract must be stated simply such that it is easy to understand.

### Simplified bidding and selection

Given the short-term nature of the work, a simplified bidding and selection process must be put in place, which should not be hindered by excessive administrative requirements such as lengthy forms or processes to be completed.

### Understand how gig workers’ skills can best meet organisational needs

Importantly, the participants highlighted that organisations should make sense of how gig workers’ skills may meet their needs, in order to better leverage the workforce.

*“A better appreciation from the organisation in terms of understanding that there is a huge value-add that independent consultants bring into the business.” (P8)*

#### **5.6.1.3 Autonomy and Flexibility**

### Adaptability to change

Demonstrating an adaptability to change was stated by participant P2 as being a key requirement for organisations that utilise the gig workforce model:

*“Also a very important part of working in this way is adaptability, being agile, and also helping your clients to adapt very quickly and be agile themselves.”*

### Autonomy to customise deliverables

As stated previously, having the ability to customise gig workers’ task deliverables is viewed as supportive by gig workers. This is important for knowledge-based gig workers, given their level of specialisation.

*“And now the onus is on (the gig worker’s) shoulder, they expect him to be the expert, and in fact, give them guidance on what to do. So the gig worker must give guidance and direction, based on experience.” (P11)*

In addition to this, being allowed to work independently was highlighted, with participant

P11 going so far as to state that social interaction was less important in this context.

#### Ability to influence contracting terms

Higher levels of dialogue was stated to be a key enabler in being able to influence contracting terms at a much higher level. It also avoids the risk of scope creep due to misinterpretation of the required deliverables. Further to this, the contracting terms need to be negotiated transparently.

#### Flexibility in work arrangement

Work arrangement flexibility, in terms of location and hours to be worked, were perceived to be supportive, as noted by participant P7:

*“You want flexibility, for example you don’t have to be fixed here for these hours, but you still maintain a level of agility in that you deliver on the outputs that are expected of you.”*

#### **5.6.1.4 Performance feedback**

##### Short interval control

In order to ensure that they remain on track in terms of the direction of their task, as well as to manage stakeholder expectations, the participants highlighted the need for a level of short interval control or regular task-check ins with their organisational sponsors. Having short interval control was further justified by a participant from a financial perspective:

*“But whereas when it is frequent, the organisation saves money, because they get better output from you as a person who is providing a service to them. And if all parties feel that it won't work, they can end it earlier on as well. As opposed to letting it linger on for a long time.” (P5)*

##### Post-engagement performance feedback

Post-engagement feedback was found to be valuable in that it can benefit the gig worker in terms of their professional development:

*“With regards to performance just more feedback, I guess, that's got nothing to do with criticising what you don't like about the work, but I think more aimed towards personal development for the gig worker.” (P10)*

#### **5.6.1.5 Remuneration and rewards**

##### Access to future gig engagements through value-add



Being considered for future engagements on the basis of their value-add to the organisation from previous engagements was considered to be an aspect of rewards. A suggestion in this regard from participant P10 was that organisations should have a bidding system in place to facilitate better access for gig workers.

#### Flexible performance-related incentives

Additional performance-linked incentives were highlighted to be a possible reward system, in addition to standard remuneration.

*“For gig workers there is very little incentive, other than a good rate. So if I get a good rate, that’s fantastic, but if I have to set up an HR team to deal with gig workers, I would incentivise the gig workers as well.” (P1)*

One participant, however, highlighted that if a form of performance appraisal could be done, it could complement a reward model of some sort, as this is not currently in place. Financial rewards were highlighted as important to motivate gig workers.

### **5.6.1.6 Learning and Development**

#### Engagement-specific training

Being given access to engagement-specific training was highlighted by a number of participants as being important to fulfilling the organisation’s deliverable requirements, as it provides them with insight into the unique aspects of the business and enables the deliverable to be tailored. Personal training is not expected, however, as gig workers recognise that they are solely responsible for their personal development in order to secure future work.

#### Capability-enhancing engagements

An aspect of learning and development that participants believe an organisation could support them with is providing them with access to stretch tasks that could serve to further enhance their capabilities.

*“You know, so if I want to learn about any part of the business that involves my writing, and you’re able to give me that I feel like an opportunity to explore that it should be given. Because that not only enhances me, but it enhances my potential work for you.” (P10)*

### **5.6.1.7 Fairly applied practices**

### Fair access to HRM practices

Provided that it does not lead to incurring additional effort, the participants highlighted that it makes sense for organisations to fairly extend their available HRM practices to gig workers to enable higher levels of support:

*“If the organisations make some of these resources and provisions open as much as possible to everybody, and most of these things don't cost money”. (P3)*

### Organisational delivery on agreed terms of exchange

When organisations deliver to gig workers according to agreement, it is viewed as supportive. The participants highlighted this aspect mainly with regards to remuneration, as this is where the most challenges are experienced:

*“Having deadlines on when to pay the freelance workers, because in the same that most freelance workers have a deadline, there has to be a deadline on finance to pay us.” (P10)*

*“And now you have to have, you know, quite uncomfortable conversations with people about the timelines in terms of remuneration, whatever it is you're supposed to get. So those systems could improve.” (P13)*

In summary, most of the recommendations for supportive HRM practices were centred on engagement support as well as clear structures and processes, as they are instrumental in facilitating the delivery of a task by a gig worker. When discussing their recommendations, one participant mentioned that the key focus is that they are coming into the organisation to complete a specific deliverable and not to become involved in traditional organisational processes and politics. Therefore this is what the supportive HRM practices need to be built around.

### **5.6.2 HRM practices perceived to be most supportive**

Having reflected on their recommendations for supportive HRM practices, in interview question six the participants were asked to highlight which of the practices described would be most supportive, thus leading to higher commitment levels for the task or engagement. Table 10 lists the most pertinent HRM practices, based on the frequency with which the participants stated their importance. Engagement support was noted as the most important, followed by remuneration and rewards, with a focus on timing and amount thereof.

**Table 10: Most pertinent HRM practices**

Rank	Construct	Frequency
1	Engagement support	7
2	Remuneration and rewards	6
3	Clear structures and processes	5
4	Performance feedback	3
7	Learning and development	2
7	Autonomy and flexibility	2
7	Fairly applied practices	2

### **5.6.2.1 Engagement support**

Having engagement support, particularly regarding on-boarding and socialisation, internal organisational sponsorship, and involvement in crucial engagement-related interactions, was perceived to be most important by the participants, as it provides clarity regarding the engagement requirements.

*“Because at the end of the day, the nature of gig work is to come and do work, then leave. And so from a commitment point of view, if I know what I'm supposed to do, I can do it. If I don't know what I'm supposed to do, it's very difficult to be committed, because I've got no idea that I'm doing what I'm supposed to do, what the expectations are around what I should be doing.” (P1)*

### **5.6.2.2 Remuneration and rewards**

A structure around remuneration and rewards was also highlighted as being important, as it makes gig workers feel valued. In light of this, a recommendation was made by a participant wherein the organisational sponsor may provide public recognition where possible.

*“I think this is a factor at a level of an individual and at a level of a human heart. As people we thrive when somebody recognises the good work that you are doing. But I think what we're forgetting is that if we don't also do something over and above the HR processes in place, we will lose or we will omit the people who don't fall part of the process.” (P3)*

Once again, the issue related to remuneration timing and amount was highlighted as a challenge, as it leads to uncertainty in the livelihood of the gig worker and exposes them to conditions of insecurity.

*“(With the payments), it's about when I'm getting paid, on time, on the day that I've been promised payment. That's been the biggest problem, it's staggered, so it's not continuous or secure.” (P10)*

#### **5.6.2.3 Clear structures and processes**

Contracting is seen to be important in that it enables a more meaningful engagement with the organisation regarding the scope of work and remuneration process, allowing for clarity of expectations.

*“At the end of the day you don't feel like you've been ripped off because someone doesn't feel that the work that you've committed actually brings value.” (P8)*

#### **5.6.2.4 Performance feedback**

Short interval control on an engagement allows gig workers to “feel the heat on a day to day basis”. This keeps the engagement pace up and addresses any roadblocks as they arise. In addition to this, receiving helpful feedback enables gig workers to identify development areas and initiate training in their personal capacity, as noted by participants P5 and P10.

#### **5.6.2.5 Learning and development**

Learning and development was stated to be an important practice, particularly with regards to receiving engagement-related training to allow gig workers to tailor a task to an organisation's unique characteristics.

#### **5.6.2.6 Autonomy and flexibility**

The aspect of having the ability to influence organisational members regarding an engagement was highlighted by participant P11, who stated:

*“I ask [the organisation], tell me more, supply that, that's why the gig worker must be the primary driver to get the task done”.*

#### **5.6.2.7 Fairly applied practices**

The organisation's delivery against the agreed terms of exchange was highlighted as being important, as it helps to preserve a good relationship between the gig worker and the organisation.

*“I’m [the] sort of person once I commit to doing something, I try and do it as well as I can, and it’s annoying to see that you help an organisation achieve something and then people drag their feet around compensation.” (P13)*

For question seven, the participants were requested to allocate points to the HRM practices in terms of importance. Table 11 highlights a summary of the percentage of points allocated to each practice in total. Based on the results, engagement and support was perceived to be the most important practice, followed by remuneration and rewards.

**Table 11: Point allocation to each HRM practice**

Rank	Construct / Category / Sub-theme	Frequency
1	Engagement support	41%
2	Remuneration and rewards	20%
3	Learning and development	15%
4	Clear structures and processes	11%
5	Feedback on delivery outcomes	9%
6	Fairly applied practices	4%

Six participants, however, found it difficult to allocate points, feeling that all practices combined play a role in the gig worker experience. They thus opted not to allocate points.

What was interesting to note was that, when comparing the results of questions six and seven, engagement support and remuneration and rewards ranked first and second respectively in both responses. The rankings differed for the remaining practices, however, and autonomy and flexibility was not listed in the point allocation at all. A possible reason could be that in their rankings, the participants’ focus may have been on those practices that they had experienced the most challenges with from a support perspective, with those practices that were ranked lower already being in place and experienced at an adequate level.

### **5.6.3 Summary of findings for Research question two**

In answering research question two, recommendations for supportive HRM practices were put forward by the participants, who most frequently highlighted engagement support, clear structures and processes, and autonomy and flexibility.

The participants were then asked to rank these practices in terms of their importance in creating higher levels of commitment, both through verbal mentions and through a point allocation process. The results of this revealed that engagement support and remuneration and rewards are considered by the participants to be the most important

across both rankings of importance. A number of participants, however, felt unable to allocate points to each practice, as they argued that the practices reinforce each other when combined. What was also noted was that the HRM practices need to be focused on supporting the successful delivery of an engagement.

## 5.7 Results: Research question three

### ***Research question three: What effect does task complexity have on the knowledge-based gig worker’s preference for the type of HRM practices provided?***

Gig workers engage in tasks of varying levels of complexity, with some being transactional in nature and clearly defined in terms of deliverables and the path towards achieving them. Others may require more cognitive capabilities and are less well-defined. The objective of this question was to understand how the gig workers’ required level of HRM support varies according to the nature of the task.

#### **5.7.1 Defining the complexity of the task**

Besides requiring higher levels of integration with the organisation, a number of participants felt that complex tasks were better characterised according to the constructs listed in [Table 12](#). Each is discussed in further detail below.

Table 12: Characteristics of task complexity

Rank	Construct	Frequency
1	Complex tasks involve broad engagement scopes	2
2	Complex tasks involve change within organisation	2
3	Complexity of task determined by its novelty	1

##### ***5.7.1.1 Complex tasks involve broad engagement scopes***

It was highlighted by participants P2 and P6 that the scope, or depth, of the task or engagement has implications for the HRM practices to be applied, particularly with regards to the specific terms of contracting and the level of engagement support required.

*“For me, over and above complexity, perhaps is the question of the width, how broad the engagement might be, not so much the complexities which are a given, but how broad. In other words, the scope. The other thing that’s actually also very important is the scoping. Because then otherwise you get into problems of scope creep, if you have not really well-defined the problem, and well-defined the scope of the problem.” (P2)*

##### ***5.7.1.2 Complex tasks involve change within organisations***

In certain instances, the outcome of a task or engagement may require changes to processes within an organisation, adding to the level of complexity. In this regard, participant P1 highlighted:

*“Here you would need people’s minds to start changing around the piece of work that you are trying to do.”*

This would then require engagement support of a different type to that required for transactional tasks.

### **5.7.1.3 Complexity of task determined by its novelty**

It was also highlighted that, although a task may be complex, if the gig worker has engaged in multiple complex tasks that were similar in nature, less HRM support may be required. Therefore, the level of HRM support required would be based on the novelty of the task, mainly in the area of on-boarding, which forms part of engagement support.

### **5.7.2 Level of HRM support required based on complexity of the task**

Based on the complexity of the task, the participants primarily highlighted differences in the practices associated with clear structures and processes, and engagement support. Table 13 highlights the frequency of mentions for each HRM practice, and each is discussed in further detail below.

**Table 13: HRM support required based on task complexity**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Construct</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1	Clear structures and processes	7
2	Engagement support	6
3	Autonomy and flexibility	2
5	Performance feedback	1
5	Learning and development	1

#### **5.7.2.1 Clear structures and processes**

Regarding the specific terms of contracting, the participants highlighted that more time and effort is required on the scoping of work and the terms of the contract for more complex tasks. This will ensure an adequate understanding of the organisation’s requirements, as not properly doing so may lead to perceptions of exploitation of the gig worker by the organisation, particularly in relation to issues such as scope creep for which gig workers may not be remunerated.

