

A Typology of Gig Workers in Canada

Towards a new model for understanding gig work through human, social, and economic capital





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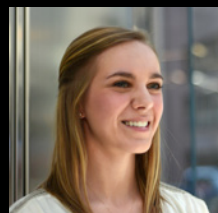
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Project overview

This paper offers a conceptual framework and preliminary typology of gig work and workers, based on a thorough review and synthesis of the existing research, designed to be tested “in the field” with real gig workers themselves. This worker-centred frame is critical to rounding out the existing dialogue—which predominantly focuses on the objective conditions of work, or structure—to critically examine the role of agency in the gig economy. The tensions between structure and agency in the gig economy need to be understood and articulated for policy to play a meaningful role in this dynamic and ever-evolving space.

We make a deliberate conceptual choice to focus our inquiry on digitally enabled types of gig work, and within that space, we focus on access (how and why do gig workers gain access and entry to the gig economy?), movement (how and why do gig workers move around and within the gig economy?), and capital (what are the types of currencies being exchanged, and why?).


Gig work is a form of work that has attracted a lot of attention in recent years, with some seeing it as a positive trend increasing worker power and offering flexibility and choice, and others seeing it as a form of exploitation as employers shirk responsibilities and erode workers’ rights. Part of the reason for competing views of gig work relates to the different definitions and forms of gig work that exist.

In both the existing literature and in broader social discourse and debates, there is no agreed definition of “gig work,” but a general consensus has begun to emerge. For the purpose of this research and for many other studies aiming to understand the gig economy, the choice is made to focus on technology-enabled gig work that is mediated by digital platforms. This excludes the kind of informal, often “under-the-counter” forms of gig work that predate digital platforms such as occasional babysitting or garage sale selling (Collins et al., 2019). Further, this type of gig work focuses on unincorporated sole proprietors—people who in Canada would file T2125 tax forms for the self-employed, but who do not have business numbers (Jeon et al., 2019). These workers share similarities with other types of contingent workers, but are also markedly different. For example the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics groups “independent contractors” with on-call workers, temporary help agency workers, and workers provided by contract firms (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). All of these contingent workers provide on-demand and temporary labour to task requesters, but the independent contractor in the U.S. or the unincorporated sole proprietor in Canada provides labour without business registration and without being employed by a firm. They are freelance agents—neither business owners nor employees—often enabled

by digital platforms but also denied the organization-facilitated benefits provided by employee status. It is this form of contingent worker that is growing in prevalence across the Canadian labour force.

Important labour market trends map onto the heightened prevalence of gig work in ways we do not fully understand. For example, we know that 12.4 percent of gig workers who are men work in construction, the industry with the second highest number of men doing gig work in the country (Jeon & Ostrovsky, 2020). While gig work has been common in the construction industry for a long time, new apps like Gig Connected and Faber Work have come online exclusively to connect gig workers to construction jobs, increasing gig worker access in an industry with a large existing gig work pool. We also know that construction was among the top five industries with the most jobs lost between February and April 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2020a). On the other hand, it is also the industry that added the most jobs between February and July 2020. The health care and social assistance sector employs the highest proportion (20.2 percent) of all gig workers who are women, and this sector has not yet, as of July 2020, recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Other sectors with relatively high proportions of gig workers of both genders are also found among the five sectors that are least recovered from the economic hit of the pandemic—other services (except public administration) and retail. The economic impact of the pandemic on gig workers is not yet known.

As we'll emphasize through this paper, gig workers share many attributes, but the secondary research indicates that their experiences are significantly mediated by the external conditions of the labour force, the economy, and the skills and qualifications they have upon entry to gig work. The central commonality between gig workers might be that they are exposed to change with the least amount of institutional protection or buffer. However, as discussed above, factors such as industry of employment, low versus high skill jobs, and market forces can mediate gig workers' experiences in the extreme. One point of consideration throughout this paper to think about how gig workers might benefit from skills development and policies that support training. For some, gig work may remain a good option. One way that policy makers can protect gig workers is by bolstering their skills and qualifications, which may work as protective factors in times of crisis.



