

FEBRUARY 2020

# The Blended Workforce Revolution

## A call for a radical new framework

A new research white paper and roadmap for action, commissioned and authored by: Jeremy Blain & Dr. Rochelle Haynes



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# Executive Summary



# The Blended Workforce is on the March

The rise of the blended workforce, made up of permanent, part-time, and independent workers, is indisputable. Across the globe, traditional hierarchies and ways of working are being challenged like never before.

There's a revolution going in the world of work. Yet it seems business leaders, HR professionals and even independent workers themselves are unsure how to navigate it – a major theme that emerged in our global research.

We surveyed almost **2,000 independent workers and HR/business leaders from 6 regions** to see just how pervasive the blended workforce has become, and how much leaders are formalising a strategic approach to attracting human capital, recruitment, deployment and more.

We also examined how today's leaders manage high performance when working with a heady mix of independent workers and full-time staff. How exactly do independent workers and HR leaders interact and engage with each other?

The results revealed some compelling insights.

## Corporates are failing to manage independent workers effectively

1

Independent workers tend to be digitally savvy, work flexible hours and from various locations. SMEs get this. **Yet few corporate HR departments employ any structured approach** to mobilising and managing their independent workforce. In many cases, it is not clear whose responsibility it is for managing these contractors. Much project work is ad hoc, and expectations of how work is delivered varies from company to company. The corporate world is simply not ready for the big shift in the way we will all work in the 2020s and **needs to act now**.

## Extensive variation in how independent workers manage productive relationships with corporates

2

There is little evidence that independent workers agree strict terms of work with their clients. Instead, they **tend to rely on mutual understanding, trust and a loose framework**. The most successful independent workers have a **clear, well-structured set of rules and framework agreements** to guide their working relationships.

As a result of this research we have also created an actioned framework for Human Capital professionals to lead action back in the workplace. We call it GigHR® and you can find out more on this and other action-oriented resources on our websites.

[www.performanceworks.global/the-gig-hr-experts/](http://www.performanceworks.global/the-gig-hr-experts/) | [www.crowdpotential.co.uk](http://www.crowdpotential.co.uk)



## Urgent need for a new, integrated people-management framework

Business leaders are failing independent workers by not acknowledging the diversity of the independent workforce they are dealing with. In response, they should create business strategies to suit different types of digital nomads and independent workers. All parties need clear guidelines on how best to manage the workflow and set/meet expectations, and we offer some ideas for this at the end of this paper. The most successful HR functions develop processes and platforms that aid attraction, recruitment, management, collaboration and communication across their workforce, including their independent human resources..

3

## Clash between traditional vs digital ways of working

Many business and HR leaders surveyed lack the digital skills to manage their independent workforce. HR professionals, particularly, need more diverse digital skills to keep up. At the same time, independent workers required further digital skills development to help them better engage clients on a human level, manage their workflow and grow their business. Those who optimise their skills to boost performance, in terms of both digital and the human touch, will benefit most.

4

## Culture and mindset must change...and soon

HR and business leaders are not considering the way they attract, retain and manage the independent workforce with the same enthusiasm they have for managing full-time staff. In addition, independent workers are not always given the support and recognition they deserve, which negatively impacts the quality of work. This has been known for some time but still not enough priority is being given to this issue at corporate level.

HR and business leaders must align the way they work to fit with the business culture of the 2020s, particularly in how they attract, retain and integrate independent workers into a project.

5

## Shift towards long-term or retainer contracts

Independent workers often live a life of insecurity, relying on one-off projects to generate income. Business relationships tend to be short-term and rarely get space to flourish, which benefits no-one. However more and more contractors are opting for long-term retainer contracts, which create security for the independent worker and help build a bond with their clients and avoid exploitation. A strong blended workforce depends on good relationships and financial stability, and we'll see much more of this in the future.

6

## There is little structure, mobilisation and management of the 2020s blended workforce as many at corporate level 'don't know what they don't know'

Those who embrace the opportunities of the blended workforce will maintain a competitive advantage in the talent stakes. The problem is that many at corporate level are not aware of this trend impacting their organisation. The blended workforce is growing exponentially, so it's no use everyone grappling in the dark, attempting to find the best way to work together informally. Organisational Design professionals need to help their companies understand how the increasingly diversified workforce is changing and how it will impact their businesses.

7

The workforce mix is set to radically develop over the first 5 years of the 2020s – The 'invisible' workforce becoming a more visible component of everyday working practices, as a more formalised addition to the workforce, alongside – not in addition to – permanent workers. This is what we mean by the blended workforce revolution.

Our new GigHR® framework will help human capital and organisational development professionals get to action on the outputs from this research, leading the agenda in their own companies.

[www.performanceworks.global/the-gig-hr-experts/](http://www.performanceworks.global/the-gig-hr-experts/)

[www.crowdpotential.co.uk](http://www.crowdpotential.co.uk)

This revolution highlights the demand for a **blended workforce manifesto** to help business leaders, HR leaders, employees, and independent workers align their goals, working culture and digital know-how. A strong manifesto should embrace the diversity of the independent workforce – everyone from independent professionals to full-time digital nomads.

We hope our research will energise the conversation to make this happen.

**Jeremy Blain and Dr. Rochelle Haynes**  
*February 2020*

The **GigHR**® Experts

# Glossary



## Independent or Contingent Workers

Self-employed workers, usually professional with some form of expertise. Often work remotely using digital tools to communicate and collaborate. Responsible for billing clients and sourcing work. Also often referred to as the Invisible Workforce or Alternative Workforce.



## Digital Nomads

A sub-set of independent workers. Can be nomadic and 'location-free' but sometimes work from a single remote location. Location-independent workers who are digital natives, use digital tools to complete tasks and rarely, if ever, have face-to-face contact with their clients or employers. Can be on full-time contracts as well as ad hoc.



## Permanent Workers

Full-time or part-time employees on the company payroll. Typically enjoy employment-related benefits such as regular salary, paid leave, sick pay, and collective representation.



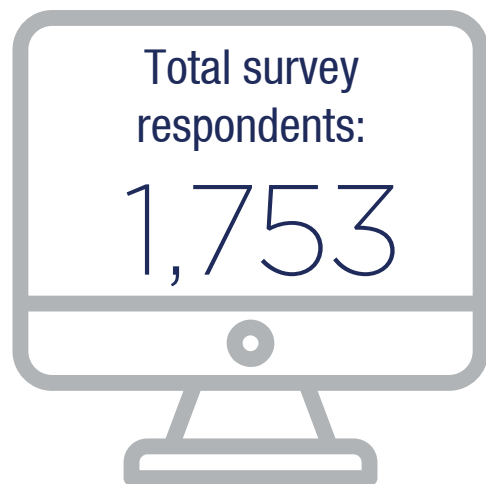
## Blended Workforce

The mix of permanent and independent workers who work together to fulfil a project or professional need. Can also refer to diversity within the workforce in terms of generation, online/offline, etc. Also referred to as the Mixed Workforce. This will be further blended as more intelligent AI and Robotics sit side-by-side the human workforce over the next decade.



# Who were our respondents?

We surveyed a mix of HR/business leaders and independent workers across the globe.



53%  
Independent Workers



47%  
HR & Business Leaders

## Interviews

We also conducted interviews with digital nomads, along with the business and HR leaders who manage them. You can read their comments throughout this research.



33 Digital Nomads\*



5 Managers and HR Leaders

Locations included APAC (Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines); Europe (Spain, Germany, UK); North America (US and Canada), and the Caribbean (Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica)

\*Those with a management role were interviewed twice

## Where?

Our respondents come from a total of **6 regions** and **36 countries**.

**APAC - 24%**

China, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, Australia.