Although it was highlighted that lower intensity HRM practices are required for less

complex tasks, in that less support is required to get on with the task, the basic processes must be in place to protect the interests of both parties, according to two participants.

#### **5.7.2.2 Engagement support**

In terms of the upfront on-boarding, participant P5 specifically mentioned that it was more important on complex tasks as it:

*“ensures that you get entrenched in the ways of that specific organisation.”*

This is important in executing on the engagement to the organisation’s requirements. In contrast to this, participants P5 and P9 stated that on-boarding is important even for less complex tasks, but would perhaps not be as detailed as that required for a more complex engagement, but still required clarifying the task requirements.

*“The level and intensity of time spent to on-board them and introduce them into the environment, especially if their complexity is less, is lower as compared to when the complexity is high.” (P1)*

According to the participants, when the complexity is low, there is no real requirement for engagement or engagement-related interactions as the broader impact on the business is limited. On the contrary, a requirement for interpersonal relationships on more complex tasks does exist, as certain aspects may arise which require the gig worker to be able to navigate within the organisation, for example delays within the engagement that require mitigation.

*“I have to interface with everybody that has a say in this organisation from all levels of the organisation. I’m delivering a project that is sponsored by an MD of a business division. And I write reports to him, I need to talk to him about getting clarification of the direction of the project, if there are issues, I need to call people into one room together and be able to get them to talk and untie issues.” (P3)*

Access to resources in terms of providing the necessary organisational collateral, whether it is access to information or organisation-specific platforms to conduct the task, was noted as being more important for complex tasks by participants P4 and P9. Lastly, having access to an internal organisational sponsor, which the gig worker could engage with as required, was stated to be important for both complex and more simple tasks.

#### **5.7.2.3 Autonomy and flexibility**

Participant P3 highlighted that a higher level of authority and power is required for more



complex tasks in order to successfully execute on the engagement requirements, and the gig worker needs to be trusted by the organisation that (s)he is acting in their best interests. More complex tasks require that one brings stakeholders together around a common purpose, and not having high levels of autonomy to coordinate this may be detrimental to the task outcome.

#### **5.7.2.4 Performance feedback**

The nature of complex tasks requires that feedback be provided more frequently and in a tailored manner that supports the engagement outcome, whereas feedback at end of an engagement is sufficient for less complex tasks, as noted by participant P9.

#### **5.7.2.5 Learning and development**

Lastly, depending on whether a task requires a high level of customisation based on the organisation’s unique characteristics, the participants felt that the provision of training is not a requirement on simple, transactional tasks, but is on more complex tasks.

### **5.7.3 Conclusion of research question three**

The key differences and similarities between the levels of support required for complex and simpler transactional tasks is presented in Table 14 below:

**Table 14: Level of support required by task**

<b>HRM practice</b>	<b>Complex</b>	<b>Transactional</b>
<b>Clear structures and processes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific terms of contracting</li> <li>• More rigorous scoping and contracting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific terms of contracting</li> </ul>
<b>Engagement support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpersonal nature of relationship</li> <li>• Upfront on-boarding</li> <li>• Internal organisational sponsor</li> <li>• Access to organisational resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transactional nature of relationship</li> <li>• Upfront on-boarding</li> <li>• Internal organisational sponsor</li> </ul>
<b>Autonomy and flexibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autonomy to customise deliverables, and influence organisation regarding the engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little scope to customise deliverables</li> </ul>
<b>Performance feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requirement for short interval control / regular check-ins with sponsor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-engagement performance feedback</li> </ul>
<b>Learning and development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of engagement-specific training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No requirement for training, will be sufficiently covered as part of on-boarding</li> </ul>

In terms of defining a complex task, it may be considered from an engagement scope

perspective, according to the level of change required, or as per the novelty of the task to the gig worker. With regards to more complex tasks, as part of clear structures and processes, a more rigorous contracting process is required, as well as higher levels of engagement support. Gig workers are also required to be granted higher levels of autonomy to customise deliverables, and more frequent check-ins are required with the organisational sponsor to support progress.

## 5.8 Results: Research question four

### ***Research question four: What is the perceived role of the digital labour platform in building organisational commitment among knowledge-based gig workers through HRM practices?***

The objective of research question four was to ascertain what gig workers' perceptions are regarding the role of digital labour platforms in the provision of supportive HRM practices. Further to this, the researcher sought to understand how such practices could be designed in a way that does not diminish the relational aspects of the task or engagement. It was important to understand the role of digital labour platforms as they have become central to the gig economy workforce model.

#### **5.8.1 The perceived role of platforms in the provision of supportive HRM practices**

The participants' responses mainly highlighted HRM practices associated with clear structures and processes, such as matching workers' skills to business requirements during bidding and selection, and task assignment. Each of the constructs listed in Table 15 are discussed in further detail below.

**Table 15: Role of platform in HRM support**

Rank	Construct	Frequency
1	Clear structures and processes	11
2	Autonomy and flexibility	5
3	Learning and development	3
5	Remuneration and rewards	2
5	Fairly applied practices	2

##### ***5.8.1.1 Clear structures and processes***

A frequently mentioned response from the participants was that digital labour platforms better facilitate the matching of worker skills and business requirements, as part of the bidding and selection process.

*“I would think that the service that the platforms should provide from an HRM perspective is the matching of skills, abilities and history with the needs of the business.” (P1)*

As part of this, the platform needs to indicate a gig worker’s basic skillset, their references from previous projects, and a rating.

Due to their efficient nature, platforms were also highlighted as potentially supporting the engagement process in terms of task assignment, thereby avoiding human error. The participants also highlighted that platforms could automate a number of manual tasks, for example the management of day-to-day performance once deliverables have been agreed upon with the organisation. In this way they could enhance the interface between the gig worker and the organisation:

*“Things are digitised from the onset, in terms of performance management, contracting terms, KPIs. So you always have a dashboard of where you are, what is deficient, what is lacking, what needs to be done.” (P7)*

#### **5.8.1.2 Autonomy and flexibility**

The ability to execute tasks remotely through a platform, based on the organisational specifications, was perceived positively in that it would simplify the execution of the task.

*“And often using the platform, a guy can actually execute on the job without even coming to your premises, you just provide the specification, telling them exactly what to do, and they will start executing the job and the beauty of that is that this person could be sitting in Eastern Europe.” (P3)*

However, a number of participants commented on the high likelihood that a platform would lead to micromanagement by communicating and following up on task requirements excessively, such that it would become an annoyance rather than a means to assist task execution. The requirement of having to provide a detailed account of progress within a workday was viewed unfavourably by the participants.

#### **5.8.1.3 Learning and development**

From a learning and development perspective, the provision of general training was highlighted as being useful for a platform to provide in the event that this was not available to the organisation, however it would not be tailored to a specific organisation.

Through the use of algorithms, platforms could also be used to track training and

development activities, as well as to provide recommendations for further development based on gig worker interests:

*“It could keep track of when last I completed training and perhaps recommend that I could take go take up something on Coursera or LinkedIn or Udemy. Once I've done the training, record it on the platform, so that it keeps reminding me and perhaps that becomes part of my profile ranking for future jobs, to say this is a guy who cares about his development, he is training and is delivering on his KPIs.” (P3)*

#### **5.8.1.4 Remuneration and rewards**

Digital labour platforms facilitate the bidding process for tasks, and in this respect have been perceived to facilitate a race to the bottom, whereby gig workers compete fiercely on costs.

*“I put it out on the platform, and people bid to do the work. And what happens is they try to out-bid each other, so what you get is a very, very low cost.” (P1)*

The resulting low prices exclude professional workers as it is not favourable for them to compete below a certain price point. As an example of this, participant P10 shared their experience from a platform:

*“The money that I was going to possibly make doing that job didn't seem like it was money that any human being should be given, it really didn't seem like it was going to be worth it.”*

In contrast to this, however, platforms may also govern rates more fairly by creating a market or reference point for workers and organisations in terms of a suitable rate for the task, as noted by participant P1.

#### **5.8.1.5 Fairly applied practices**

For gig workers who are new to the market, platforms may introduce a level of fairness when it comes to competing for work, as they are able to obtain access to organisations that would have been closed to them if they relied solely on professional networks.

*“I suppose for people that who are still building their brands, who may not be known to have specific skills. So it kind of introduces some level of fairness I suppose, and opportunity for those that don't have people at clients (requesting assistance).” (P2)*

### **5.8.2 Facilitating a relational work arrangement through the platform**

In order to facilitate a relational work arrangement through the platform, most participants

felt that a hybrid model would be most optimal. They then went on to describe characteristics that such a hybrid model should contain, including characteristics related to human centrality and interactive mechanisms. Each of the constructs listed in Table 5.16 are discussed in further detail.

**Table 16: Relational work arrangement through the platform**

Rank	Construct	Frequency
1	Hybrid model to suit workers' needs	11
2	Human centrality	7
3	Interactive mechanisms	4

### **5.8.2.1 Human centrality**

#### Performance management as a human-centric process

The participants were of the view that a performance appraisal process, being very personal to an individual, requires a human touch. This means that gig workers should be provided with the opportunity to have a one-on-one discussion regarding how they performed, as this would allow for a relational interaction and the opportunity to clarify feedback.

*“Then I think performance evaluation that must be left to the organisation. It can't be something that you know, I wouldn't put that on a digital platform because it's very personal and obviously very specific to each task and organisation.” (P9)*

#### Human appreciation is more meaningful

From the perspective of remuneration and rewards, being personally thanked by the organisation holds a higher value for the gig worker compared to extrinsic rewards issued through the platform, highlighting the value of personal recognition.

*“So a platform can dispense a voucher, but there is no human appreciation attached to that, which says my boss on the engagement sees me in a certain way and appreciates me. So you can never replace that through the platform.” (P3)*

#### Creation of an inclusive community

The online labour platform may facilitate the promotion of an inclusive community through online community forums or special interest groups, which would allow gig workers to interact to a greater extent in order to create a feeling of being included, as noted by participant P15.

Online labour platforms may also create a sense of inclusivity for gig workers by mirroring HR practices that they would not normally be able to access, as highlighted by participant P4:

*“I think they can actually try to mirror the processes within most organisations because you can tell in an organisation people do try for employees to cover the basics... So I think this is a lot improvement that they can do just by trying to emulate part of what happens within organisations for organisational employees.” (P4)*

### **5.8.2.2 Interactive mechanisms**

#### Mechanisms to interact directly with the organisation

The participants highlighted that the availability of a mechanism that would enable the gig worker to interact directly with the organisation, for the purposes of clarifying aspects of the engagement that appeared to be ambiguous, would be important. This mechanism could also be utilised in a request for further support in completing the task according to the client organisation’s requirements.

*“There needs to be some interpersonal interface, even if it's over Zoom, but there needs to be a discussion, you know, around the recruitment and clarity and terms of reference and things like that.” (P6)*

*“There isn't a way of implementing it without having to guide it, because people like to have a face to face interaction.” (P8)*

#### Use of interactive media

In order to maintain a level of engagement and a sense of relational support, participant P6, making reference to the on-boarding process, highlighted the utilisation of interactive media to support the facilitation of HRM practices. This would keep the gig worker engaged.

### **5.8.3 Conclusion of research question four**

The findings of this question highlight that the type of HRM support provided by digital labour platforms is mainly associated with efficiently matching gig worker skills with business requirements through bidding, and assigning tasks to workers. It may also be used to manage processes suitable for automation such as the administration of benefits and recommendations such as training. In order to facilitate a relational work arrangement between the gig worker and an organisation, most of the participants recommended the

use of a hybrid model that balances human-centred, relational interactions with a digital labour platform. Digital labour platforms must also have interactive mechanisms in place to facilitate relational engagement.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings from the four research questions set out in Chapter Three of the report. Supportive HRM practices were identified as being: Engagement support, clear structures and processes, reward and remuneration, autonomy and flexibility, fairly applied practices, learning and development, and performance feedback. Based on their experiences of the HRM practices, the participants articulated their perceptions regarding organisational support and the resultant impact on their performance. Given the level of task complexity, gig workers' preference for HRM support was also better understood, as well as the role of digital labour platforms in the provision of HRM support to gig workers. Chapter Six will provide a discussion of the results against existing literature, which will be used to provide input into a proposed framework regarding the supportive HRM practices that lead to higher levels of task commitment in the knowledge-based gig economy.

# CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

## 6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six provides a discussion of the results of each of the four research questions, which were presented in Chapter Five of the research report. The study sought to identify supportive HRM practices required for knowledge-based gig workers; the ways in which the nature of the task, in terms of its complexity, determined gig workers' required level of HRM practices support; and how digital labour platforms may best support knowledge-based workers in the provision of supportive HRM practices. The results from the research questions are compared against the extant literature presented throughout Chapter Two, in order to identify new insights on supportive HRM practices in the knowledge-based gig economy context, with the aim of contributing towards existing literature relating to perceived organisational support and human resource management in alternative work arrangements. The research questions are discussed in line with the themes identified in Chapter Five of the report, in order to understand whether they support, or are in contradiction with extant literature.

## 6.2 Discussion of research question one

***Research Question 1: In what ways does a knowledge-based gig worker's experience of HRM practices influence their perception of organisational support, and impact task performance?***

Research question one explored both the positive and unfavourable HRM practices within the knowledge-based gig economy context, how these HRM practices influenced their perceptions of organisational support, and the subsequent performance on the task or engagement. A discussion on each of the three elements of research question one is provided in the section that follows.