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Research definition

The gig economy encompasses an open talent continuum that excludes the standard employment relationship—a model in which workers have one employer and work full-time, year-round on the employer’s premises with an agreed-upon approach to compensation that allows for predictable total rewards. Moreover, the conditions of work are highly regulated through collective agreements or legislation that protect the worker from down cycles, and greater risk is placed onto the employer. In the gig economy, workers exchange the regulatory protections of a standard employment relationship for flexible and easy labour market attachment (Graham & Woodcock, 2020; Prassl, 2018; Vosko, 2000).

In our preliminary scoping paper, *Understanding the Nature and Experience of Gig Work in Canada*, published July 2020 (Ziegler et al., 2020), we conducted a historical review of gig work, exploring shifts from the standard employment relationship (SER) as a normative model of employment (in the Global North) to a model of employment with much looser labour force attachment. We acknowledge that, all along, the SER was a misnomer. From both a historical and global perspective, the SER was never universally accessible in Canada. For example, women and members of particular racialized groups were variously denied the “family wage,” and policies and practices dovetailed to explicitly curtail the participation of women and minorities (Hyman, 2018; Vosko, 2000).

For the purpose of this research, we develop a frame to discuss gig work at a large scale, with specific criteria for this research listed below. We use the following definition of “gig work”:

A category of work, or work arrangement, deemed to be non-standard or informal compared to a standard employment relationship. This alternative work fills a need by providing access to labour (for employers), and flexibility and access to the labour market (for workers). While people at all socioeconomic levels can participate in gig work, it is characterized as having uncertain future business activities, being minor or casual in nature, as lacking options for career or personal advancement, and lacking in formalized protection for the worker and employers. (Canadian Union of Postal Workers vs. Foodora Inc., 2020)

From our literature review, we generate a preliminary typology of gig workers in Canada:

- > The Platform Professional
- > The Entrepreneurial Influencer
- > The Asset Enabler
- > The Tasker

This typology was developed using access—or points of entry—into gig work in Canada as a jumping off point. Access to capital is the main factor we use to situate gig workers in this typology, while other dimensions (control, relatedness, and motivation) are used to systematically analyze gig workers' experience using a common frame.

The primary contribution of this paper is to re-centre the dialogue on the experiences of gig workers to understand the push and pull factors that mediate their decision-making, or access to decision-making, around gig work. Who can do gig work, and how do demographic characteristics mediate the nature of available entry points into the gig economy? What makes people participate in gig work, and what do they expect and desire from that experience? Further, how do gig workers' expectations interface with their actual experiences? We address experts' calls for research that examines the heterogeneity of the gig worker experience (Lobel, 2019) by looking at the gig workers' perspectives in secondary research and discussing the perceived role of gig work in a person's career, income, and life and how they might end up within different roles and spaces within the private and public world of work. This paper develops an applied frame for organizing gig workers and gig work, which will allow us to further validate and build on the insights of the typology in the future based on the perspectives of gig workers themselves.

Context: Gig work in the future of work

There is an extensive dialogue underway about gig work and its role in the world of work now and in the future. The literature review in this section examines several of the ways studies have positioned and sought to understand technology-enabled gig work. While several compelling models for understanding gig work have emerged, there is an absence of research that addresses the critical differences and heterogeneity across gig worker experiences. While many acknowledge the pros and cons of different models, few have developed dynamic, worker-centred frames of inquiry. However, before we analyze a few noteworthy typology models, we examine some of the critical issues in the gig work conversation.

While research and policy interest in the gig economy has been rising for decades, and the precarity of gig workers has been underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic, gig work is not new. The term “gig” was popularized by musicians at the turn of 20th century in reference to short, paid performances. Statistics Canada uses tax and administrative data to identify gig workers and includes individuals within the self-employed category whose work fits specific characteristics in terms of payment, contract type, work schedule, schedule of earnings, and supervision. Gig workers are unincorporated self-employed workers who do not report a business number on their T2125 (Jeon et al., 2019). Gig workers have non-standard or informal work contracts compared to workers in standard employment relationships, and they can be found across sectors and industries. The top five gig work industries for men and women are shown in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