**Europe - 23%**

UK, France, Germany, Poland, Romania, Italy, Spain, Republic of Ireland, Sweden

**Middle East - 19%**

UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia

**North America - 18%**

USA, Canada

**Latin America & the Caribbean - 10.5%**

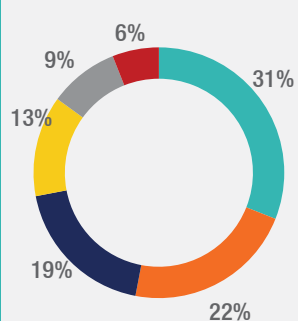
Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad

**Africa - 5.5%**

Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa, Morocco, Egypt, Ghana

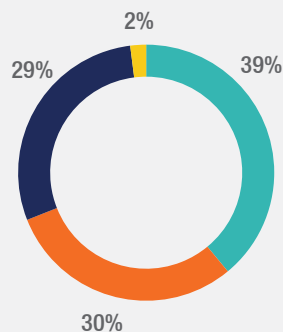
# Independent Workers

## Location



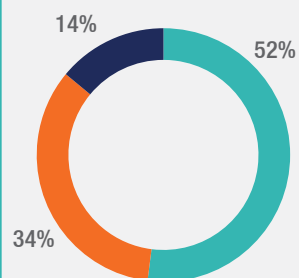
■ Asia Pacific  
 ■ Europe  
 ■ Middle East  
 ■ North America  
 ■ Latin America  
 ■ Africa

## Age



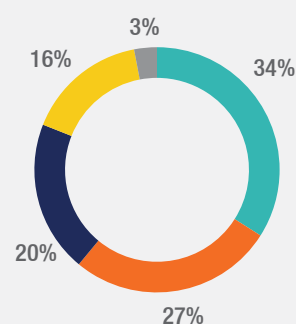
■ 18-30  
 ■ 31-45  
 ■ 45-60  
 ■ 60+

## Digital Maturity



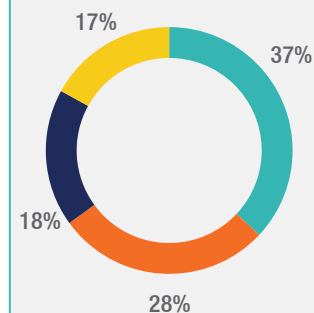
■ Digital Nomad (the way I work)  
 ■ Assertive (integrating digital into how I do things)  
 ■ Adopting (aware, adopting and experimenting with practices)

## Area of Expertise



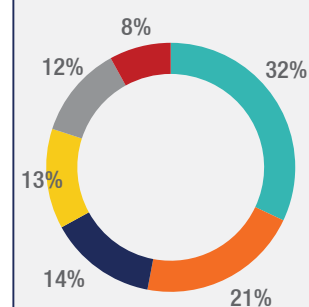
■ IT / Technology: data, systems management, cyber  
 ■ Marketing: design, content  
 ■ Consulting  
 ■ Training and Coaching  
 ■ Other

## Client Size (average)



■ \$25M USD+  
 ■ \$10-25M USD  
 ■ \$1M USD and below  
 ■ \$1-10M USD

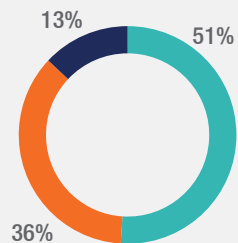
## Source of Work



■ Asia Pacific - China, Philippines, Singapore  
 ■ Europe - UK, Sweden, Republic of Ireland  
 ■ Middle East - UAE  
 ■ North America - USA  
 ■ Latin America - Brazil  
 ■ Africa - Nigeria, South Africa

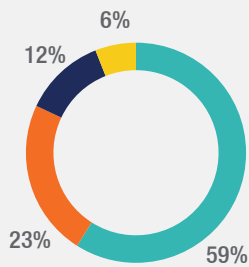
# HR and Business Leaders

## Executive Level



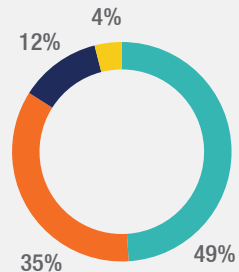
- HR Managers and Directors / Business Unit Directors
- Management
- Other

## Company Size



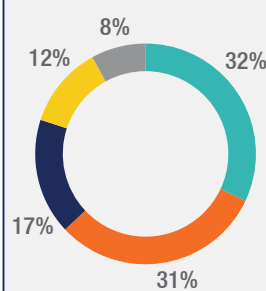
- \$25M USD+
- \$10-25M USD
- \$1-10M USD
- \$1M USD and below

## Age



- 45-60
- 31-45
- 18-30
- 60+

## Sectors



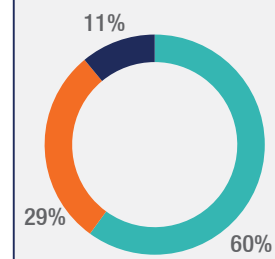
- Financial / Insurance / Banking
- Technology / Telecommunications / Media
- Retail / FMCG
- Professional Services
- Construction / Engineering

## International Dimension



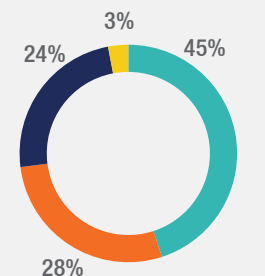
- Global or regional brief
- Local brief

## Digital Maturity



- Adopting** (aware, adopting and experimenting with practices)
- Assertive** (integrating digital into how we do things)
- Digital Practitioners** (the way we work)

## Level of Policy for Managing Independent Workers



- Very little
- Some / making progress
- None
- Fully integrated

A group of five diverse people (three men and two women) are gathered around a table, looking at a laptop screen. They appear to be in a collaborative meeting or workshop. One woman in the center is holding a red mug. The background is slightly blurred, showing an indoor setting with large windows.

# Survey findings – Independent Workforce



# Time to level the playing field for independent workers

## Talking point

Our research highlights changing work trends and expectations in the digital age. It emphasises the growing adoption of a digital working lifestyle and rising use of digital workers by companies worldwide. More than ten years on since the Internet exploded with articles and new stories about the rise of the digital age, along with increased independent working, our research shows that there is still great disparity in the management and understanding of these atypical workers, compared to their counterparts in more traditional, permanent roles. We believe these gaps – a point raised continuously throughout our research – is an issue that needs addressing for the benefit of all parties.

Leaders responsible for employing a permanent workforce are often prepared to fight for top talent. Yet they make less of a systematic effort to entice the cream of independent workers. Surely it makes sense to fight for the best talent and help them produce excellent work, regardless of their status in the blended workforce.

Occasionally, it's the Board members who bring onboard independent expertise, suggesting such workers are seen as specialised hires rather than part of a broader workforce. However, the disconnect between organisations' perception of such work verses workers' expectations and reality often causes issues further down the line.

The survey responses and interviews with independent workers make one thing clear – attracting, rewarding and recognising their value creates a huge competitive advantage for those willing to take a radical approach. What's more, organisations willing to accommodate and embrace changing work modes and realities will be primed to benefit from the dispersed and dynamic global talent in the digital age.

For example, leaders can provide some security for their independent workforce by offering mutually-negotiated retainer contracts rather than ad hoc work, and being more consistent in supplying end-of-project referrals. Also, to integrate those remote workers who want to engage more with clients, firms can utilise both online platforms and offline satellite social spaces to provide such opportunities to interact with internal stakeholders.

Organisations willing to effectively blend and manage independent expertise with their permanent workforce will maintain an edge over their competitors in the future., as the way we work adapts to the new, flexible, anything-is-possible age. The shift has started to happen, but we have not yet seen a more formalised 'War For Independent Talent emerge'. It's coming.

At the same time, independent workers must be allowed a voice to request the conditions and support that they require. Agreeing on terms of work should be a two-way conversation where the worker clearly conveys their needs and the client supports them in the best possible way for the duration of the work. Mutual value versus a one-way street.

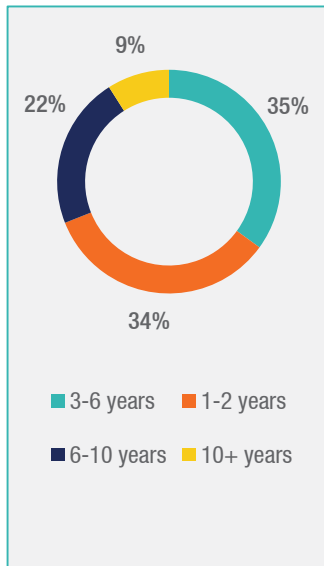
Our results indicate that this will help to enhance relationships, performance and standards of work. A win-win for all.