### 6.2.1 HRM practices in the knowledge-based gig economy context

As outlined in Chapter Five, seven key HRM practices were identified from research question one, namely engagement support, clear structures and processes, autonomy and flexibility, performance feedback, fairly applied practices, learning and development, and reward and remuneration. The findings are mostly in line with what Kurtessis et al. (2017) described as being supportive HRM practices, which consisted of opportunities for professional development, job security, work autonomy and flexible work practices, as well as job enrichment through task variety and feedback.



The results of the analysis on the first part of research question one highlighted that positive HRM practices associated with engagement support, clear structures and processes, and autonomy and flexibility were referred to most frequently. Regarding unfavourable HRM practices, participants most frequently referred to the absence of engagement support, clear structures and processes and remuneration and rewards. A discussion of each of the seven identified HRM practices will follow in the subsequent section.

### **6.2.1.1 Engagement support**

Engagement support received the highest frequency of mentions, in terms of gig workers' experience of both positive and unfavourable HRM practices. Three sub-themes were identified in relation to engagement support, including on-boarding and socialisation, internal organisational sponsorship, and crucial engagement-related interactions.

#### On-boarding and socialisation

From a positive perspective, the on-boarding and socialisation experience was described by participants as consisting of upfront on-boarding from the client organisation in relation to the engagement, and being introduced to key engagement stakeholders within the client organisation which facilitated the formation of an engagement support network. This enables an understanding of the requirements of the task or engagement, and access to sufficient information to be able to successfully commence with and complete the task.

In contrast to this, the unfavourable experience was described as having the engagement being kicked-off suddenly, without sufficient on-boarding, which did not allow participants time to understand the engagement expectations, resulting in negative implications from a task delivery perspective. The results of a study conducted by McKeown and Cochrane (2012) on professional contractors found that pre-engagement on-boarding, which covered the key elements of what the contract entailed, was viewed to promote perceived organisational support. This supports the finding relating to upfront on-boarding and socialisation from the research.

#### Internal organisational sponsorship

Having access to an internal organisational sponsor on the engagement, and a network of support who are well-briefed on the scope, was emphasised as a positive practice. This is because it assisted in having a key touchpoint within the organisation whom to engage with on task progress as required. This finding is in line with the results of a study on freelancers conducted by Barlage et al. (2020), wherein it was highlighted that perceived

project-related support from the organisational supervisor, motivated them to engage further in their project role as they felt obliged to reciprocate the support they had received.

A common feature within the gig economy is the lack of supervisory support, which means that gig workers must self-manage, in order to perform at a level that supports the achievement of the client organisation's deliverables or goals (Jabagi et al., 2019). Participants perceived their experience to be unfavourable when the organisational sponsor or support network had not been briefed on the engagement. The outcome from this often led to misalignment and conflict, and resulted in poor outcomes for the engagement. A lack of supervisory support may serve as a challenge in the knowledge-based gig economy, as the often ambiguous nature of the work requires closer levels of engagement for task clarification purposes.

#### Crucial engagement-related interactions

Being included in interactions with the organisational representatives ultimately responsible for the engagement was highlighted as an important aspect of engagement support. Participants believed it enabled them to deliberate on solutions that would enhance value for the organisation, and remain up to speed on the latest decisions relating to the engagement. The findings from this are supported by research conducted by Mckeown and Cochrane (2012), which established a positive relationship between client organisations' level of knowledge sharing and contractor perceived well-being which relates to perceived organisational support. It led to the perceptions of a supportive work environment, thus enabling contractors to exchange knowledge with the client organisation (Mckeown and Cochrane, 2012).

According to Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli (2001), positive actions by the supervisor, including quality exchanges with employees, and considering their needs, lead to a favourable impression of organisational support. The same observation holds for knowledge-based gig workers, in relation to the engagement, as being able to engage with the client organisation is supportive towards the achievement of their deliverables.

Participants shared that when knowledge-based gig workers were excluded from interactions or key decision-making forums, which resulted in scope changes to the task, it was viewed as an unfavourable HRM practice. A key reason for this is that it became detrimental to their financial well-being, as it would require additional time effort, yet the remuneration would be based on output.

#### **6.2.1.2 Clear structures and processes**

Clear structures and processes relates to having in place clearly and specifically stated contracting terms and conditions as part of the engagement, and following a structured process throughout the engagement.

#### Specific terms of contracting

Participants stated that contracts that included specific milestones, timelines, measurable KPIs to demonstrate success, and payment terms, were supportive as this covered both the gig worker and the client organisation's interests. When the contract terms were not stated specifically, it led to a reliance on self-interpreting the expectations, which increased the potential for misunderstandings between the two parties. As a means to promote perceived organisational support, McKeown and Cochrane (2012) made practical recommendations which included client organisation facilitation of contracting conversations to highlight the key elements, and the implementation of supportive policies and processes to support the management thereof.

#### Structured and simplified engagement process

When client organisation's communicate in a structured manner with gig workers regarding the engagement process, gig workers felt a sense of confidence in the organisation which was perceived to be positive. Whilst the engagement process is structured, however, it also needs to be simple given the short-term nature of the work and flexible enough to accommodate uncertainty. Lacking any structure to an engagement process, characterised by poorly communicated changes on the contract terms, created uncertainty regarding the next steps of the engagement.

#### Systemic nature of gig model

The gig economy is structured in a manner such that professional career path development is rarely made available to gig workers (Ashford et al., 2018). Participants felt that, whilst this may not be the fault of the organisation, it does serve as a disadvantage to working in the gig economy. The finding regarding HRM practices not being supportive towards the professional development of gig workers is in support of the existing literature. However, what was interesting to observe is that participants assigned this to factors beyond the control of the organisation, stating that it is inherent to the gig model.

#### **6.2.1.3 Autonomy and Flexibility**

Participants viewed having high levels of autonomy and flexibility in relation to their engagement deliverables, negotiation of their contracting with the organisation, and work

arrangements, as positive. These findings are confirmed by extant literature, which states that high levels of autonomy and flexibility in their work is a key characteristic of workers in the gig economy, from the perspective of work content and work conditions (Spreitzer et al., 2017; Kost, Fieseler & Wong, 2020; Pichault and McKeown, 2020).

#### Autonomy to customise engagement deliverables

Participants considered having high levels of autonomy in shaping the means of achieving their deliverables to be a positive experience when completing tasks for the client organisation. This finding is in line with one of the three elements of autonomy, work content, as proposed by Pichault and McKeown (2019), from a study conducted on independent professionals. The findings are similar to those proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2017) and Bush and Balven (2018) who highlighted that workers engaged in gig work, valued flexibility with regards to the scheduling of work. This includes not having detailed, standardised specifications imposed with regards to how the deliverables ought to be achieved, thus allowing for job crafting and empowerment through decision-making (Jabagi et al., 2019; Pichault and McKeown, 2019). This is important, given the expert nature of the knowledge-based gig worker, and makes them feel that the client organisation demonstrates confidence in their ability to deliver outcomes that are tailored to organisational needs, which was stated to be a positive experience.

From an unfavourable perspective, not having the ability customise work or to rectify challenges experienced on the task was raised. This happened when gig workers were made to follow a detailed specification as part of the deliverable with no scope for customisation, leading them to feel like unskilled workers whose views were not welcomed. Wynn (2016) and Gandini (2019) argued that, given the specialised nature of knowledge-based independent workers, it is difficult to enforce command and control mechanisms regarding their work content. This reason may support the finding regarding why a lack of autonomy was perceived to be unfavourable.

#### Flexibility to negotiate contracts

Being in a position to influence contract terms and conditions through negotiation, such that they are favourable to the gig worker, was also highlighted as a positive experience. The key terms for negotiation must include payment rates, key milestones and the engagement or task methodology to be followed. This finding aligns to the aspect of autonomy relating to work conditions (Pichault & McKeown, 2019), which emphasises the importance of having the ability to negotiate work conditions, such as engagement contracts.

### Flexible work arrangements

Participants highlighted flexibility in their work arrangements, whereby the client organisation's focus was on accountability for the task deliverables, rather than working hours. This is confirmed by Spreitzer et al. (2017), who stated that of great value to gig workers in alternative work arrangements, was the flexibility in terms of where and when they work, in order to accommodate the various demands within their schedules.

#### **6.2.1.4 Performance feedback**

### Short interval control throughout engagement

Participants experienced short-interval control, which consisted of short but frequent task performance check-ins with the client organisation's sponsor, to assess progress and any blocking points. This was particularly positive when challenges were experienced on the engagement. Bush and Balven (2018) stated that, in the absence of performance feedback, gig workers may feel that they lack control over the outcomes of tasks, hence the reason for short-interval control being highlighted as being positive.

### Post-engagement performance feedback

According to Kost et al. (2018), the ability to improve oneself led to gig workers experiencing higher levels of meaningfulness in the work that they do. Following the conclusion of the task or engagement, receiving performance feedback, balanced on both positive and negative aspects was found to be useful in that it assisted gig workers to identify areas of self-improvement. An aspect of self-improvement is having the ability to learn, and develop one's skills further (Kost et al., 2018); one's development needs may be uncovered through performance feedback. It is therefore for this reason that gig workers experienced feedback positively, as it enabled them to focus on the areas in which they required further development.

Gandini (2019) highlighted that the nature of gig work is such that feedback is typically limited, or non-existent, thus limiting gig workers' ability to further develop their professional competencies. Participants did not note negative experiences related to feedback, however it was mentioned by one participant that they had not received any feedback, but had seen the output from their deliverables being implemented by the organisation. Another participant highlighted that one's performance is measured by receiving remuneration following the conclusion of the task.

#### **6.2.1.5 Fairly applied practices**

### Fair access to HRM practices

Receiving fair access to HRM policies and being subjected to practices that would normally be reserved from permanent employees such as training, and work flexibility, was described by gig workers as positive, and led to feelings of inclusion. In this case, gig workers' fair access to HRM practices demonstrates the presence of procedural justice which was highlighted as an antecedent of perceived organisational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Being excluded from rewards made available to permanent employees, for the achievement of targets that the gig worker made a contribution towards, was described negatively from a fairness perspective. However, it was acknowledged that one was not entitled to this as it had not formed part of the agreed contract. This is also a demonstration of procedural justice as the organisation displayed transparency regarding its remuneration policy for gig workers (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

#### Organisational delivery on agreed terms of exchange

Working in the gig economy is accompanied by low levels of security, whereby organisations may not fully compensate workers for the tasks completed, or not honour other aspects of the contract (Petriglieri et al., 2019). Hence, having the client organisation deliver fully according to the agreed terms of exchange was viewed as a positive experience by knowledge-based gig workers.

A key challenge encountered by gig workers during engagements, concerned organisational actions such as altering final deliverables to suit the motives of individuals within the client organisation. This led gig workers to feel that their values were compromised, particularly when they felt compelled to fall in line with actions that compromise their independence or values as well as the terms of the contract itself. As the priority for gig workers is to protect their contracts, they are placed in difficult positions when such compromising situations occur, and may opt out of future engagements as a result.

#### **6.2.1.6 Learning and Development**

##### Engagement-specific training

The provision of training to support in the execution of the engagement was viewed as positive. In this context, training consisted of understanding the unique characteristics of the organisation, such as its systems, and operating philosophy. Participants felt that an understanding of this helped to improve the likelihood of successful outcomes, as they

would be better able to customise the solution. Not doing so, may be detrimental to the final deliverables. This affirms the suggestion put forth by Flinchbaugh et al. (2020) on their review of independent contractors, in which it was proposed that contractors' understanding of processes and systems unique to the organisation were important to their performance levels, as they would be better equipped to serve the needs of the organisation.

Gig workers assumed responsibility for their own personal development, to ensure that their skills are kept current, thus enabling them to remain competitive within the market and offer attractive solutions to clients as a result. This finding aligns to the research conducted by Lo Presti et al. (2018), who, through a study on freelancers, found that their professional development contributes to continuing to secure work, which serves to benefit client organisations as they will possess a range of skills that may be of relevance. In support of this Meijerink & Keegan (2018) and Ashford et al. (2018) emphasised that, due to the fast pace of change in the labour market, gig workers are required to continuously develop skills that support their ability to remain relevant, which they don't depend on the client organisation to provide, given the short-term nature of the relationship. The provision of improvement-oriented feedback however, was found to be useful by participants in helping craft developmental actions for gig workers.

#### Capability-enhancing engagements

In the absence of formal training and development, an important experience within the gig economy context, is exposure to capability-enhancing assignments, which support further learning and growth and the enhancement of gig worker skills. It would also mitigate the effects of repetitive work that is often experienced by gig workers. This is affirmed by (O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006), who highlighted that independent workers seek stretch work that may introduce new dimensions to engagements that are similar, thus facilitating the enhancement or development of skills.

#### **6.2.1.7 Remuneration and Rewards**

##### Access to future gig engagements through value add

Given the nature of the gig model, workers are not entitled to benefits beyond remuneration for the task completed (Flinchbaugh et al., 2020). This was highlighted by research participants who stated that there were seldom monetary and non-monetary rewards in place upon the completion of the task, beyond the remuneration that was contracted upon. However, provided that one had added value according to the client

organisation's assessment, the opportunity to return to an organisation for future tasks was viewed as a positive experience.

#### Remuneration based on milestone achievement

Remuneration is normally made following the conclusion of the engagement. In order to better support gig workers, it was highlighted that remuneration tied to the achievement of specific milestones, in the case of lengthier engagement periods, would be viewed more favourably. This finding is aligned to the recommendations of Bush and Balven (2018) and Vanhala and Ritala (2016), wherein additional incentives, tied to performance, were advocated for.