Top five gig work industries for men and women

Men		Women	
2-digit NAICS industry	Percent of total men's gig work (%)	2-digit NAICS industry	Percent of total women's gig work (%)
Professional, scientific and technical services	19	Health care and social assistance	20.2
Construction	12.4	Professional, scientific and technical services	17.4
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	10.6	Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	13.4
Transportation and warehousing	8.3	Other services (except public administration)	12.7
Arts, entertainment and recreation	8.2	Retail trade	10

Source: Jeon & Ostrovsky, 2020

While not all gig work is mediated by digital platforms, today contract-based self-employment, also known as gig work, is strongly associated with the use of digital platforms. These platforms facilitate connections between people with skills and assets and task requesters who require temporary labour (Statistics Canada, 2018). Platforms like Uber, Skip the Dishes, Airbnb, and TaskRabbit have become important mediators providing opportunities for on-demand, freelance workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many tech-enabled gig workers have been essential workers on the front lines, putting their lives in danger while delivering medicine, care, and food (Ziegler & McCallum, 2020).

Reasons for entry into gig work are varied—some gig workers are pushed into gig work because they face barriers that exclude them from traditional employment opportunities (Jeon & Ostrovsky, 2020). Others are pulled into it, drawn by the promise of increased flexibility and control over their work. For some, it is their principal source of income, but for most, it is a supplement to their main income (Jeon et al., 2019). While most gig workers are Canadian-born and not racialized, racialized people and new immigrants are over-represented in the most precarious and least well-paid gig work jobs (Jeon et al., 2019; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Gig work can increase access to the workforce for people who have struggled to find employment. For example, Canadian employers put a great amount of stake in the amount of time job seekers have already spent in the Canadian workforce, which has the effect of discriminating against highly qualified newcomers (Yssaad & Fields, 2018). Verifying this trend, the ratio of gig income to T4 income is higher among new immigrants to Canada, meaning that the average new immigrant is earning a higher proportion of their income in the gig economy than out of it (Jeon et al., 2019). This may be because the gig economy offers easy access to workers in a workforce that undervalues immigrant skills (Dietz et al., 2015; Ng & Gagnon, 2020).

Still, there are risks to individuals and to the rest of the economy from the growing space that digital platform-enabled work takes up in the labour market. For example, the globalization of talent sourcing means that there is in many cases an oversupply of skilled workers whose price points for gig worker entry have less to do with the value of their work than with local economic conditions and the value of their currency (Graham et al., 2017). This borderless free market means that gig workers across geographic locations can afford to deeply undercut each other, making it difficult for gig workers from countries with more valuable currencies to find buyers of their services at local market rates.

Other risks or precarious elements of the gig economy include the loss of income security for workers and the potential for experiencing discrimination without having recourse to human rights protections available to employees. Further, both income insecurity and discrimination stand alone as independent variables correlated with poorer mental and physical well-being (Golberstein, 2015; Kopasker et al., 2018; Province of Ontario, 2017). In particular, access to social security benefits such as an employer-buttressed pension among older workers is positively linked to mental health (Golberstein, 2015). The absence of labour regulation risks leaving workers exposed to the vagaries of the external labour market. It can also endanger social reproduction by limiting access to healthcare and requiring workers to engage in significant unpaid “work-for-labour” (Wood et al., 2019b). Decentralization and spatial separation act as barriers between gig workers and between gig workers and task requesters. These barriers deter the usual methods of building trust, relationships, and a peer community, which are often based on informal, in-person communication and shared experiences.

“The future of work, it turns out, is a blast from the past. From eighteenth-century outwork to nineteenth-century dock labour, there is ample historical precedent for this organization of work—and the resulting working conditions”

Prassl, 2018

Similarly, while there is much that is innovative about the gig economy’s reliance on modern technology, in so far as work is concerned, the business model is ancient. Many platforms’ business models are built around large workforces competing over relatively low-skilled tasks, controlled by powerful intermediaries. “The future of work, it turns out, is a blast from the past. From eighteenth-century outwork to nineteenth-century dock labour, there is ample historical precedent for this organization of work—and the resulting working conditions” (Prassl, 2018). Further, it is fair to question the level of innovation in the gig economy. For instance, if Uber is cheap it is not because it has out-innovated the incumbent cab market, which, at the

end of the day, has access to the same ride-hailing technology. Companies like Uber are funded by venture capitalists and private equity firms, not profit, leading some to speculate that “the source of its greatest innovations is and always has been cheap money” (Kaminska, 2016; Levy, 2019). Operating at a loss can render the service cheaper—but for how long? In fact, the more one probes, the more gig work appears to be a longstanding phenomenon with a new arrangement on a frictionless app-based gig platform.