# Breaking down the independent workforce

Millennials have dominated independent working over the past 6 years, with Generation X set to become the next big migrating demographic to make the switch

Time spent as an independent worker



Majority of independent workforce have been Millennials for most of the past 10 years

Fastest growing demographic of independent workers is GenX

75% of people who work independently have been doing so for less than 6 years. Over a third are new to the game, with Generation Y making up the majority. Generation X'ers are catching up fast.

Interestingly, the demographic shift is mostly happening in western nations (UK, USA and Australia) as well as the Philippines, where human capital emigration is fluid.

There are strong indications that many Generation X'ers – mostly responsible for leading enterprise into the 2020s – are choosing to leave the corporate world in huge numbers. Some respondents indicated that this is due to feeling constrained by corporate and the challenges of digital transformation, managed poorly by previous leadership. Ultimately, they believe they can perform better and contribute more effectively as independent experts.

*'There was always a lot of talking around 'digital' and the need to change. It became a debate about technology and, for me, it's so much more than that. As one of the Leadership team, I felt my view of company strategy was rapidly moving away from the Board vision. As a potential CEO / COO in waiting, I didn't want to tackle these increasingly urgent challenges due to legacy immobility. To me that was preparing to fail! I made the decision to leave and set up my own consultancy, focused on this challenge. Ironically, I now do a portion of retained work for the Board at my previous company on this very issue...*

- Gen X UK-based business leader and digital nomad

Our research indicates that there is a growing number of 'Gen Xers' taking this position, which means that large organisations will need to increase dependence on specialists, hence the call for dramatic structural changes and an agreed framework.

Whilst entrepreneurial-minded Millennials (born 1981-96) make up most of today's independent workers, the move towards the contingent model of working is happening across the generational divide. And it will be responsible for a seismic shift at corporate level.

The bottom line, though, is that corporates must act now to bring digital transformation in line with the needs of the new blended workforce.

Failure to do so could lead to rapid decline, particularly if Generation X continue to vote with their feet, or if the re-imagination of the 2020s workforce is not handled carefully.

This is potentially a disastrous trend for enterprise. If they can't retain their top talent, where do they go next? They are preparing to fail...

Whole business transformation is key to winning the battle of the new working paradigm and dealing with relentless change. That may also help retain those 'leaders-in-waiting' who see the bigger picture and have been disillusioned by Board-level misunderstanding, narrow focus and immobility around #digitaltransformation.

# Contracts and payment

## Independent remote workers increasingly demanding retainer-based agreements and long-term contract work

### Common contract work description



Independent workers prefer long-term work for stability, unless they already have access to alternative income (e.g., retirees). Despite this, most project work is still currently delivered in an ad hoc fashion. As the number of independent workers grows, there will be greater demand for contracts that rest on building relationships and opportunities to plan effectively.

While organisations identify good remote talent, offering retainer or long-term contract work could reduce perceptions of risks for both parties and increase feelings of security for the digital nomad / independent worker community.

The choice to be an independent worker and / or fully embrace a digital nomad lifestyle, does not mean job security is not important to that community. More active dialogue driven by both parties (Corporate and Independents) is the clear need here.

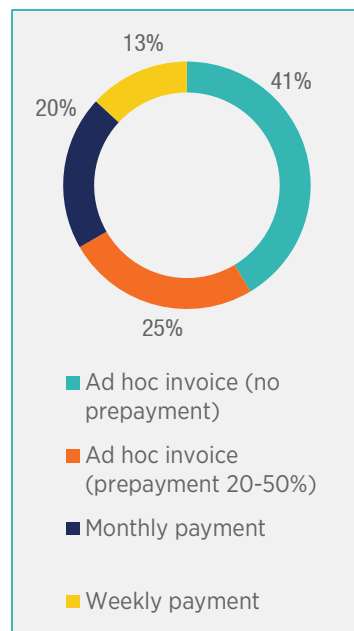
*"Putting people on precarious contracts happens a lot in the gig economy. That way they (clients) can offload risks onto you, and save themselves money and taxes and health benefits and all of that. It's a very exploitative way of employing people and it puts a lot of risk onto me."*

- Writer and digital nomad, Thailand

# Contracts and payment

## 75% of independent workers currently rely on higher-risk payment terms

### How independent workers are paid



Late payments and erratic cash flow are two of the biggest risk factors for independent workers. Many workers are not taking payments upfront, so risk being exploited and held to unreasonably high standards of performance, coupled with potentially lengthy payment terms. Some large multinationals have even moved to 90 day payment terms. This is bad enough for larger suppliers to their business, but unacceptable and unworkable in the era of the blended workforce. It indicates that independent workers are not even on the radar with decisions like this. Truly the invisible workforce to many, which questions the value perception and modus operandi in place.

*It's always different. Based on a project they can just say, "At the end of this month, we'll pay you this lump some once this is completed", so it's not necessarily consistent"*

- Marketing Manager, US

More champions must emerge in corporates to highlight the real and potential value of the independent workforce – surely this sits within HR / Talent remit, and is crucial to the HR4.0 era?

To at least tackle the problem with some urgency, organisations and workers should agree proportional payment terms to mitigate these risks and enable a smooth, productive workflow. Regardless of the official terms in place, often set by Finance and Procurement, there is little appreciation of the value their independent workforce delivers and the risk they face through making it impossible to do business with them.

This is an increasing issue for independent workers and, while they have not been proactively managing these discussions themselves up to now, there is a need to do so urgently. Informally, respondents expressed a desire to move towards retainer or split-fee invoicing (with upfront payment) to help with workflow and cash flow planning. They also want the kind of rights and protections available to permanent employees.

Following this survey, we have a major question to ask...

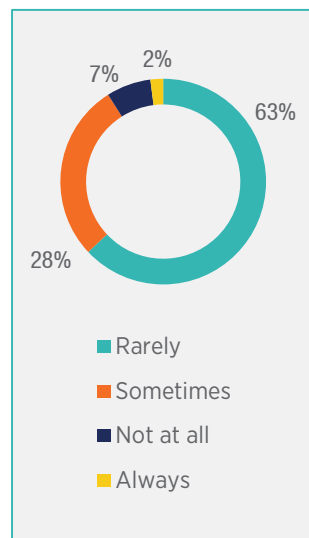
Who is aware of this issue within these corporate entities and who is tabling the discussion?

It requires leadership within organisations and within the independent workforce itself. Pressure for a change needs to be applied from all sides.

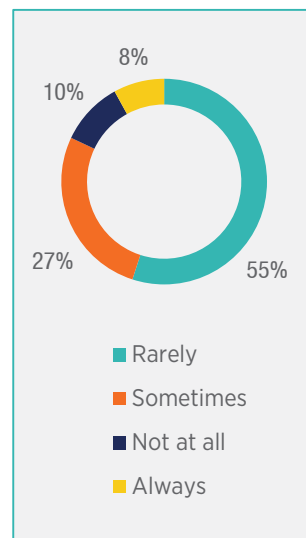
# Performance and motivation

## Independent/remote workers rarely recognised or rewarded for outstanding work

How often independent workers are rewarded for outstanding work



How often independent workers are recognised internally



There is an abundance of business and academic literature emphasising the importance of recognition as key to motivation (Silverman, 2004; Ndungu 2017, CIPD, 2019). Yet only 35% of independent workers say they receive any kind of recognition, with the most popular being verbal/written feedback or an award. This figure is extremely low when compared to the formalised recognition typically enjoyed by full-time workers, and highlights the disconnect between the way permanent and independent workers are perceived. A mindset shift is required to recognise this largely invisible workforce (to many) as a hugely important contributor to success, especially over the next 5 years as we enter the 2020s, and learn to more effectively manage this growing blended workforce.

Companies who develop a formal rewards policy, which includes some consideration of how external talent should be recognised internally, will be more attractive to top talent in the growing digital workforce and better retain a talented and motivated independent workforce, creating a boost their competitive edge.