### **6.2.2 Perceptions of organisational support**

After participants had highlighted both their positive and unfavourable experiences of the HRM practices, they were asked to reflect on how these experiences influenced their perceptions of support from the client organisation. The four themes that emerged regarding gig workers' perceptions of the client organisation from a support perspective include valuing the personal contribution of the gig worker, perceptions of inclusion, perceptions of positive values, and lack of support inherent to the gig economy. Each of the themes is discussed in the section that follows.

#### **6.2.2.1 Value of worker contribution**

##### Understanding and appreciation of value-add

Having crucial engagement-related interactions with the client organisation made participants feel that their value add on the engagement was understood and appreciated, and in this way they found the organisation to be supportive. Perceived organisational support, by its very definition, relates to having an organisation value an individual's work contribution (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and it is apparent that this definition is applicable to knowledge-based gig workers. When HRM practices regarding engagement support were not favourable, gig workers felt that their value add was not appreciated. Gig workers also questioned why organisations had contracted with them in the first place when they felt a sense of having to compete with members within the organisation on the engagement, who were driving different outcomes.

##### Open-minded toward external influence

When client organisations were open-minded towards their solutions, it demonstrated to participants that organisations were supportive, which served as further encouragement to



perform. It also makes the gig worker feel trusted by the organisation to deliver solutions that will be beneficial in the long-run. Flinchbaugh et al (2020) highlighted that a trusting relationship built between professional contractors and the client organisation, elevated their levels of performance on the engagement.

Not being provided a level of task autonomy led to gig workers feeling micro-managed, leading to a reluctance to voice an opposing view to the client organisation, even when they knew better, for fear of losing their contract with the organisation. This finding asserts the argument made by Fleming (2017) regarding the gig economy, stating that higher levels of micro-management monitoring were observed with this work model.

### **6.2.2.2 Inclusive practices**

#### Feel part of the team

Feeling part of the team, through inclusion in interactions and decision-making during the engagement, was highlighted as supportive. However this was noted for gig workers who had conducted more than one engagement with the same organisation, thus forming closer relationships with organisational members. This is supported by self-determination theory, which highlights that, together with psychological needs for autonomy and competence, an individual's need for relatedness or connectedness to others leads to improved feelings of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Jabagi et al., 2019).

Furthermore, achieving alignment with stakeholders and up-front on-boarding in order to understand the organisational expectations on the engagement, made gig workers feel that there was support for the engagement. When gig workers are not provided with on-boarding regarding the task or engagement, and do not receive the support necessary to execute, they perceived the organisation to be lacking a focus on the engagement, and not behaving in an inclusive manner to gig workers, who are often left to self-navigate the situation in order to execute on the task.

### **6.2.2.3 Organisational values**

#### Value-orientation

The demonstration of fair treatment regarding the HRM practices, and ethical practices instilled by the organisation, resulted in gig workers perceiving the client organisation to be values-oriented. As a result of this they feel supported in the nature of the work that they engage in. Flinchbaugh et al. (2020) found that such shared values between independent workers and the client organisation had a positive impact on work performance

of independent workers, as its effects led to lower levels of uncertainty. This explains why a values-oriented client organisation may be perceived to be supportive.

Burbano (2019) suggested that employer characteristics or values, such as corporate social responsibility, may influence non-traditional workers in a positive manner, such as improved productivity levels. This partially supports the findings regarding the impact of organisational values on gig workers' perceptions of support, and subsequent performance thereof, such as discretionary effort.

However, when uncertainty existed in terms of the client organisation upholding its terms of the agreement, participants questioned whether the organisation could be trusted, or whether it cared for people. This served as a poor reflection of the organisational culture. Further to this, gig workers felt exploited or misused by the organisation, mainly from a remuneration perspective, as it led to financial uncertainty. However, it was mentioned that if client organisations shared the risks with the gig worker, such as the financial disadvantage created by a changed scope, they would be perceived more positively.

It was also stated by a participant that in instances whereby gig workers are remunerated appropriately, but lacked support in other HRM practices, they felt that competitive remuneration was used as justification for lack of support.

#### ***6.2.2.4 Lack of support inherent to gig economy***

##### **Systemic limitations**

Unfavourable practices may come to be accepted as the norm in the gig economy, with gig workers highlighting that a number of the limitations, such as a lack of career progression, are systemic in nature and not within the client organisation's control. Participant perceptions of the organisation were also not influenced negatively when the unfavourable HRM practice had been part of the conditions of the contract that they had agreed to.

#### **6.2.3 Impact on engagement deliverables**

The final section of research question one concerned the ways in which positive experiences impacted research participants' performance on the particular task or deliverable assigned by the client organisation. The five themes that emerged regarding the impact of the HRM practices on gig workers' performance include discretionary effort, task engagement, commitment to task delivery, task accountability and delivery timing. Each of the themes is discussed in the section that follows.

### **6.2.3.1 Discretionary effort**

When positive HRM practices led to participants perceiving the organisation to be supportive, it resulted in their application of discretionary effort, through additional working hours in order to improve the final deliverables for the client organisation. They also felt motivated to prove themselves and demonstrate to the organisation their value add. In this context, gig workers perceive the support received to be beneficial, and thus feel motivated to reciprocate the perceptions of organisational support. This is often demonstrated through high performance behaviours (McKeown and Cochrane, 2012; Zhong et al., 2016), and extra-role behaviours (Eisenberger, 2001), which are examples of discretionary effort. Thus the findings are in line with existing literature on the role of perceived organisational support on worker performance.

Gig workers acknowledged that discretionary effort may lead to scope creep, however they felt that they could accommodate a slight scope creep, and did not feel exploited as their efforts would lead to improved deliverables and further enhance the relationship with the client organisation. Kost et al. (2018) highlighted that moral factors, or the feeling that one's work produced positive outcomes for others, contributed towards higher levels of meaningfulness for gig workers; this may lead to discretionary effort as a result. The findings highlighted are therefore in line with existing literature.

In terms of the outcomes of unfavourable HRM practices, two participants stated that, although they remain committed to delivering against what they had agreed to as part of the contract terms, they will not necessarily deliver more than what was agreed to. In addition, gig workers stated that the opportunity to create benefits for the organisation is missed if the environment is not supportive, as knowledge-based gig workers have specialised skills that may be utilised in solving business challenges.

Of interest was that a participant highlighted that they were able to distinguish between the client organisation and client representative or sponsor, and based on their interaction with the sponsor, made a choice on whether to apply discretionary effort or not. Their choice was determined by the support received from the sponsor. This highlights that the gig worker may engage in discretionary effort due to a commitment felt towards to the individual within the client organisation for whom they are completing the work. .

### **6.2.3.2 Task Engagement**

Supportive HRM practices led gig works to feel motivated to engage further with the organisation from a task perspective, and experience a higher level of comfort, positivity

and self-confidence when approaching the task. This occurred when clear expectations from the client organisation were in place, ultimately resulting in improved performance levels.

A number of participants stated feeling more connected to the organisation, or the outcome of the engagement when they felt supported. This finding is in line with the observation made by Flinchbaugh et al. (2020), whereby independent contractors felt a higher level of connection to their role and the organisation when the organisation was perceived to be supportive.

The result of unsupportive practices from the client organisation, however, led gig workers to question their willingness to engage with the organisation in future; and although they strived to ensure high quality deliverables, lacking support from the organisation may ultimately hinder performance levels.

#### ***6.2.3.3 Commitment to task delivery***

Irrespective of the perceived level of support felt by gig workers, they remained committed to the high quality deliverables that they had agreed to. The reasons for this include the fact that consistently delivering at a high quality to client organisations was crucial to thriving in this work context, and gig workers therefore could not afford to fail on engagements as it would jeopardise their ability to secure future work. In addition to consistent quality delivery, additional values that inform their work include professional credibility, honesty in their work and independence. This affirms the argument put forward by Lo Presti et al. (2018), who stated that in the gig economy context, worker commitment is displayed at the task or professional level, rather than at the organisational level. In addition, Ashford et al. (2018) highlighted that creating a positive perception of one's capabilities is important for workplace success; this is very important to gig workers.

#### ***6.2.3.4 Task accountability***

When high autonomy levels are granted, gig workers have a high sense of accountability for the outcomes of the task. They also adopted a mind-set of proactively attempting to rectify the situation when deliverables were at risk. In such instances, participants also proactively sought to initiate corrective action, such as seeking support through alternative channels or further upskilling themselves professionally to be able to mitigate any potentially negative outcomes.

This demonstrates that gig workers hold themselves fully accountable for tasks as part of their commitment to ensuring delivery on what has been agreed to with the organisation, which is evident even in the absence of perceived organisational support. This further highlights their

commitment to the task (Lo Presti et al., 2018). In addition to this, alignment on the direction of the engagement between all stakeholders, enabled all team members to hold each other accountable.

#### **6.2.3.5 Delivery timing**

Having in place the necessary support in relation to the engagement, assists in accelerating the delivery time. Also, due to the often-times repetitive nature of the engagement, gig workers are able to gain high levels of efficiency, further contributing to speed of delivery.

From an unfavourable perspective, bureaucratic administration such as cumbersome sign-on processes, slows down task completion. This is understandable, given the short-term nature of these engagements. Further to this, not clarifying the terms of scoping or desired deliverables, leads to poor project delivery from both a timing and cost perspective.

#### **6.2.4 Summary of the discussion of research question one**

The results of research question one highlighted that positive/effective HRM practices associated with engagement support, clear structures and processes, and autonomy and flexibility were referred to most frequently. The presence of positive practices led gig workers to perceive organisations as supportive from the perspective of valuing their contribution, making them feel included and demonstrating (supportive) organisational values. In terms of the impact on gig worker performance, higher levels of discretionary effort, engagement and commitment to delivery were highlighted to be key outcomes. This is supported by the findings of the literature.

Regarding unfavourable HRM practices, participants most frequently referred to the absence of engagement support, clear structures and processes and remuneration and rewards. The absence of supportive HRM practices led gig workers to perceive that the organisation did not value their contribution towards the engagement, and that the culture was not supportive as a result. However, a number of participants highlighted that this seems to be the nature of the work that they are typically involved in, and unfavourable experiences may not be through the fault of the organisation but rather the dominant/prevaling nature of the work arrangement. Participants highlighted that their commitment to delivery on the task or engagement, however, was sustained, regardless of support from the organisation as they were guided by their personal values and reputation, as well as the fact that the nature of their work dictated that quality delivery was paramount to ensuring access to engagements in future. This is supported

by the findings of the literature.

## **6.3 Discussion of research question two**

### ***Research question two: Which HRM practices are most pertinent in ensuring the knowledge-based gig worker's commitment?***

Research question two sought to understand which of the HRM practices identified in research question one were most pertinent in creating perceptions of organisational support, that would lead to higher commitment levels for the task or engagement from the gig worker. Research participants were firstly asked to reflect on their specific recommendations regarding how organisations may modify HRM practices to improve perceptions of support, and subsequent commitment to the task from the gig worker. Thereafter, they ranked the recommended practices in order of perceived importance. Of the seven HRM practices associated with perceptions of support from the client organisation, the results from research question two showed that engagement support, remuneration and rewards, and clear structures and processes were highlighted as most important. A discussion on the findings relating to the recommended HRM practices to improve perceptions of support, and the ranking of the recommended practices follows.

### **6.3.1 Recommendations on supportive HRM practices**

#### ***6.3.1.1 Engagement support***

##### Upfront on-boarding

In addition to clarifying the requirements of the engagement as part of the upfront on-boarding, participants recommended the inclusion of key policies and guidelines to abide by, and the strategic priorities of the client organisation to keep under consideration in the execution of engagement. Providing this information was considered to be helpful in guiding engagement-related decisions, as gig workers often feel rushed into the task without an adequate understanding of these key aspects. The findings are supported by Bush and Balven (2018) who highlighted the importance of placing emphasis on the objectives of the engagement, as it creates a perception of value alignment between the gig worker and client organisation. This may lead to perceptions of organisational support, as gig workers feel equipped to conduct the task.

##### Internal organisational sponsor

Having access to an internal organisational sponsor allows for gig workers to engage with the client organisation during key touchpoints or milestones on the task, and to clarify any

uncertainty relating to the task. In order to further support the success of the gig worker on the engagement, keeping the organisational sponsor accountable for success was also highlighted to be important. As previously mentioned, gig workers perceive that project-related support exists and are motivated to engage further on the task when they have access to the organisational supervisor, with whom they can engage with on the task at hand (Barlage et al., 2020). Therefore the finding regarding the requirement of an internal organisational sponsor is confirmed by existing literature

#### Inclusion in crucial engagement related interactions

The inclusion in forums relating to the engagement ensures that gig workers maintain visibility of the decisions being made, as it impacts on the outcomes of their final deliverables. Transparently sharing of information by the organisation in regards to the engagement, unless stated as confidential, was highlighted by participants, as both parties were working towards the same outcomes. Further to this, an understanding within the organisation of the gig worker engagement to be done is also required to unlock resource support, and enables organisational employees to better understand and appreciate the value they add. Having one's contribution being valued is perceived to be supportive in the gig economy, in line with the literature on perceived organisational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis et al., 2017).

### **6.3.1.2 Clear structures and processes**

#### Specifically stated contract terms

Working independently in the gig economy exposes workers to high levels of uncertainty in terms of their working conditions, and the continuity of work itself (Ashford et al., 2018; Petriglieri et al, 2019; Josserand & Kaine, 2019; Aroles, Mitev, & Vaujany, 2019). They may also be prone to exploitative work conditions. It is for these reasons that contract terms of the engagement must be stated very clearly between the gig worker and client organisation, to allow for the gig worker to be able to interpret it and ensure their interests are protected in the exchange. This also signals a level of fairness regarding the client organisation's HRM practices.