One of the greatest innovations of the technology-enabled gig economy may be the scale at which roles are unbundled into tasks. The gig economy's emphasis on technology presents people as "computational infrastructure" and in this world "some become creators while others become computers" (Irani, 2015; Prassl, 2018). Digital platforms facilitate group interactions, acting as intermediaries and facilitating transactions between users, but also working to further a culture of unbundling roles into tasks so that workers are not identified with the labour they perform, functioning only as intermediaries themselves.

Regulatory arbitrage (evasion of employment law) and outsourcing of risk is embedded in the business model of many gig employer platforms.¹ By presenting themselves as mere intermediaries rather than powerful service providers, platforms shift nearly all of their business risk and cost onto others. This presents risks for workers, but also for consumers and taxpayers alike. For consumers, there have been numerous incidents of consumers facing serious problems (e.g., assault, discrimination, death), for which the platforms did not accept liability. For taxpayers, the gig-economy business model leads to significant tax-income losses—both directly, through unpaid taxes, and indirectly, through taxpayer-funded subsidies for platform workers who may have to rely more heavily on the social security system, despite working full-time (Prassl, 2018).

The major legal challenge that gig workers have mounted against gig platform operators is that while companies would prefer to classify workers as independent contractors to save operating costs, they sometimes actually use workers like staff (Buzogany & Mueller, 2010). True independent workers exist, but the misclassification of employees as independent contractors is a very common problem in employment law. As such, legal cases against gig platform operators in Canada and internationally are also increasingly common, centring on the issue of worker misclassification (Gokhale & Gorsky, 2019). Digital apps have made the misclassification of gig workers more visible, possibly also because the new gig workers have more social capital to raise awareness and organize than gig workers who are not digitally connected (Mojtehedzadeh & Regehr, 2020). In fact, many gig workers leverage social media networks and online forums to create networks and communities where they share strategies for navigating work on platforms, including how to manage bad relationships with clients (Anwar & Graham, 2019; Graham & Woodcock, 2020). Canadian Foodora workers used community forums, such as Foodsters United, to locate and share messaging about their bid for collective bargaining rights (Manzocco, 2020).

¹ Regulatory arbitrage is "the manipulation of the structure of a deal to take advantage of a gap between the economic substance of a transaction and its regulatory treatment" (Prassl, 2018).

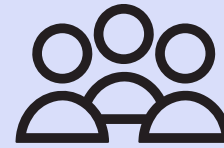
There has been pressure on Canadian policy makers to regulate gig work and reduce the misclassification of workers for decades. The argument about digital platforms has been that they are operating in a space already furnished with policy and governance infrastructure while their operators argue that their unique organizational structure excludes them from the restraints of labour laws (Stanford, 2017). Sometimes this is a valid argument, and sometimes it is not. Regulating the gig economy is therefore also about identifying what true gig work is, and what it isn't. For example, a \$400 million class action law suit against Uber for the alleged misclassification of their workers was given the go-ahead in June 2020 and will be heard in Ontario courts (Mojtehedzadeh, 2020). Foodora workers won the right to unionize in February 2020, the first time gig workers were given the right in Ontario. These workers explicitly resist the idea that they are entrepreneurs, explaining instead that their boss is unconventional—an algorithm—but a boss nonetheless, and that they are employed workers (Mojtehedzadeh & Regehr, 2020).

There is a need to strengthen and expand policies to safeguard these labour force participants (Johal & Cukier, 2019; Johal & Thirgood, 2016; Stewart & Stanford, 2017). While the need to define and better protect gig workers pre-dates the influx of digital platforms into the Canadian market, the introduction of these platforms and now the pressure introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the urgency of the need to regulate gig working relationships (Stanford, 2020; Ziegler & McCallum, 2020).