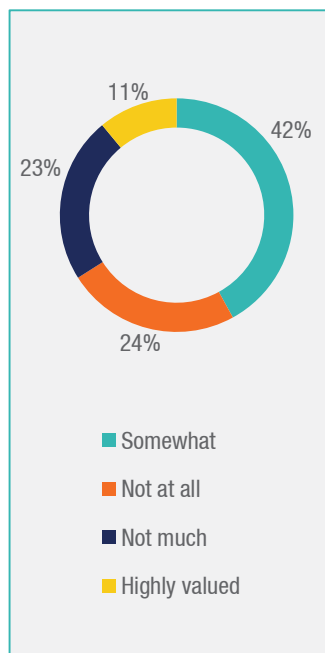
Our research also highlighted regional differences in companies recognition practices for remote workers. For example, North American respondents were most likely to be recognised internally, whilst those in Middle East and Africa least likely. This suggests that differing cultural attitudes towards independent workers are a factor in how they are recognised and motivated.



# Performance and motivation

## Undervalued independent workers make corporates more vulnerable

How valued by the client do independent workers feel?



Only 1 in 10 independent workers feel highly valued by the businesses they work for.

Almost half of all independent workers feel undervalued by clients, while 42% feel they are only somewhat valued. This is a damning indictment for companies and could be a ticking time bomb as it leaves companies vulnerable to the loss of key expertise and skills.

The most valued independent workers were from North America and Europe, while the least valued were from the Middle East. Is it time for a culture shift in the way companies value independent workers? Who is responsible for building personal relationships that lead to success?

The most common issue seems to be around 'when things go wrong'. Independent workers are not always responsible in this situation but appear to receive much of the blame. Our research has uncovered that the main problems arise when clients set unrealistic objectives or briefs change halfway through a project. Sometimes, delays at the client end are blamed on the independent worker and exchanges over the breakdown are based on opinions, not facts.

A clear framework should be in place to ensure both the client and the worker understand how they will work together, and who is responsible for what.

*For digital marketing, when the project is designed, we should be in at the start because we could say, 'well no that won't work here' or 'we can integrate the strategy this way'. But because they are thinking of my contribution, the digital side, as an add-on, then it's just given to us in a rush on Tuesday and stated to have it done by Thursday. But if we were integrated from the start, it could have been better executed.*

- Independent Digital Media Manager, Jamaica

*'Some larger clients expect us to be working 24-7. I have one client that they were three hours behind me so they are expecting that I am up at 11 o'clock at night to answer their emails, which just doesn't happen'*

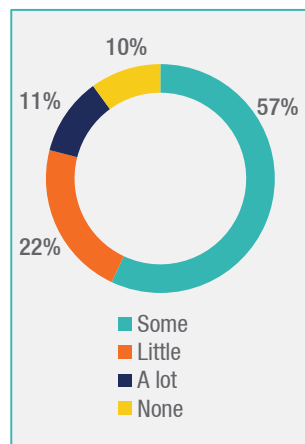
- Independent digital worker, Jamaica



# Organisational support

One third of independent workers receive virtually no support, yet are expected to excel

Level of support provided by client



Our results showed that more than half of independent workers felt that some level of assistance in completing the task was provided by clients, but this was not enough. Paradoxically, organisations typically had higher performance expectations for independent workers. How can companies expect similar levels of performance when they do not provide adequate support for freelancers?

Independent workers also complained about lack of clarity and structure, along with having to meet higher expectations than those set for permanent staff. In many cases, gaps and delays in communication are responsible for delayed or less than ideal performance from remote workers, whose correspondence is not prioritised by internal stakeholders.

*"When it comes to communicating with others, everyone assumes that when I send someone an email, they will automatically get back to me. It might depend on how persistent you have to be versus being more relaxed...I have been in situations that it was really challenging to get hold of people."*

- Independent Digital Marketer, U.S

In other cases, bias and discrimination impact on how workers are treated, and this is as much of an issue for independent workers as it is for full-time employees.

## Independent worker gender and race bias

Coming in as a female - and as a black female at that - comes with another set of issues. I have predominantly white male team mates so it's just a little bit harder. In Jamaica, I always felt I am at the equal level and you feel the comments are based on the work and not because of those differences and nuances. But in this international online team, it's like you have to prove yourself a bit more. Sometimes, it's subtle but you can see that the dynamics are different and I think that gender plays the bigger role here"

- Marketing Manager, Jamaica

## Further discrimination faced by independent Millennials

Particularly because I was younger and there were gender aspects of this as well, I was very much seen as a subordinate. They framed it like we were all partners and then when we started working together there were definitely power dynamics. I was younger, I was a woman so you just get treated in this sort a way even though I was brought in to work on this very same issue; to help them be less patriarchal and work on their diversity and inclusion issues.

- Project worker, UK

# Organisational support

Clarity, support and flexibility are key success factors for independent workers

## Formalised communication and close collaboration will be central to success

Type of organisational support independent workers would like to receive (ranked in order of importance)

1. Clearer and realistic objectives
2. More on-the-job support
3. Flexibility around my working style
4. Reduce complexity when working together (e.g., by not changing the brief half way through project)
5. Reference on successful job completion
6. Fair performance assessment and measures
7. Fair and decent pay
8. Flexible and aesthetically pleasing workplace
9. Two-way feedback
10. Mutual respect
11. Access to stakeholders
12. Grievance procedures

While workers do also bear some responsibility for communicating clear guidelines to clients, it is crucial for companies to clearly articulate the objectives and scope of the assignment or project, as well as how the role of these remote individuals fit in with the wider departmental or organisational mandate. In fitting with this, both surveyed and interviewed digital nomads stated that they placed more value on clients **respecting the way they work** and that this, rather than money, was the primary consideration when deciding who to work with.

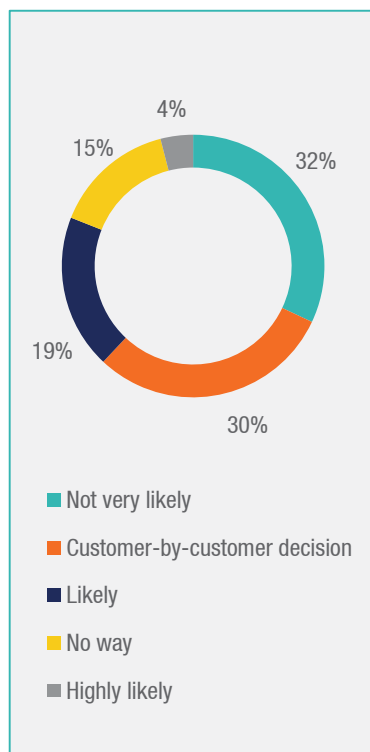
In many ways, it is the basics that are missing, which is the logical start point for those leaders who want the edge over their competitors. **Build the foundation, the new rules of the road, and establish the processes with supporting systems to manage it.**



# Organisational support

Companies that effectively manage independent workers will appeal to top talent

## Likelihood of working for unsupportive clients again



Almost half of all independent workers are unlikely to continue a relationship with clients who fail to provide suitable support, which could be a big problem for HR and the business as a whole. A breakdown in relationships means a higher turnover of contracted workers and a constant need to acquaint with new talent; a disruptive and costly exercise. It also has implications for workers, as higher client turnover means more time spent establishing new relationships.

HR managers must adapt to the new ways of working, which requires a huge shift in culture and an understanding of how to properly support the blended workforce. A culture of low pay and high expectations is simply not sustainable in the long run.

However, it is also important that independent workers play their part in creating strong mutually beneficial relationships with their corporate partners, as much as it is for business to define new rules of the road to build a more blended workforce.

*"That idea that we shouldn't treat someone who is working remotely in a similar way to someone who is on a permanent contract is a dangerous thing that will ultimately lead to bad behaviour and lack of success. We abuse remote workers at our peril."*

- Business Owner, UK

Companies who set clear expectations, and have systems for managing independent workers with some element of reward, will enjoy a massive competitive advantage by 2025.