#### Simplified bidding and selection

As tasks or engagements that characterise gig work are typically of a short-term in nature, participants highlighted a preference for a simplified bidding and selection process, one which was not burdened by bureaucratic administration. .

#### Understand how gig workers skills can best meet organisational needs

It was highlighted by research participants that organisations should make sense of how gig worker skills may meet their needs, in order to better leverage the workforce. This is of particular importance as knowledge-based gig workers possess high levels of expertise (McKeown and Cochrane, 2012), which would be of great value to organisations, provided that they are able to appropriately match this expertise to address key business challenges.

### ***6.3.1.3 Autonomy and Flexibility***

#### Adaptability to change

For organisations who utilise a gig workforce model, demonstrating adaptability to change and agility, is a key requirement for organisations, based on the findings from research participants.

#### Autonomy to customise deliverables

A high level of autonomy to customise the task deliverables, was viewed as supportive by gig workers. This finding has been confirmed by extant literature, whereby it was stated that high levels of autonomy and flexibility is perceived to be supportive to gig workers, in terms of the work content and work conditions (Spreitzer et al., 2017; Kost, Fieseler & Wong, 2020; Pichault and McKeown, 2020).

#### Ability to influence contracting terms

Participants stated that it is important to be able to influence the key contract terms, to take into consideration their interests. Engaging in higher levels of dialogue with the client organisation was highlighted as a key enabler in being able to influence contracting terms. This is aligned to the findings of Byrne & Pecchenino (2019) who advocated for the utilisation of relational-based contracts that allowed for higher levels of flexibility on knowledge-based engagements, as they may be characterised by higher levels of ambiguity. Psychological contract literature also found a positive correlation between relational contracts and higher levels of perceived organisational support (Barlage et al., 2020).

#### Flexibility in work arrangement

Flexibility regarding the work arrangement, based on the location and hours to be worked, were perceived to be supportive, as it allows gig workers to work independently. In this regard, a participant went as far as to state that social interaction was less important in this context, thus highlighting the importance of flexibility.



#### **6.3.1.4 Performance feedback**

##### Short interval control

To ensure that gig workers are kept up to speed on the key priorities of the task or engagement, considering the inputs of their stakeholders, the requirement for short-interval control through regular task check-ins with the organisational sponsor was highlighted.

##### Post-engagement performance feedback

The provision of feedback on engagement performance, following the conclusion of the task, is perceived to be valuable in that it supports the gig worker in identify key areas for professional development. This affirms the findings of Bush and Balven (2018) and Meijerink and Keegan (2018), who suggested that the provision of performance-related feedback is valuable to the gig worker, in that it supports improved future task performance, and is particularly useful when tasks of a similar nature will be undertaken in future. Feedback was also highlighted by Ashford et al. (2018) to be important in the gig economy as the practice does not take place in a consistent manner, as is done for permanent employees.

#### **6.3.1.5 Remuneration and rewards**

##### Access to future gig engagements through value add

Gig workers acknowledged that they are not entitled to financial rewards from the organisation, apart from the agreed remuneration that is received for the completion of the task. Given this, a number of participants stated that a client organisation's consideration of gig workers for future engagements was perceived to be a reward for the discretionary value added to the organisation. In support of this finding, Bush and Balven (2018) made a similar proposition; however it was considered as part of a retention strategy for gig workers which, over time, may lead to a greater sense of commitment to the organisation by gig workers.

##### Flexible performance-related incentives

Further to the standard agreed remuneration, additional incentives that are linked to performance were viewed favourably by participants. They described incentives served as a motivator, and perceived the organisation to be supportive when they are remunerated fairly for their efforts. This would be reasonable, given that Meijerink and Keegan (2018) highlighted the importance of remunerating gig workers in a manner that is fair and beneficial, reflecting their value add. However, such a reward model would need to be accompanied by a performance management system; this supports the view of Vanhala and Ritala (2016) who stated that incentives must be linked to objective performance management and evaluation systems.

Jabagi et al. (2019) argued however that extrinsic motivators, such as financial rewards, were not effective at changing an individual's behaviours and therefore questioned whether this could lead to commitment to learning in the longer-term. In light of this, the authors called for more intrinsic forms of motivation, which could be in the form of access to future engagements with the organisation, or capability-enhancing engagements, and which was also stated to be among the most pertinent HRM practices in the gig economy (Jabagi et al., 2019).

### **6.3.1.6 Learning and Development**

#### Engagement-specific training

The results showed that the provision of engagement-specific training by the organisation is important to fulfilling the required deliverables, as it provides gig workers with insight into the unique aspects of the business which enables for the deliverable to be tailored accordingly. Thus, gig workers feel supported in executing on their tasks due to the perceived enhancement of their capabilities (Bush and Balven, 2018). Training aimed at professional development, however, was not expected from the client organisation, as gig workers recognise that responsibility for their personal development rests solely with them, in order to continue to secure future work. This is confirmed by literature, wherein it was stated that gig workers take ownership of their professional development to ensure that they can compete successfully in the gig economy (Ashford et al., 2018; Lo Presti et al., 2018; Meijerink & Keegan, 2018).

#### Capability-enhancing engagements

Participants highlighted that opportunities for learning and development constituted the provision of on-the-job training, through access to tasks or engagements that enhanced their capabilities, such as stretch tasks. This affirms the findings of O'Mahony & Bechky (2006) who stated that stretch work that adds further layers of complexity to the task not previously experienced by gig workers, was useful in the development of new skills and capabilities. This is also supported by Bush and Balven (2018) as a means of further training and development, leading gig workers to feel supported in their development. It also benefits client organisations, who may then leverage gig workers to solve more complex business challenges ().

O'Mahony & Bechky (2006) also made mention to the career progression paradox, whereby gig workers are hired based on a required set of expertise, however they require opportunities to be able to develop such expertise. Access to stretch tasks in order to develop their expertise further, could therefore aid in resolving this challenge.

### **6.3.1.7 Fairly applied practices**

### Organisational delivery on agreed terms of exchange

Given the multiple challenges that gig workers endure working this way, particularly with regards to the timing and amount of remuneration, as well as the required task deliverables, they perceive the client organisation to be supportive when they deliver according to what has been agreed to by both parties.

#### **6.3.2 HRM practices perceived to be most supportive**

With specific recommendations for client organisations in terms of supportive HRM practices being made, the latter part of research question two sought to identify which of the practices were most important in improving perceptions of organisational support. In order to understand the relative importance of each HRM practice, participants were also asked to allocate points to each. Each HRM practice is discussed based on the frequency of mentions by each participant; thereafter the relative ranking of each HRM practice, according to the point allocation, will be discussed.

##### ***6.3.2.1 Engagement support***

Engagement support, inclusive of on-boarding and socialisation, internal organisational sponsorship, and involvement in crucial engagement-related interactions with the client organisation, was the most frequently mentioned HRM practice by participants. The first priority of gig workers is to ensure that they execute successfully on the assigned task. Therefore, having the necessary resources and information from the client organisation, would be perceived as being supportive in that they want to see the gig worker being successful. This finding is affirmed by the argument made by Zhong et al. (2016) which states that organisation investment in employees serves to signal that they are valued, thus improving perceptions of organisational support and engagement. Furthermore, as mentioned by a participant, it is difficult to remain committed to delivering on the task when the gig worker does not have clarity on the task expectations. .

##### ***6.3.2.2 Remuneration and rewards***

A remuneration and rewards structure, which makes gig workers feel valued, was ranked as the second highest HRM practice from a perceived organisational support perspective. Although remuneration and rewards are normally limited to payment by the task in the gig economy (), recommendations were made by participants to include financial incentives for exceeding task deliverables, and personal recognition from the client organisation. The provision of personal recognition is in line with the argument made by Jabagi et al. (2019), who advocated for the intrinsic rewards, which have been shown to improve commitment

levels.

A second element of remuneration and rewards, is with regards to the timing thereof. It is important that client organisations remunerate gig workers in accordance with the agreed terms and conditions so as not to exacerbate the uncertainty faced by this work group, who are already operating under precarious work conditions (Petriglieri et al., 2019; Ashford et al., 2018). This is also linked to the fair application of HRM practices in terms of the client organisation delivering according to the agreed terms of the engagement.

#### ***6.3.2.3 Clear structures and processes***

In terms of the HRM practice relating to clear structures and processes, having in place specifically stated contract terms was highlighted as important in that it enables a more meaningful engagement with the organisation regarding the scope of work and remuneration process, which allows for clarity of expectations by both parties.

#### ***6.3.2.4 Performance feedback***

As described by a participant, having short-interval control in place ensures that gig workers, and the client organisation, “feel the heat on a day to day basis”, thus maintaining the engagement pace and addressing any roadblocks as they arise. Furthermore, receiving post engagement performance feedback is important in enabling the gig worker to identify professional improvement areas. In this context, the client organisation may be one of the only reliable sources from which feedback may be obtained, hence the importance of it.

#### ***6.3.2.5 Learning and development***

The provision of engagement-related training, in order to support gig workers to effectively tailor the task deliverable in line with the organisation’s unique characteristics, is perceived to be the most important aspect from a learning and development perspective. .

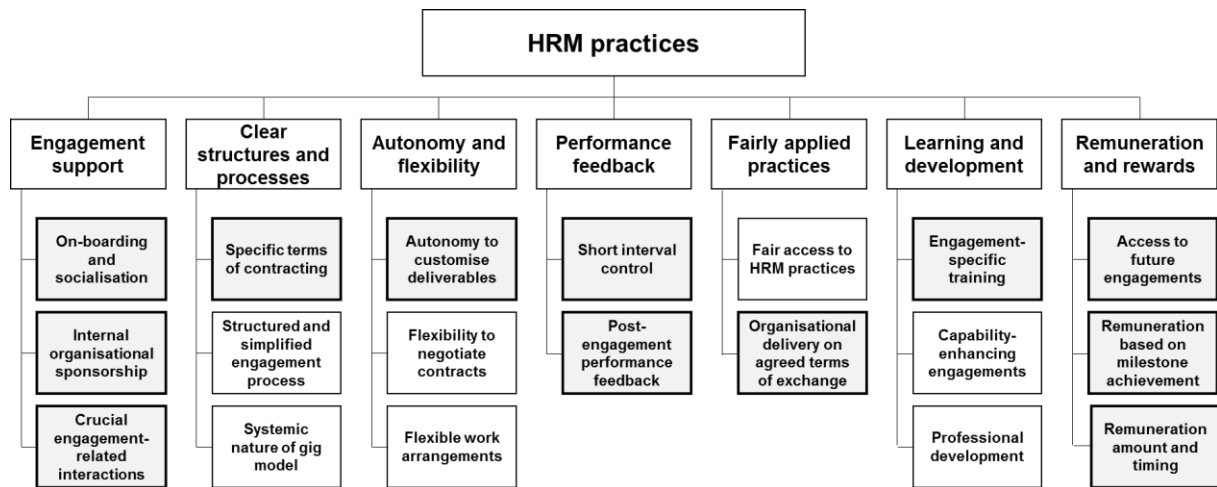
#### ***6.3.2.6 Autonomy and flexibility***

Given the knowledge-based context of their work, participants stated that having the ability to influence organisational members and give direction regarding the engagement was a very important aspect of their work. This is associated with having autonomy to customise deliverables, and positively influenced their perceptions of organisational support. .

#### ***6.3.2.7 Fairly applied practices***

Delivery against the agreed terms of exchange by the client organisation was highlighted as being important, and is key to maintaining a trusting relationship between the gig worker and client organisation.

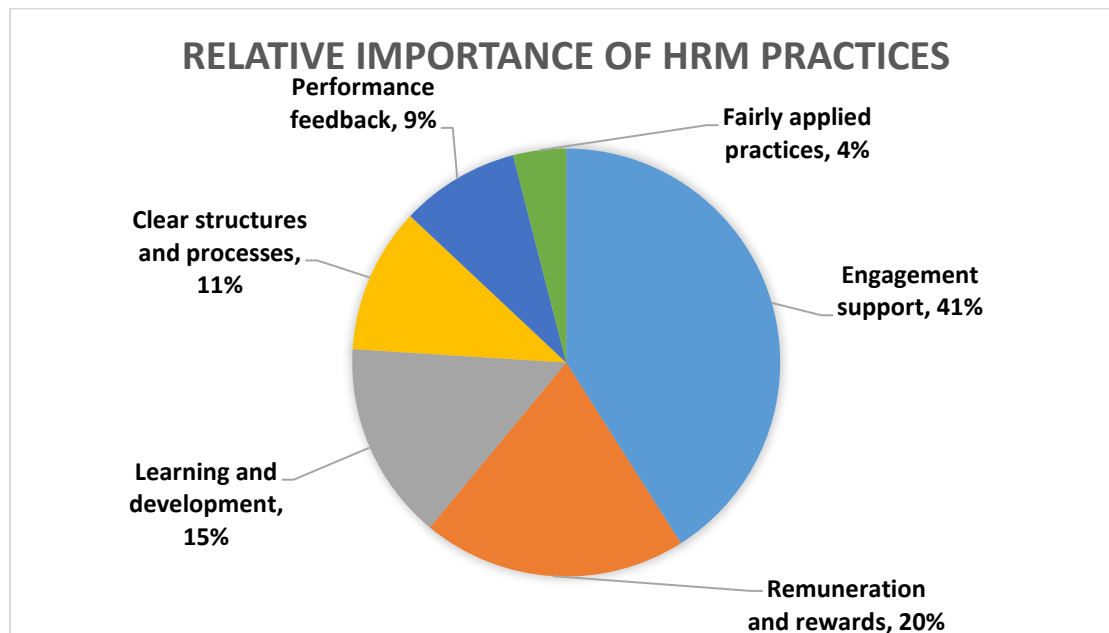
Figure 3 presented below, illustrates a summary of the elements of each HRM practice that participants perceived to be most important. These are indicated in the bold, greyed out blocks.