Who are gig workers?

Whether or not gig work is good or bad for workers, it is increasingly popular. Statistics Canada makes an important distinction in their self-employed employment category, choosing to identify gig workers as a type of self-employed worker, though differentiating gig workers from other types. While self-employed workers overall make up about 15 percent of total employment, more than half of them (8.2 percent of all workers) are gig workers (Yssaad & Ferrao, 2019). This subset of the self-employed population are defined as “unincorporated self-employed workers (sole proprietors) who report business, professional or commission self-employment income, and whose future business activity is uncertain or expected to be minor or occasional” (Jeon et al., 2019). This is an increase from 2005, when the percentage of gig workers in Canada was 5.5 percent. Gig work involvement spiked dramatically between 2008 and 2009, and again from 2012 to 2013, with the entry of gig work platform operator companies into Canadian markets (Jeon et al., 2019). The size of the gig economy increased from 6.0 percent in 2008 to 6.8 percent in 2009, as some of those who lost wage employment during the recession were “pushed” into self-employment (Ziegler et al., 2020). Spikes in gig work were not reflected in other forms of self-employment, suggesting a direct link between increases in gig work and the introduction of new digital platforms.

According to a 2019 report from Statistics Canada, self-employed or temporary workers constitute over 20 percent of the labour force, and are by far the fastest growing labour group in Canada (Jeon et al., 2019). Moreover, a 2018 survey of Canada’s digital economy—the first of its kind—found that 28 percent of Canadians aged 18 and older were making money through online platforms. The most common method of earning money was by selling new or used products through online bulletin boards such as Kijiji, eBay, and Etsy. This amounted to \$4.9 billion in earnings, or an average of \$722 per person. This activity was most popular among Canadians under the age of 44 and among those with an annual personal income above \$100,000. Other ways of making money included providing online freelance services, posting creative content online, such as YouTube videos, and offering peer-to-peer ride, delivery, or accommodation services. This survey did not shed light on the earnings of this group (Digital Economy, 2018).

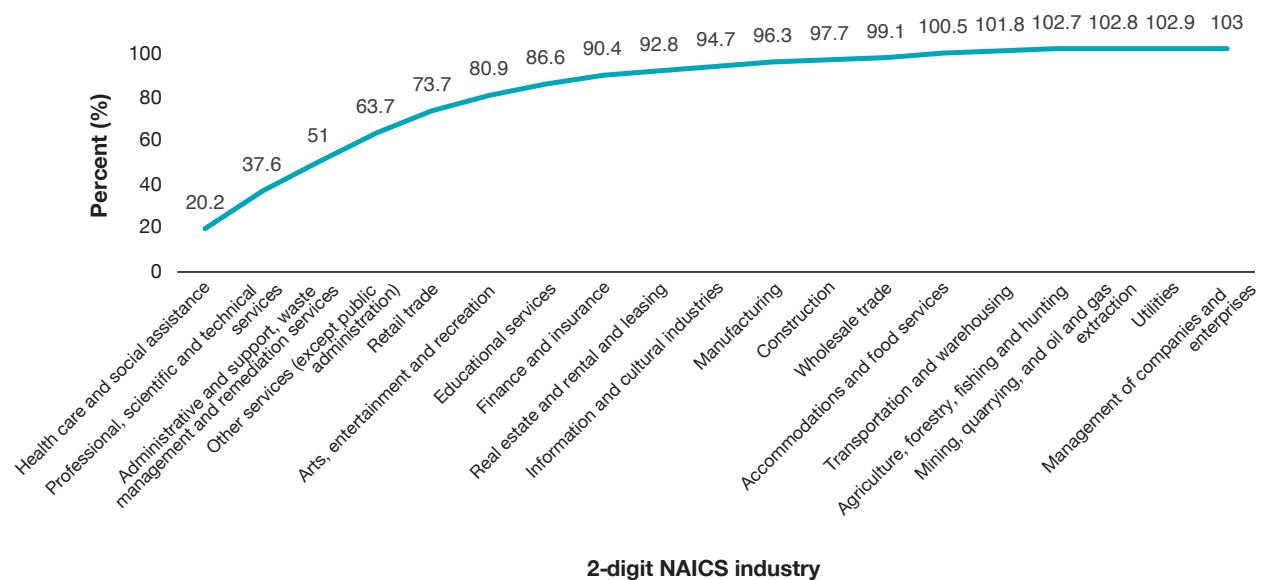


Self-employed or temporary workers constitute over 20 percent of the labour force, and are by far the fastest growing labour group in Canada