# Survey findings – Business and Human Capital Leaders





# HR and business leaders must battle for both permanent and independent talent to remain competitive

**The next War for Talent is as much about the independent workforce as it is the permanent one.**

Deloitte's (2019) Human Capital Trends report found that while forty-one percent of firms believed there was a need for a new mindset shift to address the future skills gap, only 28% of firms actually felt that they were ready to address this. Our research also points to a huge disconnect between the expectations of independent and remote workers and those of the organisations who hire them. Moreover, it also points to the lack of understanding and consistency in the way leaders manage independent workers verses how they manage their full-time staff.

In some cases, HR functions dismissed technologies that improve remote working efficiencies in favour of slow and outdated systems. A few failed to appreciate the implications of the remote workstyle, and thus lacked the organisational mechanisms and policies to facilitate both project and individual development that mirrored the strength of those available to permanent staff.

The response from HR and business leaders highlights the urgent need to establish a new set of frameworks – guidelines on how to integrate the independent workforce to generate the best quality work and build fruitful relationships.

To ensure fair and good work, HR must also source and support talent at various project stages, rather than simply driving speedy completion. They should think carefully about what it means to properly support independent workers and what organisational steps can be taken to do this; for example, providing a clear and consistent project brief, negotiating and agreeing the terms and conditions before the project begins, creating effective and updated communication channels, and recognizing internally the contribution that these workers make within the organisation

Leaders and managers must familiarise themselves with the new ways of working, and ensure that they are equipped to provide for varying needs of different workers. They should develop a digitally-driven culture which maintains a human touch and empowers the blended workforce without prejudice. They should also arm themselves with strong management and digital skills to inspire high productivity and better understand the way independent workers operate.

## Talking point - A workforce culture fit for the future

Companies that change their mindset and culture, embrace digital transformation and develop the human touch, will have a strong competitive advantage over the next five to 10 years.

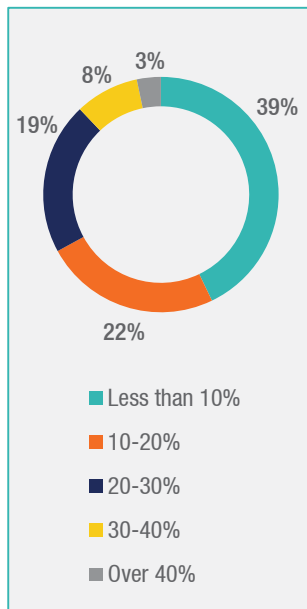
Addressing the HR skills gap, along with the will of leaders to think and act differently will change this situation for the better.



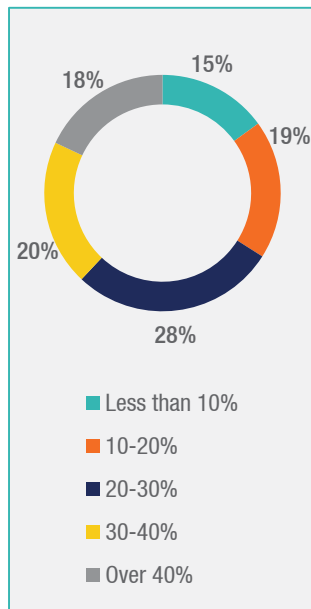
# The workforce mix is already evolving

## This trend is catching out business and human capital leaders

Percentage of independent workers employed (average, all businesses)



Percentage of independent workers employed by Small Businesses up to \$10M turnover



There is a marked contrast when we look at small businesses of up to \$10M USD turnover per annum. They appear to be embracing the blended workforce as a more efficient and productive way of doing business. They are doing so, also, through the integration of appropriate technologies to automate process, communication and sharing; unleashing the power of their independent workforce and how it is managed. This is most evident in Asia where the growth of the independent workforce is most obvious and where adopting digital has been a proven, key success factor.

## Asia is employing digital to more rapidly blend the workforce

Allowing for more rapid engagement and management of the growing independent worker population; as well as the evolving permanent workforce.

Average globally

13%

Latin America and Africa

>10%

North America, Europe, Middle East

10-20%

Asia Pacific

20-30%

Automation is growing in the Asia Pacific, showing the region to be ahead of the digital game. This feeds into the narrative of Asia being the driver in world growth over the next decade and reinforces the point made in the previous statistic.

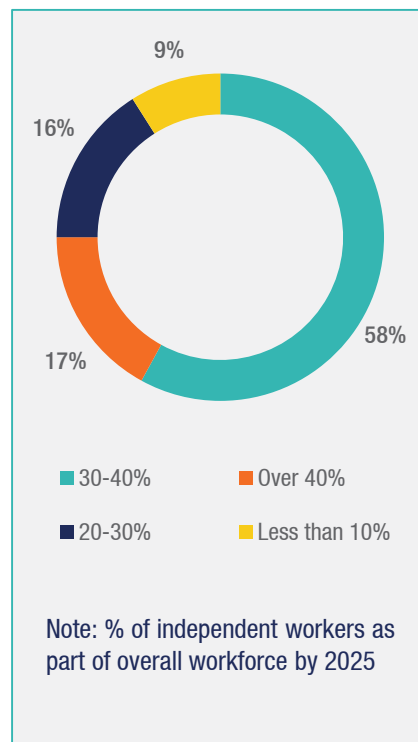
Companies using outdated ways of working – particularly in the West who still follow 20<sup>th</sup> Century models, focus on short-term results and avoid major investment – risk falling behind. Those in Asia are taking full advantage of digital, with major technology innovations – e.g. Singtel phygital stores and Ping An Bank – giving them a competitive edge. They are 21<sup>st</sup> Century mindset ready and investing heavily to transform ahead of their competition

In every case, the numbers call on companies to embrace digital transformation, and change mindset and culture to accommodate it. That way, new ways of working and the blended workforce become a logical extension of their digital adoption, rather than a sea change in thinking and acting.

# The trend will continue to accelerate over the next 5 years particularly

## Independent worker population is set to rise to become nearly 40% of the workforce by 2025

Enterprise expects the independent workforce to be a much greater percentage of their overall human capital resource by 2025



According to these projections, almost half the workforce across different regions will be made up of independent workers by 2025. Despite this, many firms had little actionable steps in place to prepare for this shift. High profile cases like Google and Uber have highlighted the risks of ignoring the needs of this invisible workforce. As numbers grow, organisations need to review their culture, environment and management practices and ensure that these serve both its internal and external agents.

There is some awareness that something needs to happen - [a recent Forbes article](#) stated that firms were thinking about it - but not much was being done in the way of strategy and execution. With digital transformation accelerating, this signals potential resourcing disasters for firms in the near future. While large firms were restricted by long established culture and systems, our survey results showed that many smaller companies across global regions, particularly Asia and Africa, were embracing the blended workforce, either deliberately to leverage the brand or as way of managing costs.

It is time for large corporations to acknowledge the formal nature of the shifting workforce. And it is imperative to develop new rules of the road, processes, structures and ways to manage the human capital mix. Very few appear to be serious about formalising the approach. Competitive advantage will clearly be in the hands of those organisations that start to tackle this trend sooner rather than later.



# More collaborative thinking required across business functions, driven by HR, to attract, hire and retain independent workers

## Top 4 hiring entities within corporates (ranked)

Human Resources

Board / Executive Committee

Functions – IT / Tech

Functions – Marketing and Design



We have already established that HR functions are only managing independent workers in the loosest sense of the word, with hiring process occurring largely on an informal basis. In some cases, the Board/Executives are largely responsible for managing independent workers, especially in North America. In others, it is managed independently by the entity or function requiring contingent resources, without sharing experiences across the rest of the business

There is a danger that 20th Century management practices are being applied to a 21st Century non-traditional workforce. Managers must educate themselves on modern working practices or risk stagnation. At the heart of this is how 'digital' is employed to support collaboration, communication and productivity across the whole workforce - not just its permanent element.

The management of independent workers needs to be captured as part of a robust 21st Century digitalised ecosystem, to increase transparency, effective management, and the value that these workers can add to organisations. As such, there is an urgent need to have formal, streamlined processes across the whole organisation, that are informed by the particular needs of its diversified workforce.