**Figure 3: HRM practices perceived to be most supportive**

The allocation of points to each HRM practice to understand their importance relative to each other, indicated that engagement support was perceived to be the most important practice, followed by remuneration and rewards.

Figure 4 below illustrates how participants rated each HRM practice, with the percentage indicating the amount of points allocated to each practice.



**Figure 4: Percentage allocation of pertinent HRM practices**

However, the point allocation is based on the response of 10 of the 16 participants, as a number of participants highlighted that they found it to be challenging to allocate points to each practice, with one participant specifically highlighting that all practices played a combined role in the gig worker's perception of support.

When comparing the results of question six and seven, engagement support and remuneration and rewards ranked first and second respectively in both questions. However the rankings differed between the questions for the remaining HRM practices. Furthermore, it was noted that participants did not allocate any points to autonomy and flexibility. A comparison of the results from the two questions is shown in Table 13 below.

**Table 17: Comparison of most pertinent HRM practices**

Rank	Question 6	Question 7
1	Engagement support	Engagement support
2	Remuneration and rewards	Remuneration and rewards
3	Clear structures and processes	Learning and development
4	Performance feedback	Clear structures and processes
5	Learning and development	Performance feedback
6	Autonomy and flexibility	Fairly applied practices
7	Fairly applied practices	

A possible reason may be that in their rankings, participants' focus may have been on those practices that they had experienced as the most challenging from a support perspective from the client organisation, with those practices that were ranked lower, already in place and being experienced at an adequate level.

### **6.3.3 Summary of the discussion of research question two**

The results indicate that knowledge-based gig workers perceive engagement support and remuneration and rewards as the most important HRM practices in signalling support from the client organisation. However, they cannot be considered in isolation, and the remaining HRM practices must be considered in terms of the way in which they contribute towards supporting the gig worker to successfully achieve the agreed deliverables with the organisation, and that they do not serve to be a hindrance.

## **6.4 Discussion of research question three**

***Research question three: What effect does task complexity have on the knowledge-based gig worker's preference for the type of HRM practices provided?***

Research question three sought to understand the ways in which the nature of the task, in

terms of its complexity, determined gig workers' required level of HRM practices support. The results showed gig workers define complex tasks as those that may involve change to the client organisation, are broadly scoped and have not been undertaken by the gig worker before. Support required varied in regards to the HRM practices of clear structures and processes, engagement support, autonomy and flexibility, performance feedback and learning and development. A discussion on the findings relating to the nature of the task, in terms of complexity, and differences in HRM support required, follows.

#### **6.4.1 Defining the nature of the task**

When defining complex tasks, participants referred to them as involving broad engagement scopes, in terms of breadth or depth, which would have implications for the terms of contracting and level of engagement support. Complex tasks were also characterised in terms of the changes required to organisational processes or systems, as this would require engagement support and the ability to influence organisational members. Also importantly, the novelty of the task, as determined by whether the gig worker had engaged before in a task of a similar nature or not, would determine the level of engagement support required, particularly with regards to up-front on-boarding. Nakatsu, Grossman, & Iacovou (2014) provided a taxonomy of crowd-based complex tasks based on the structure of the task itself in terms of the level of standardisation (Jabagi et al., 2019), interdependence based on whether it required interactions with a range of stakeholders to resolve or could be completed individually, and the level of commitment required in terms of the effort or intensity required to perform successfully. It is expected that knowledge-based gig work may be more complex, due to the specialised nature of this work group.

The findings on complex tasks in relation to the breadth or depth of the scope, and the level of change required to organisational processes or systems, are closely linked to the taxonomy of complex tasks highlighted Natakusu et al. (2014), in terms of the structure of the task and interdependence. It could be argued however, that due to the novelty of the task, greater effort would be required to perform the task. Linking the novelty of a task to complexity is also supported by Wood et al. (2019) whose research study findings on remote gig workers highlighted that when workers took on novel tasks, they felt it provided an opportunity to engage in tasks of a more complex nature.

#### **6.4.2 Level of HRM support required based on nature of the task**

##### ***6.4.2.1 Clear structures and processes***

##### Specific terms of contracting

Tasks of a more complex nature require higher levels of effort in the scoping of work and contract terms (Nataksu et al., 2014), to ensure an adequate understanding of organisational requirements. Not adequately doing so may lead to perceptions of exploitation of the gig worker, in relation to scope creep for which gig workers may not be remunerated.

#### Structured and simplified engagement process

Although lower intensity HRM practices would be required for less complex tasks, in that less support would be needed to get on with the task, the basic processes must be in place to protect the interests of both parties, namely the gig worker and client organisation.

#### **6.4.2.2 Engagement support**

##### On-boarding and socialisation

For any task or engagement, clarification of the requirements is needed. However, on more complex tasks, upfront on-boarding is perceived to be more critical, in that it ensures that gig workers understand the key ways of working of that particular client organisation.

##### Internal organisational sponsorship

Access to organisational sponsorship was highlighted as being important irrespective of the complexity of the task, for liaison purposes as required.

##### Crucial engagement-related interactions

When the complexity is low, there is no real requirement for engagement-related interactions as broader impact of the task on the business is limited. However, interpersonal relationships are required for more complex tasks, as uncertainties may arise which require the gig worker to be able to navigate within the organisation. Resource support, such as access to information or organisation-specific platforms to conduct the task, was also highlighted as more important for complex tasks.

#### **6.4.2.3 Autonomy and flexibility**

##### Autonomy to customise deliverables

Having higher levels of authority and influence, and being trusted by the organisation to act in their best interests, aids in executing complex tasks. Given that complex tasks require that the gig worker may need to bring stakeholders together around a common purpose, not having high levels of autonomy to coordinate this may be detrimental to the



task outcome. This is supported by Jabagi et al. (2018), who highlighted that non-standardised tasks having more task variety and a higher level of complexity, may call for high levels of worker autonomy and decision-making empowerment.

#### **6.4.2.4 Performance feedback**

##### Short interval control

The nature of complex tasks requires that feedback be provided more frequently, through short interval control, and in a tailored manner that supports the engagement outcome. In order to develop competences on the job, Kost et al. (2020) called for a feedback system that provides sufficient feedback on both aspects of the task that are being done well, and flagging of the activities that require improvement.

##### Post-engagement performance feedback

Feedback at end of engagement is sufficient for less complex tasks.

#### **6.4.2.5 Learning and development**

##### Engagement-specific training

Depending on whether the task required a high level of customisation based on organisation's unique characteristics, the provision of engagement-related training becomes a requirement on complex tasks, but not on simple, transactional tasks as the requirements are often stated clearly with no room for ambiguity.

#### **6.4.3 Summary of the discussion of research question three**

The results indicate that task complexity may be characterised by the scope, or breadth, of the engagement, the level of change required, and its novelty to the gig worker. This is supported by extant literature. In terms of the level of HRM practice support required by gig workers, additional effort is required in scoping the engagement and contracting, as well as higher levels of involvement in crucial engagement-related interactions. Importantly, gig workers need to be trusted by the organisation and given autonomy to execute in line with their best interests.

### **6.5 Discussion of research question four**

***Research question four: What is the perceived role of the digital labour platform in building task commitment among knowledge-based gig workers through HRM practices?***

Research question four obtained gig workers' perceptions on the role of digital labour platforms in the provision of supportive HRM practices. The results highlighted that, of the seven HRM practices associated with perceptions of support from the client organisation, clear structures and processes, autonomy and flexibility, learning and development, remuneration and rewards, and fairly applied practices could provide support to the gig worker.

Further to this, participants also provided input into how such HRM practices could be designed in a way that does not diminish the relational aspects of the task or engagement. The results of this revealed that a hybrid model, which is designed in a manner that enables a human-centredness approach and provides mechanisms for relational interaction with the client organisation, would be most optimal. A discussion on the key findings relating to the role of the digital labour platform in the provision of HRM practices follows.

### **6.5.1 Perceived role of platforms in provision of supportive HRM practices**

#### ***6.5.1.1 Clear structures and processes***

##### Structured and simplified engagement process

The digital labour platform is perceived to be most suitable for the facilitation of the bidding and selection process, as it is able to efficiently match gig worker skills to business requirements. In this way, it is useful in highlighting a gig worker's skillset as well as references of projects conducted, and how a gig worker is ranked. The finding is in alignment with Kost et al. (2020), who suggested that, in addition to matching and serving as a reference for previous work, platforms could be utilised to help gig workers understand what skill sets they require to bid for client organisation tasks which could inform their developmental plans, and in this way could support talent management.

As digital labour platforms are designed to manage processes efficiently, they are supportive in assigning tasks, and thus may support the engagement process, leaving little room for human error in this regard. They are also well-suited to managing the day-to-day performance on deliverables that have been agreed to by the organisation and gig worker.

#### ***6.5.1.2 Autonomy and flexibility***

##### Flexible work arrangements

Executing tasks remotely through the platform better supported a flexible work arrangement. However, it creates a high possibility of micromanagement, in that the requirement for follow up on the day-to-day performance against deliverables may become excessive, and leads to an annoyance rather than a means of assisting task execution. Gandini (2019) stated that digital platforms were mainly utilised to govern the labour process between the worker and organisation, keeping close track on gig worker task performance to ensure the efficient exchange of required services. By controlling the labour process, it dictates the engagement terms (Dunn, 2020). However, given the nature of knowledge-based gig work, a command and control approach is not well-suited to gig workers, and calls for a more relational, value exchange interaction.

### ***6.5.1.3 Learning and development***

#### **Professional development**

Given that most client organisations do not provide developmental-focused training to gig workers as the task is of a short-term nature, receiving this through the digital labour platform that the gig worker has signed onto was highlighted. Through the use of algorithms, platforms could also be used to track training and development activities of gig workers, and provide recommendations for further development based on desired developmental areas. This once more affirms the suggestions made by Kost et al. (2020) regarding the role that platforms may play in supporting gig workers' talent management and development efforts.

### ***6.5.1.4 Remuneration and rewards***

#### **Remuneration amount and timing**

Digital labour platforms facilitate the bidding process for tasks, and have been negatively perceived to create conditions that lead to fierce cost competition, in a way that may be exploitative to gig workers. This results in the exclusion of professional or knowledge-based gig workers, who find that the value of the task or engagement is not justified by the rate offered. This finding is in line with what has been highlighted by Fleming (2017), Josserand & Kaine (2019) and Duggan et al. (2020). In contrast to this however, platforms may be better utilised to assist in the governance of rates in a fair manner, by creating a reference point for gig workers and client organisations in terms of a suitable rate for a particular task.

### ***6.5.1.5 Fairly applied practices***

### Fair access to HRM practices

Platforms may be utilised to introduce fairness in bidding for work, particularly for gig workers who are new to the market, or have not formed working relationships with client organisations. This would aid in obtaining access to organisations, which would normally be closed to them if they relied solely on professional networks. With a high focus on sustainable and fair work practices, Healy et al. (2020) also argued that labour platforms may need to re-consider the approach to the management of on-demand talent.

## **6.5.2 Facilitating a relational work arrangement through the platform**

### **6.5.2.1. Human-centredness**

#### Performance management as a human-centric process

Due to the personalised nature of performance feedback, human intervention is required, whereby gig workers are granted the opportunity to have a one-on-one discussion relating to their performance as this allowed for a relational interaction and the opportunity to clarify feedback. Thus it is more suited to take place outside of the digital labour platform.

#### Human appreciation is more meaningful

From a relational perspective, receiving personal recognition for a task that was accomplished well, is perceived to be more meaningful for the knowledge-based gig worker, compared to extrinsic rewards issued through the platform.

#### Creation of an inclusive community

Through the promotion of online professional forums available to gig workers, or by mirroring HRM practices that are not made available to gig workers by the client organisation, digital labour platforms may facilitate the creation of an inclusive community, in order to enable a relational work environment. This supports the argument made by Ashford et al. (2018) and Jabagi et al. (2019), highlighting that relational support may be obtained through involvement in online communities with fellow workers, which also enables information sharing and a shared experience.

### **6.5.2.2. Mechanisms to facilitate relational interactions**

#### Mechanisms to interact directly with the organisation

Within the digital labour platform, the availability of a mechanism that enables direct communication between the client organisation and the gig worker, is important for the

purposes of clarifying uncertainties relating to the task for which support may be required, and to facilitate two-way feedback. Rockmann and Ballinger (2017) highlighted that closer levels of client interactions may help foster a more relational engagement, which supports the finding from research participants.

### Use of interactive media

In order to maintain a level of engagement and a sense of relational support, where HRM practices are conducted through the platform, provision must be made such that the media utilised facilitates higher levels of interaction, for example through the on-boarding or learning process.

### **6.5.3 Summary of the discussion of research question four**

The results of research question four showed that participants perceived the digital labour platform as a mechanism mostly to improve the efficiency of the processes. This included simplifying the engagement process from a bidding perspective, and assigning of tasks which could be delivered remotely, as well as managing the day-to-day deliverable requirements. In this way it supports autonomy and flexibility. It may also be used to support gig workers in professional learning and development through recommending developmental areas, thus supporting talent management and development. The findings are supported by existing literature.

Although criticised in terms of creating exploitative conditions through the task negotiation process, it may be used to govern rates fairly on the platform.