# Clearer policies and procedures needed for the sourcing of independent resources

An ad hoc approach to the hiring of independent workers is evident with multiple platforms often being used by the same company without being 'joined up'

## Source of independent hires

Multiple platforms	Word of mouth
Agencies	References
Apps	Job boards
Social platforms	Traditional hiring process
Web	

Hiring entities, especially HR, still tend to adopt a traditional approach to recruiting independent workers. This approach is increasingly limited, so companies must embrace digital marketplaces and platforms. As they do, a consistency internally is required so that all hiring entities use the same / similar platforms for transparency, control and management. There are many new solutions in the marketplace and the best companies are embracing them to provide more efficiencies in how they search, attract, employ, engage and retain independent workers.

That said, one of the issues within even the newest of platforms like [Upwork](#), [Freelancer](#) and [Fiverr](#), is that they are largely market-driven rather than personalised. However, as the trend towards personalisation and automation continues into the 2020s (see [BLONK](#) as an example in recruitment), this technology will become useful for recruiting both the permanent and independent workforce. Leaders must ensure their digital skills are up-to-date to take advantage of emerging platforms. This requires a more agile approach to training and learning and an expansion of traditional in-house HRM roles.

Word of mouth and references were ranked quite low globally, suggesting that a systematic process for hiring is still popular. Nonetheless, referrals are key routes to hire according to the independent workers surveyed.

Businesses and HR must lead the way in adopting the most appropriate platforms that will enable them to manage a blended workforce as effectively and efficiently as possible.



# Corporate expectations of their independent workforce

Companies value a job done well, fast and at appropriate cost when hiring independents

Qualities Business and HR leaders look for in independent workers (ranked in order of importance)

1. Expertise
2. Speed
3. Value for money
4. Digital literacy
5. Hassle-free management
6. Flexibility
7. Culture fit
8. Creativity
9. Multi-skilled

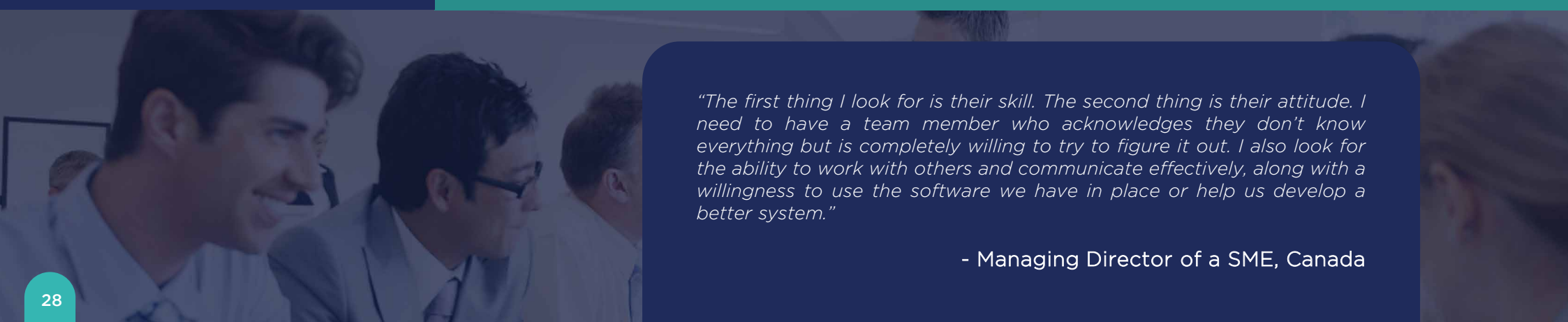
Expertise is likely to become more attractive as companies source outside talent to deal with industry disruption and digital transformation. But the nature of ad hoc work results in short-term value delivery and rarely long-term value creation. Both sides need to step up to plug the gap.

Culture fit and creativity are currently seen as a nice-to-have but will soon become critical.

However, as the ratio of independent workers vs permanents shifts, culture will need to adapt internally. Organisational culture will become central to success for the new blended workforce and ways of working.

## Workplace / Workforce Culture

Alarmingly, only the minority at OD and HR level seem to be aware of how important a culture shift within our organisations is to the successful blending of the workforce. Equally, independent workers are not pushing the need to develop a strong culture between the permanent and independent workforce spaces. Are we too comfortable with informal ways of working? If so, this cannot continue. We need to formalise, manage and measure an increasingly blended workforce, in order to do business more effectively in the 2020s. Culture shift is key.



*"The first thing I look for is their skill. The second thing is their attitude. I need to have a team member who acknowledges they don't know everything but is completely willing to try to figure it out. I also look for the ability to work with others and communicate effectively, along with a willingness to use the software we have in place or help us develop a better system."*

- Managing Director of a SME, Canada



# The roles independent workers are most hired for

## Technical work and consulting projects are most popular.

### Frequency of hire per specialism



#### Very often

Design work  
Consulting  
Web management  
IT systems / process  
Short term project work



#### Sometimes

Data analytics  
Mix of above  
Ad hoc support

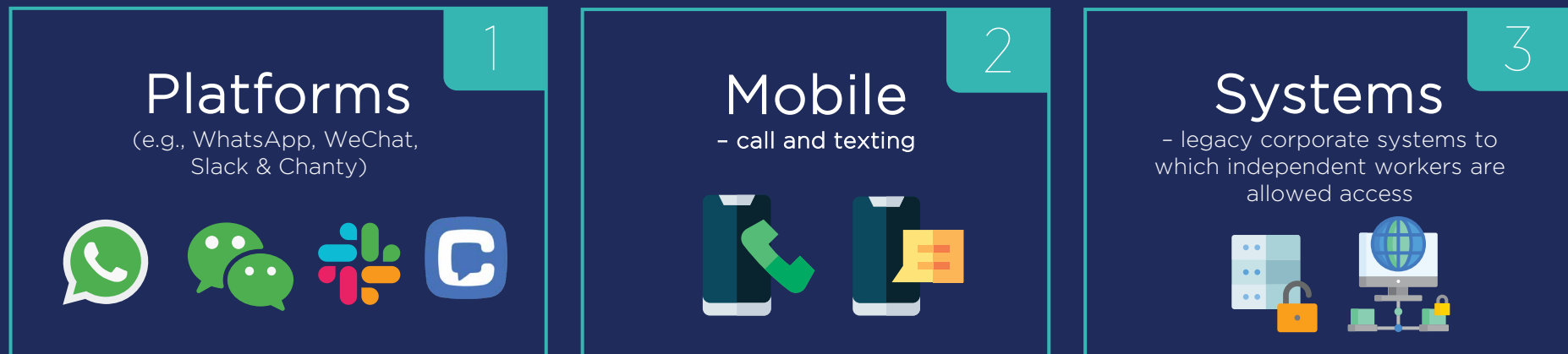
The demand for digital skills in organisations continues to grow as organisations recognise that they are lacking the necessary internal capabilities needed to benefit from the digital age. The data showed that the most popular skills demanded from digital nomads and other independent contractors were technology or IT related. Demand is highest for those with digital/IT skills, but it seems more independent workers are offering a variety of consulting skills to improve business prospects (see [“No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills”](#) by Nania et al. 2019).

This mix of strong digital skills and enhanced human touch, or ability to consult and communicate effectively, appear to be the winning combination for the best independent workers and even pure digital nomads across the globe. In the digital age, we could argue that the human skills are even more important to differentiate the average / good from the great contributors.

# Digital tools key to the engagement and management of independent workers

Increasing use of informal digital tools to enable more efficient and effective communication and collaboration

## Technologies used to manage independent workers (ranked)



There is disparity between regions, with only Asia and North America ranking their use of platforms highly. However, platforms like *Slack* and *Chanty* are fast become the tools of choice internally and with contingent workers to mobilise, engage, involve, manage, motivate, collaborate and more. We are likely to see an acceleration of uptake over the next few years as the platforms of choice for successful collaboration, workforce and workload management.

What is clear from our research, on the whole, is that HR and independent workers are responsible for finding the best tools to interact. Both should agree on which tools are most appropriate to get work completed quickly and efficiently, particularly in terms of communications and management.

Where possible, digital management ecosystems should be easily accessible and not disrupted by firewalls or other security software. This requires new thinking at leadership level to guarantee trust, security and privacy.

Most managers still rely on apps and mobile – being comfortable with what they know, perhaps – whereas there are more possibilities and potentially greater efficiencies with platforms that are more collaboration centred (e.g. Slack).



The authors would like to thank Tica Hessing and Chris Marrable from Cushman and Wakefield, the global commercial real estate services company, for their input and suggested focus for this section. Cushman and Wakefield conduct their own research on how our workplaces and workspaces are evolving, pulling out how this impacts workforce wellbeing and more. We have provided a link to their report and website at the end of this section.

# Survey findings – Workplace and Workspace

Workplace and workspace will be a pre-occupation for enterprise, as the rise of the blended and more remote workforce becomes a marked reality over the next 5-10 years.

Where we work has been hugely impacted by technology, along with workplace wellness and health considerations, over recent years. The traditional commute to the office is being challenged, as both permanent and independent workers migrate to work in alternative environments.

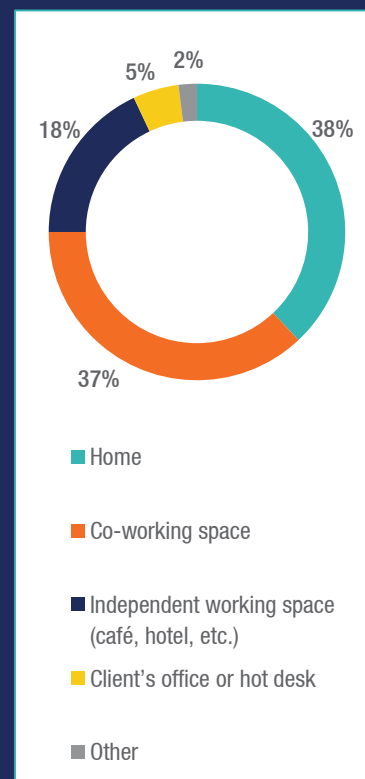
*"I wanted to get out of the world. I felt stuck working in a nine-to-five, in an office where I was spending 2 to 3 hours commuting, so by the time I got home from work, I had no energy left. I knew that if I was able to work remotely, I could travel. As soon as I did that, it just freed up so much more inspiration in my life for me to give more to my work."*

- Graphic Designer, Thailand

So, what kind of spaces and facilities help workers do their jobs well? How are HR managers and business leaders changing the environment for both permanent and independent staff to suit the way they work?

## Most independent workers prefer to work from home or in a co-working space

### Most popular workspaces for independent workers



Only 5% mentioned that working from a client's office was the preferred workplace. However, this fits with one of the major benefits of independent work, so is not surprising. Nonetheless, companies are beginning to acknowledge this changing work lifestyle and are offering payments for support services such as co-working memberships, and discounted leisure activities in the nomad's local area.

Some organisations are also actively changing work spaces to make them more suitable for the changing face of their workforce and to provide high value independent workers with a space to operate from. At HR / Human Capital Leadership level there is increasing awareness of how traditional business spaces and needs are changing. What is 'fit for purpose' for their future, more flexible, workforce? This is evidenced by the exponential rise globally of co-working spaces (used by companies, permanent and contingent workers).

It is also evidenced by how leading edge companies view workforce / workspace as a fundamental success factor for their business wellbeing and performance – particularly when considering their existing permanent spaces (i.e., *Google, LinkedIn, Spotify*).



# Defining the workplace for permanent and independent workers

Collaborative workspaces are highly valued by independent workers, while permanent workers are still experimenting with the concept

		Most common workspace	
		Now	In 5 years
Total average (permanent & independent workers)		Home Hot desk Social spaces Pay as you go Flexible co working space Client space	Home Flexible co working space HQ
Permanent		HQ Hot Desk Home	Home Hot desk HQ
Independent		Home Social Spaces Co working space Pay as you go	Co working space Pay as you go Social Spaces

Many permanent workers aspire to work like independent workers. According to our survey, they prefer to work at home rather than their HQ, so companies should bear this in mind when organising the workspace for full-time staff. Having said that, it's important that people work where they are most productive, and this should take precedence when HR leaders design guidelines for their full-time remote workers. Watching trends on where independent workers work best will help inform this.

We acknowledge the 'trend within a trend' here. There has been much movement by many traditional and newer organisations to reduce bricks-and-mortar offices, in favour of more collaborative, spread spaces. This recognises a more remote permanent workforce, as much as the increasing percentage of independent workers being employed.

The impact is so much greater, of course. Crucial questions such as how does organisational culture evolve to cope with this trend, how do leaders lead and managers manage more remotely through appropriate technologies and developmental support. And much more!



# Environment is a key factor for effective and productive working

Not surprisingly, the lack of a permanent workspace throws up challenges for independent workers, despite this being their preferred workstyle. These challenges included having the right tools and atmosphere to work in, and feeling a part of the work team. But there are certain conditions which help to boost performance. On the right are digital nomad responses ranking the most important factors for a good working environment.

As the workforce continues to evolve and blend, the workplaces and workspaces we all work from are adapting to offer features and spaces that support the increase in remote and independent working. More professionals want features that help them maintain mental and physical health, as well a desk to work at. Respondents offered ideas that appeal to independent and permanent workers alike.

The largest decline in traditional workspaces are happening in Asia but there is evidence in less-developed regions that the traditional business rule-books are being re-written. New ways of working and new workspaces are being used in preference to traditional models (I.e. Nigeria, Indonesia, parts of the Middle East). These new workplaces and workspaces are concerned with providing an environment and features conducive to productive work, a social aspect and additional elements to support wellbeing.

These findings are just as important when considering the permanent workforce and the potential for them to become more flexible and remote in their working. Environmental factors are key wherever your workforce operates from, be they permanent or contingent workers.

## Most desirable environmental factors for all workers (permanent and independent)

- 1 |  Connected and sizeable work station
- 2 |  Pleasant, air-conditioned / heated and clean
- 3 |  Opportunities to socialise and network with others
- 4 |  Refreshments
- 5 |  Access to other spaces, such as quiet booths for calls, meeting and training rooms, etc.
- 6 |  Music

## Permanents most value



Free snacks and drinks



Social seating / lounge area



Decoration and desk spaces



Wellness activities (such as Feng Shui, massage, gym)



Local area service – full or part-funded – such as gym membership, yoga classes, etc.

## Independent most value



Invite workers to use office space



Support working expenses (e.g. internet, office / hot-desk rental, etc.)



Social events for independent workers (particularly popular in North America and Asia Pacific)

*“Specifically, where I stayed during remote working, I had a view of the Atlantic Ocean. I felt I could work from day till night because I was at peace and was comfortable to work as I like.”*

**- Independent Social Media Manager, Jamaica**

Better support policies will improve the working environment, becoming crucial as more workers move towards retainer and long-term contracts. The responsibility to provide a pleasant working environment rests with HR and business leaders.

# Cushman and Wakefield in support of our research findings

## The workplace experience of the future

Cushman and Wakefield (C&W) is a workplace experience specialist organisation. They investigate and advise how our workplaces and spaces are evolving to provide the most productive and healthy co-working environments for workers – be they permanent or independent. This tracks an increasing trend for many organisations of embracing flexible working spaces as an alternative to their permanent offices. There are many contributing factors to this evolution of the workplace and ways of working, including:

- Wellness / wellbeing
- Collaboration / co-working
- Remote working
- Productivity / performance
- Work/life flexibility
- Climate / environment
- And more...



For further reading please refer to  
Cushman and Wakefield website  
[www.cushmanwakefield.com](http://www.cushmanwakefield.com) and  
previous research on  
Mental & Physical Wellbeing in the  
workplace: C&W Well Workplace  
report 2017 ([view here](#))



*"I like that my clients understand we are human. That we are doing work for them and are not robots"*

- Digital Outsourcing  
Small Business Owner,  
Toronto, Canada

# Taking action



# Action points for Organisation, HR, and Talent Leaders



## Understand changes in 2020s working culture

It's time to ditch the traditional mindset. Today's workforce likes to work flexibly, remotely and independently, so make sure your culture reflects this and has the infrastructure to manage it.