With regards to facilitating a relational work environment for gig workers, a hybrid approach was suggested that incorporates usage of the platform as well as interactions with the client organisation. Participants strongly felt that interactions such as feedback, required human intervention in order to make it more relational. Platforms also contribute towards a relational environment through facilitating inclusive communities, and implementing mechanisms to facilitate relational interactions with the client organisation.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

Chapter Six provided a discussion of the research study findings from Chapter Five, which were then compared against extant literature presented in Chapter Two. The findings were mostly supported by extant literature. The following chapter provides a conclusion of the research study and presents a framework on supportive HRM practices which may aid organisations in better supporting knowledge-based gig workers to better leverage them.

# CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 7.1 Introduction

This study aimed to determine the supportive Human Resource Management (HRM) practices to be implemented by organisations in order to better leverage the knowledge-based gig economy. How these HRM practices are influenced by the complexity of the task, as well as how digital labour platforms best support in the provision of HRM practices given their increasing usage, also informed the study. Relationships between gig workers, client organisations and digital labour platforms have been characterised by low levels of support and, as a result, a low commitment relationship between the gig worker and organisation (Duggan et al., 2020). Further to this, limited research has been conducted on the knowledge-based gig economy, particularly from an HRM perspective (Duggan et al., 2020).

The study was successful in establishing the HRM practices perceived to be most the supportive in the knowledge-based gig economy context, and how the complexity of the task influenced this. It also provided insight into the role of digital labour platforms in improving perceptions of support. The findings may be used to assist organisations to better leverage the knowledge-based gig workforce, and platform firms in the design of their digital labour platforms in a more meaningful manner that enhances perceptions of support.

Chapter Six provided a discussion of the results of each research question against extant literature. In Chapter Seven, a summary of the principal findings of the research will be highlighted, including a framework on supportive HRM practices to leverage workers in the knowledge-based gig economy. The implications for organisations and platform firms are also presented regarding supportive HRM practices in the gig economy, followed by the key limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

## 7.2 Principal research findings

The key findings of the research study are made with regards to supportive HRM practices for knowledge-based gig workers, the influence of the nature of the task on these, and the role of digital labour platforms in the provision of supportive HRM practices. The key findings are also illustrated in the Framework of Supportive HRM Practices applicable to knowledge-based gig workers in Figure 5.

### 7.3.1 Supportive HRM practices

Through the study, participants identified supportive HRM practices that would be applicable in knowledge-based gig economy context, which were determined to lead to improved perceptions of organisational support by these workers. Their perceptions of perceived organisational support were also elaborated on, as well as the impact of this on their task or engagement.

The supportive HRM practices were identified as engagement support, clear structures and processes, remuneration and rewards, autonomy and flexibility, fairly applied practices, learning and development, as well as performance feedback. Each HRM practice consisted of specific actions that are required to be in place to support knowledge-based gig workers. These are explained in further detail in Table 18 below.

**Table 18: A summary of supportive HRM practices**

HRM practice	Sub-theme	Description
<b>Engagement Support</b>	On-boarding and socialisation	Broad structure of organisation in relation to engagement, key policies and guidelines to be adhered to, and strategic priorities to be considered in execution of engagement.
	Internal organisational sponsorship	Internal sponsor to engage with on progress, and who will be kept accountable for task success from organisational perspective.
	Crucial engagement-related interactions	Inclusion in key forums relating to engagement, to ensure visibility of decisions and access to resources.
<b>Clear Structures and processes</b>	Specific terms of contracting	Clearly and specifically stated contract terms negotiated up-front.
	Structured and simplified engagement process	Simplified engagement process, given duration of the task, but one which is clearly communicated.
<b>Remuneration and Rewards</b>	Access to future engagements	Ability to engage with organisation in future, given that gig worker has demonstrated value-add through previous engagement, as a form of reward and retention.
	Remuneration based on milestone achievement	For longer engagements in terms of timing, payment terms to be broken down to enable payment to take place upon achievement of specific milestones as agreed.
	Remuneration amount and timing	High levels of certainty regarding the timing and payment of remuneration due to gig worker.
	Autonomy to customise deliverables	Ability to customise task deliverables, given knowledge-based gig workers' level of specialisation.

<b>Autonomy and Flexibility</b>	Flexibility to negotiate contracts	Higher levels of dialogue with organisation, to influence contract terms that are beneficial to gig worker and clarifies misunderstanding regarding scope.
	Flexible work arrangements	Output measured based on task delivery rather than hours worked, thus allowing for flexibility in work arrangement.
<b>Fairly Applied Practices</b>	Fair access to HRM practices	Fairly extending HRM practices that may be supportive to gig workers during the engagement.
	Organisational delivery on agreed terms of exchange	Delivery against agreed terms of contracting, in order to enhance perceptions of support.
<b>Learning and Development</b>	Engagement-specific training	Access to engagement-specific training to fulfil the organisation's deliverable requirements based on their unique needs.
	Capability-enhancing engagements	Access to stretch tasks that could serve to further enhance capabilities of gig workers, in the absence of formal professional development opportunities.
	Professional development	Acknowledged to be responsibility of gig worker, however access to performance feedback and capability enhancing engagements supports this.
<b>Performance feedback</b>	Short interval control	Conduct regular task check-ins to ensure gig worker remains on track in terms of the direction of their task, and to manage stakeholder expectations.
	Post-engagement performance feedback	Post-engagement feedback that benefits the gig worker in terms of their professional development.

Of the identified HRM practices, engagement support, remuneration and rewards, and clear structures and processes were perceived to be most supportive. Engagement support and clear structures and processes support in delivering successfully on the interaction, whereas remuneration and rewards create perceptions of support due to their reciprocal, or value-exchange, nature. However, these practices are supported by the remaining practices in influencing the knowledge-based gig worker's perception of organisational support.

The HRM practices align closely to the constructs of perceived organisational support, including fairness, supervisor support and rewards and work conditions. They made participants feel that their contribution was valued, the organisation was inclusive, and was values-oriented. From an attitudinal perspective, gig workers felt higher levels of engagement in the task, and a commitment and increased accountability towards the task. This led to positive task outcomes such as discretionary effort, and faster delivery timing from a behavioural perspective.



### **7.3.2 The influence of the complexity of the task**

The study found that the complexity of a task was determined by three factors: the broadness, or scope, of the engagement, the level of organisational change that would be required as a result, and the novelty of the task to the gig worker.

In these instances, additional effort was required from an HRM practices perspective. A more rigorous contracting process, higher levels of autonomy and decision making, frequent short-interval control, and a deeper understanding of organisational-specific systems through training was required. Complex tasks also required a more relational-based interaction between the client organisation and gig worker.

### **7.3.3 Role of digital labour platforms in the provision of supportive HRM practices**

The study found that digital labour platforms were perceived to best support gig workers through efficiently matching gig workers with clients (clear structures and processes), and accurately assigning tasks and provision of day-to-day support in terms of deliverables (engagement support). In terms of autonomy and flexibility they support the remote execution of tasks (autonomy and flexibility), and may facilitate gig worker professional development through algorithmic recommendations and in this way support talent management (learning and development). From a remuneration perspective, the ability to facilitate the governance of rates fairly, and ensuring a fair bidding process that allows for fair competition (fairly applied practices) was highlighted.

In this way a hybrid model, or ecosystem, between the gig worker, client organisation and digital labour platform, would exist. To further support a relational work arrangement, digital labour platforms could support the formation of inclusive communities with other gig workers, create mechanisms to facilitate direct interaction with the client organisation, and make provision for interactive learning through platforms.

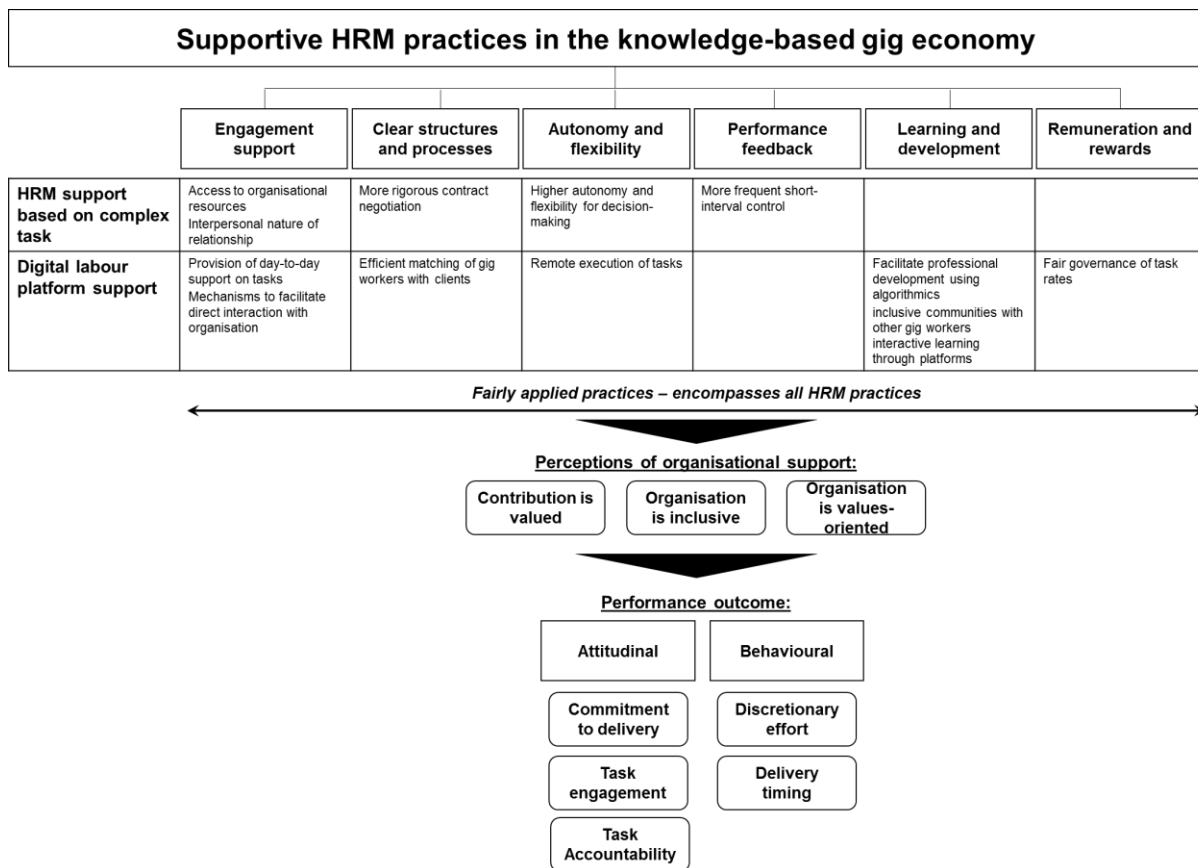


Figure 5: Framework of supportive HRM practices

## 7.4 Implications and recommendations

The study has provided insights into supportive HRM practices for knowledge-based gig workers, including the manner in which the complexity of the task informs the level of HRM practices required. The role of digital labour platforms in supporting gig workers in the provision of HRM practices has also been included. Practical insights are presented for each of the key stakeholders below.

### 7.4.1 Implications for Business

The HRM practices provide client organisations with a better understanding of how best to support knowledge-based gig workers for the duration of their task or engagement, in a manner that leads to perceptions of organisational support by this workgroup. When gig workers feel supported by the client organisation, their commitment levels towards the task are ensured, as they are provided with a good understanding of the organisational requirements in relation to the engagement. The outcome of this is mainly discretionary effort applied to the task. In this way, client organisations may better leverage the knowledge-based gig workforce to support business needs.

Therefore, organisations must ensure that, through the provision of the HRM practices, knowledge-based gig workers are well-resourced to complete the task.

#### **7.4.2 Implications for Platform firms**

In this study, it was highlighted that a hybrid approach in the provision of HRM practices would be most optimal in supporting knowledge-based gig workers. The findings provide considerations for platform firms in how they may design the platforms in a way that enables the relational engagement to be maintained with a client organisation, and supporting the worker.

#### **7.5 Limitations of research**

The qualitative, exploratory nature of the research, limits its generalisability (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999) due to the small sample size of 16 participants. The study however drew on the findings of knowledge-based gig workers from multiple industries, in order to obtain a richness of insights regarding their experience of HRM practices. The South African knowledge-based gig economy landscape is not as widespread and well-developed as that of developed economies, which could serve as a limitation in the applicability of the findings outside of the South African context.

The study was limited to participants in the Gauteng and Cape Town regions, and as a result geographical bias may have had an impact on the results. In regards to qualitative interviews, a possibility for bias exists in the way the questions could have been framed in terms of whether the questions were open-ended or not to allow participants to share views openly. The researcher's interpretation of participants' responses and the analysis of the results may have also served as a limitation.

#### **7.5 Suggestions for future research**

The following are made as suggestions for future research on this research area:

- Testing relationships of the proposed framework quantitatively to assess impact of the identified HRM practices on perceived organisational support in the gig economy context.
- Conducting a similar study on other classifications within the gig economy, in order to understand what are perceived to be supportive HRM practices.
- Conducting qualitative studies into each of the identified supportive HRM practices to understand the optimal delivery mechanism for each, for example the factors

that would be important in structuring remuneration and rewards in the gig economy.

- Conducting a study to understand how the HRM practices may be combined to strengthen perceptions of organisational support and task commitment.
- As the organisational perspective was not obtained through this study, an exploratory study could be conducted to determine other factors that have enabled organisations to successfully leverage knowledge-based workers in the gig economy.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to build on existing literature relating to perceived organisational support in a work context that is not characterised by traditional employment. Through the study, practical insights have been offered to organisations that may plan to utilise on-demand talent in the gig economy regarding HRM practices that are effective and will support the knowledge-based gig worker.