## Understand the specific expectations and needs of both offline and online workers

It is time to acknowledge that traditional management practices, designed for a more stable 9-to-5 employment relationship, cannot meet the needs of all workers in the blended workforce. Organisations need to engage in more dialogue with their external human capital to understand how they might be better supported in order to deliver excellent results.

## Set clear rules and guidelines for managing independent workforce

Make sure your guidelines for managing independent workers align with those for managing permanent employees. Expectations and feedback should work in parallel and be inclusive.

## Provide management support and educate all stakeholders in new workflow demands

When people outside the HR function are managing or interacting with independent workers, make sure they all work from the same guidelines to ensure consistency and fairness. Set up training programmes to help staff understand how to effectively work alongside the independent workforce.

## Champion diversity and inclusion across all platforms

As the Blended Workforce accelerates, managers will require re-skilling to manage remote workers, non-permanent employees, independent workers and other stakeholders. There will be a need for both digital (online) and face to face (offline) collaboration, enabled by empowering digital technologies and know-how.

This should be underpinned with a re-evaluation of diversity, tolerance, bias and inclusion lenses, in line with the needs of an increasingly blended and dispersed workforce, made up of both digital and non-digital natives.

## Reward, recognise and remunerate

Just like your permanent staff, independent workers are not solely motivated by money, yet their expertise is often crucial to the achievement of overall results. Regardless of personal motivations, it is the duty of values-driven organisations to deliver recognition, appropriate reward and fair payment terms to their valued independent worker resource. This will enable a climate of respectful inclusion and encourage all workers to perform their best.

## Develop and maintain up-to-date digital capabilities

Digital skills that aid interconnectivity, collaboration and engagement will be critical in the 2020s. HR managers should be fully conversant with the digital tools used by their independent workforce.

Organisations should aim to close capability gaps, particularly cross-generational, moving away from traditional ways of working towards the brave new world of the 2020s. For example, tools like Slack, Chanty and UpWork go beyond the pioneering apps, like WhatsApp, to provide a secure ecosystem for group management, motivation, collaboration, communication and more. Perfect for a blended workforce.

Recognise that a brand new framework, we call GigHR®, is required to better structure for workforce evolution and change over the next decade and beyond. This will become urgent and important over the next 5 years as independent workers and intelligent AI technologies blend with our current permanent workforce and ways of working. The blended workforce revolution.

Book a high level leadership briefing or sign up for a 1-day workshop with the 'GigHR® Experts' – Jeremy Blain and Dr Rochelle Haynes.

To find out more visit our web resources portal

[www.performanceworks.global/the-gig-hr-experts/](http://www.performanceworks.global/the-gig-hr-experts/)  
[www.crowdpotential.co.uk](http://www.crowdpotential.co.uk)

The **GigHR®** Experts

# Action points for Independent Workers



# Action Points for Independent Workers

## Agree on terms and conditions before starting a project

Clarity at the outset reduces the chances of friction and misunderstanding later. Outline, both verbally and in writing, the terms under which you work. Clearly lay out the support you need and timeframe to do the job properly.

## Make sure prospective clients are aware of your full skillset

Clients may come to you for specific expertise. But if you make them aware of your full skillset, you may get more work from them.

## Improve workflow management skills

Don't rely on intuition and your client's good nature to manage workflow. Invest in training to develop communication and management skills that improve workflow and the way you engage clients.

## Prioritise long-term and retainer work

You will enjoy more stability – both financially and workwise – with long-term projects than with ad hoc work, so pursue retainer clients over those offering short-term work or one-off projects.

## Find a good workspace

Your workspace will impact on how well you perform, so find a space (or spaces) that provide the best amenities and environment to help you work effectively and efficiently.

Jeremy Blain and Dr. Rochelle Haynes will be offering a series of virtual 1.5-hour sessions for independent workers everywhere.

We are creating a robust framework to help the independent workforce navigate the corporate / customer space.

We offer a programme over 4 separate sessions to ensure we cover all the know-how required for a successful collaborative relationship. Topics include: communication, contract agreement, workflow planning and management, process steps, winning collaboration, interpersonal toolkits and more.

For more information please contact as follows

Jeremy – [info@performanceworks.global](mailto:info@performanceworks.global)

Rochelle – [contact@crowdpotential.co.uk](mailto:contact@crowdpotential.co.uk)

# Appendix 1: Meet the report authors

## About Jeremy and Rochelle The **GigHR**® Experts

### Jeremy Blain

Founder and CEO  
**PerformanceWorks International**

Jeremy Blain is an award-winning Business Leader, Futurist, New Era Learning Professional, Author & Conference Speaker.



Jeremy is the Chief Executive of PerformanceWorks International (PWI), a company that helps organisations, executive boards and leaders succeed in the digital climate amidst digital disruption, workforce transformation, opportunity and uncertainty.

Jeremy has extensive experience as a transformation leader and adviser at the board-level globally. He has operated on an international basis to launch successful businesses and to turn underperformance into excellence.

Through his business, PWI, Jeremy helps Boards and leaders define strategies to implement global digital transformations, utilising a unique, co-created and award-winning Ticking Clock® model.

On the back of this, he and his team engage leadership and management to develop fit for purpose plans that drive culture change at operational level, to embed the required skills for successful modernisation.

Jeremy has proven success at all stages of the business lifecycle, from start-up to internationalisation, raising profiles and profits throughout. On the back of this, Jeremy has consistently established cross-sector and border relationships to align global activity and deliver profitable expansion.

Jeremy has close to 30 years of commercial experience at Procter and Gamble, PepsiCo, Cegos Group and in his own business, PerformanceWorks International. Jeremy is both an award-winning business leader and new era learning / human capital professional. As such, His primary focus now is helping organisations, leaders and managers ready themselves for the challenging years ahead, in the face of unprecedented workplace change and competition in the 4.0 era.

Jeremy has created a business based on embracing the independent workforce. As a digital nomad, he continues to work across borders, with a global network of experts, from a variety of workplaces and spaces - be they client focused or more social co-working hubs.



### Dr. Rochelle Haynes

Founder and CEO  
**Crowd Potential**

Rochelle is a qualified and published HR professional, consultant and speaker. Originally from Barbados, she has a demonstrated history of working with public and private sector organisations, both locally and internationally, in the fields of Accounting, HRM and International Business, and holds a PhD in International Human Resource Management.

Through her PhD, Rochelle has worked with multinational companies from several countries, including the UK, the US, Germany, Spain, France, Japan, Denmark, and India, and has written on the strategic functions of expatriate managers in these global enterprises. In addition to independent consulting, she is a senior lecturer in HRM at the University of the West of England. She also works with the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) as an employability mentor across the UK, a role for which she was nationally commended.

Rochelle is also the founder and principal partner Crowd Potential Consulting Group and delivers specialist workshops and interactive sessions across different regions including Europe, Latin America and Asia. Her past keynotes and workshop topics have included career enhancement, performance management, the digital economy, leadership development, expatriate management, and changing business models. Recently, she was invited to speak in Indonesia on managing performance in the gig economy, as a part of her on-going research project which has been funded by top-ranking financial institution, Santander.

Rochelle's true passion lies in applying HR to the growing field of the gig economy and she recently spent five weeks travelling across Thailand, a remote-working hotspot, to explore co-working spaces and interview globally dispersed workers. She specialises in the emerging field of 'Gig HR', a term she coined to describe the discipline of using HRM to help companies enhance their working relationships with contract workers, 'gig workers', 'digital nomads' and other offsite stakeholders, whose physical contact with organisations is limited or non-existent.



# Appendix 2:

## Contact Details


Jeremy and Rochelle support organisations of all sizes in the evolution of their workforce and workplaces. This starts with helping leaders to understand the current trends, including the rise of the blended workforce. It leads to a mindset shift as the culture of the organisation evolves to embrace Industry 4.0 ways of working and possibilities.

Our comprehensive consulting, training and coaching services can be viewed through the websites below, further linking to a robust suite of skills building activity, for all levels, to see through the transformation.

### CONTACT US

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# The Blended Workforce Revolution – Research and White Paper

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