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# ANNEXURES

## Annexure A: Ethical Clearance

**Gordon Institute  
of Business Science**  
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance**  
**Approved**

Dear Mellissa Steele,

Please be advised that your application for **Ethical Clearance** has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

## **Annexure B: Letter of Consent**

My name is Mellissa Steele, and I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science completing my research in partial fulfilment of a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) qualification.

I am writing to request an interview with you for my MBA dissertation. I am conducting research to identify how Human Resource Management (HRM) practices currently applied by organisations in managing the traditional workforce must be modified to accommodate the growing gig economy, in a manner that improves commitment levels to the organisation for the duration of the task or "gig". In this context, HRM practices may be thought of as activities such as recruitment and selection, on-boarding, socialising and contracting, training and development, performance measurement and appraisal, administering of benefits and rewards, as well as retention which would typically constitute the employee lifecycle. The gig economy may be described as a labour market that connects independent workers to organisations, often through digitally-enabled labour platforms, for the purpose of undertaking short-term tasks or "gigs".

The study will focus on knowledge-based gig workers in South Africa, which may be defined as workers who use knowledge and higher skills levels in the creation of products and services. The results of the research study may be used to support organisations who plan to leverage the knowledge-based gig economy workforce in future in South Africa.

The gig economy has been gaining attractiveness as an alternative career path due to demographic shifts, as well as recent technological advancements made possible through the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and now escalated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has allowed for a rapid rise in the utilisation of digital labour platforms, making the connection between organisations and gig workers more accessible. These factors are playing a crucial role in the anticipated future growth of this workforce model, the relationship between the organisation and gig worker is often perceived to be of a low commitment nature according to academic literature. The perceived transactional nature of their work, and a low commitment relationship that exists between the gig worker and organisation may thus limit the effectiveness and sustainability of this work model. It is therefore important to gain insight into ways in which organisations may mitigate this.

Our interview is expected to last approximately an hour and your participation is voluntary; you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Permission is also requested from you to record the interview session in order to allow for the researcher to accurately capture the key insights shared throughout the interview. Furthermore, to maintain your confidentiality, all data will be

reported without identifiers.

Before we proceed, please may you confirm your willingness to participate in the research study by signing the form below. If you have any concerns, please contact me or my supervisor. Our details are also provided below.

	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Research Supervisor</b>
<b>Name:</b>	Mellissa Steele	Navlika Ratanjee
<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:mellissa1693@hotmail.com">mellissa1693@hotmail.com</a>	<a href="mailto:nratangee@icas.co.za">nratangee@icas.co.za</a>
<b>Phone:</b>	+27 73 043 6236	+27 82 880 7278

<b>Signature of participant:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Signature of researcher:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

Kind Regards,  
Mellissa Steele

## **Annexure C: Interview guide**

### **1. Letter of consent**

#### **Research Title: Leveraging the knowledge-based gig economy through supportive Human Resource Management practices**

Dear Research Participant

My name is Mellissa Steele, and I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science completing my research in partial fulfilment of a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) qualification.

I am writing to request an interview with you for my MBA dissertation. I am conducting research to identify how Human Resource Management (HRM) practices currently applied by organisations in managing the traditional workforce must be modified to accommodate the growing gig economy, in a manner that improves commitment levels to the organisation for the duration of the task or "gig". In this context, HRM practices may be thought of as activities such as recruitment and selection, on-boarding, socialising and contracting, training and development, performance measurement and appraisal, administering of benefits and rewards, as well as retention which would typically constitute the employee lifecycle. The gig economy may be described as a labour market that connects independent workers to organisations, often through digitally-enabled labour platforms, for the purpose of undertaking short-term tasks or "gigs".

The study will focus on knowledge-based gig workers in South Africa, which may be defined as workers who use knowledge and higher skills levels in the creation of products and services. The results of the research study may be used to support organisations who plan to leverage the knowledge-based gig economy workforce in future in South Africa.

The gig economy has been gaining attractiveness as an alternative career path due to demographic shifts, as well as recent technological advancements made possible through the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and now escalated by the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for a rapid rise in the utilisation of digital labour platforms, making the connection between organisations and gig workers more accessible. These factors are playing a crucial role in the anticipated future growth of this workforce model, however its success may be constrained as the relationship between the organisation and gig worker is often perceived to be of a low commitment nature. This perceived transactional nature of their work, and a low commitment relationship that exists between the gig worker and organisation may limit the effectiveness and sustainability of this work model.

Our interview is expected to last approximately an hour and your participation is voluntary; you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Permission is also requested from you to record the interview session in order to allow for the researcher to accurately capture the key insights shared throughout the interview. Furthermore, to maintain your confidentiality, all data will be reported without identifiers.

Before we proceed, please may you confirm your willingness to participate in the research study by signing the form below. If you have any concerns, please contact me or my supervisor. Our details are provided below.

	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Research Supervisor</b>
<b>Name:</b>	Mellissa Steele	Navlika Ratanjee
<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:27181112@mygibs.co.za">27181112@mygibs.co.za</a>	<a href="mailto:nratangee@icas.co.za">nratangee@icas.co.za</a>
<b>Phone:</b>	+27 73 043 6236	+27 82 880 7278

<b>Signature of participant:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Signature of researcher:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

Kind Regards,  
Mellissa Steele



## 2. Interview questions

### Preliminary interview questions:

1. What is your current skills specialisation or the nature of work that you do?
2. How long have you been working in the “gig economy”?
3. Have you worked on various gigs during this period?
4. Have these gigs been done for more than one organisation?
5. Have you had interactions with organisational HRM processes in the organisations where the gig was undertaken?

### Main interview questions:

***Research Question 1: In what ways may the organisation modify its existing Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in order to foster organisational or task commitment from the knowledge-based gig worker?***

**Question 1: Think back to a time when you had a positive experience with an organisation during your time as a gig worker with regards to HRM practices. Please explain what this experience constituted and what made the experience positive?**

*Prompt: Researcher will explain what can be considered to be HRM practices. In this context, HRM practices may be thought of as activities such as recruitment and selection, on-boarding, socialising and contracting, training and development, performance measurement and appraisal, administering of benefits and rewards, as well as retention which would typically constitute the employee lifecycle.*

*The research participant may talk through this cycle based on their experience, describing what the organisation did well for each practice they were exposed to, that contributed towards a positive experience.*

**Question 2: Think back to a time when you had an unfavourable experience with an organisation during your time as a gig worker with regards to HRM practices. Please explain what this experience constituted and what made the experience unfavourable?**

*The research participant may talk through this cycle based on their experience, describing what the organisation didn't do well for each practice they were exposed to, that contributed*

towards an unfavourable experience.

**Question 3: How did this experience lead you to perceive the organisation in terms of being supportive?**

*Prompt: Researcher will explain what is meant by supportive in this context. Organisational support theory is an individual's perception of the extent to which an organisation values their work contribution and cares about their well-being, or perceived organisational support.*

**Question 4: In what ways did this experience impact your performance on your task / deliverable?**

**Question 5: How would you recommend the organisation modify its existing HRM practices to lead to a higher commitment level to the task from you?**

*Prompt: Encourage participant to think about what the ideal gig worker lifecycle through the organisation should look like in terms of HRM practices, and what supportive actions need to be implemented by organisations in order.*

**Research Question 2: Which HRM practices are most pertinent in ensuring the knowledge-based gig worker's commitment?**

**Question 6: Which of these HRM practices would lead to the highest commitment level to the task from you and why?**

**Question 7: If you had 100 points to allocate to each of these practices, how would you allocate them?**

**Research Question 3: What effect does the task complexity have on the knowledge-based gig worker's preference for the type of HRM practices to be provided?**

**Question 8: In what ways do the complexity of the task impact / inform the level of support you require from the organisation with regards to HRM practices?**

*Prompt: Researcher to explain task complexity. Task complexity refers to the level of integration required by the gig worker with organisation members; for example more complex tasks require high coordination with organisational members, and access to organisational resources such as information to effectively complete the deliverable.*

**Research Question 4: What is the perceived role of the digital labour platform in building organisational commitment among knowledge-based gig workers through HRM practices?**

**Question 9: What role do you believe the digital labour platform should play in building organisational commitment for you through the provision of HRM support?**

*Prompt: Are there specific HRM functions you believe can be done through the platform without impacting your experience and perceptions of commitment? Which are these?*

**Question 10: Which of the HRM practices do you feel may be undertaken by the digital labour platform, and how this may be done in a way that does not diminish the co-determined and relational work arrangement, and commitment levels?**

## Annexure D: Code Book

PosHRM\_fair recruitment process  
 PosHRM\_influence contract terms  
 PosHRM\_access to future gigs  
 PosHRM\_autonomy to customise work  
 PosHRM\_specific contract terms  
 PosHRM\_engage with organisation to understand needs  
 PosHRM\_facilitate formation of engagement support network  
 PosHRM\_fairly extending HRM processes  
 PosHRM\_helpful performance feedback  
 PosHRM\_inclusion in engagement interactions  
 PosHRM\_internal organisational sponsor  
 PosHRM\_introduction to key stakeholders  
 PosHRM\_delivery on agreed terms  
 PosHRM\_engagement-specific training  
 PosHRM\_quick organisational response  
 PosHRM\_remuneration based on milestone achievement  
 PosHRM\_short interval control  
 PosHRM\_simplified bidding and selection  
 PosHRM\_stretch tasks  
 PosHRM\_structured engagement process  
 PosHRM\_upfront on-boarding  
 PosHRM\_work arrangement flexibility  
 NegHRM\_conflicting priorities  
 NegHRM\_unspecific contract terms  
 NegHRM\_employees not briefed beforehand  
 NegHRM\_inadequate on-boarding  
 NegHRM\_inadequate resource support  
 NegHRM\_unstructured engagement process  
 NegHRM\_lack of communication on contract changes  
 NegHRM\_lag in career development  
 NegHRM\_misrepresentation of engagement scope  
 NegHRM\_no autonomy to customise work  
 NegHRM\_no engagement related training  
 NegHRM\_no visibility on decisions influencing engagement  
 NegHRM\_no autonomy to rectify challenges  
 NegHRM\_values compromised  
 NegHRM\_non-delivery on agreed terms  
 NegHRM\_low rates  
 NegHRM\_unfavourable scope change  
 NegHRM\_systemic shortcomings in gig model  
 NegHRM\_uncertainty on engagement conclusion  
 NegHRM\_uncertainty regarding remuneration  
 NegHRM\_no financial incentives  
 NegHRM\_voicing of issues not welcomed  
 PosSupp\_part of team  
 PosSupp\_engagement support  
 PosSupp\_open-minded to external influence  
 PosSupp\_organisational trust  
 PosSupp\_value add appreciated  
 PosSupp\_supportive organisational values  
 NegSupp\_competitive remuneration justifies for lack of support  
 NegSupp\_fearful environment  
 NegSupp\_feelings of being misused  
 NegSupp\_nature of the business  
 NegSupp\_no care for people  
 NegSupp\_lack of engagement focus  
 NegSupp\_perceptions did not change when condition was agreed  
 NegSupp\_low organisational trust  
 NegSupp\_value not appreciated  
 PosOut\_discretionary effort  
 PosOut\_efficient delivery  
 PosOut\_engage in scope creep  
 PosOut\_mindset to rectify issue  
 PosOut\_high quality deliverables  
 PosOut\_accountability for outcome  
 PosOut\_positivity to perform  
 PosOut\_motivated to engage further  
 PosOut\_sped up deliver time  
 PosOut\_failure not an option  
 PosOut\_connected to organisation  
 PosOut\_confidence to deliver  
 PosOut\_commitment to organisational representative  
 NegOut\_delayed task completion  
 NegOut\_do not perform at full potential  
 NegOut\_informed by values in execution  
 NegOut\_high quality deliverables  
 NegOut\_initiate corrective action  
 NegOut\_missed opportunity to create benefit  
 NegOut\_positivity to perform  
 NegOut\_poor project delivery  
 NegOut\_reluctance to engage in future  
 NegOut\_failure not an option  
 NegOut\_will not do more than required  
 RecomHRM\_access to resource support  
 RecomHRM\_agility to change  
 RecomHRM\_flexible performance-related incentives  
 RecomHRM\_organisation member accountability  
 RecomHRM\_match workers skills to organisation needs  
 SuppHRM\_influence organisation members  
 SuppHRM\_remuneration and benefit structure  
 TaskHRM\_lower intensity HRM practices on less complex tasks  
 TaskHRM\_interpersonal relationship on complex tasks  
 TaskHRM\_same level of HRM practices required  
 TaskHRM\_complex tasks involve broad engagement scopes  
 TaskHRM\_complex tasks involve change within organisation  
 TaskHRM\_complexity of task determined by its novelty  
 PlatHRM\_race to the bottom  
 PlatHRM\_governance of fair rates  
 PlatHRM\_risk of micromanagement  
 PlatHRM\_fairness in competing for work  
 PlatHRM\_match skills to requirements  
 PlatHRM\_manage automated processes  
 PlatHRM\_lower intensity HRM practices on less complex tasks  
 PlatHRM\_provision of general training  
 PlatHRM\_remote task execution  
 PlatHRM\_training and development support  
 RelHRM\_inclusive community  
 RelHRM\_human recognition  
 RelHRM\_hybrid model  
 RelHRM\_mechanism for organisation interaction  
 RelHRM\_interactive media  
 RelHRM\_human-centric performance management