Women are more likely than men to do gig work, but the gender of gig workers varies significantly across industries. Half of all of women’s gig work are concentrated in three industries, while half of men’s gig work involvement is spread over four industries. The industries that comprise half of women’s gig work are health care and social assistance; professional, scientific and technical services; and administrative and support, waste management and remediation services. The industries that comprise half of men’s gig work involvement are professional, scientific and technical services; construction; administrative and support, waste management and remediation services; and transportation and warehousing. There is one industry that overlaps for both genders as highly significant: 13.4 percent of all women doing gig work and 10.6 percent of all men doing gig work are gigging in the “administrative and support, waste management and remediation services” industry. Figures 1 and 2 below show the distribution of women’s and men’s gig work involvement. Illustrated by the higher arc on the women’s graph, the figures show that women’s gig work is more concentrated than men’s, with 80 percent of women gig workers conducting labour in six industries, while men conduct 80 percent of their gig work between eight and nine industries.

FIGURE 1

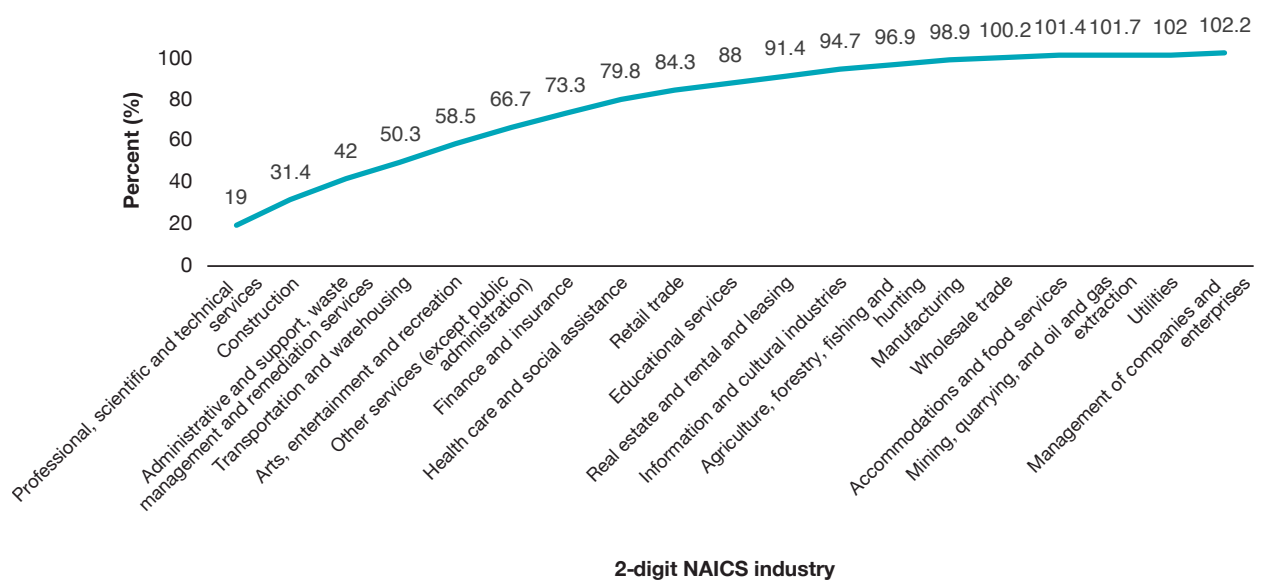
Cumulative percent of women's gig work involvement by 2-digit NAICS industry



Source: Jeon & Ostrovsky, 2020. Please note that cumulative percent does not equal 100 percent due to rounding in the published data set.

FIGURE 2

Cumulative percent of men's gig work involvement by 2-digit NAICS industry



Source: Jeon & Ostrovsky, 2020. Please note that cumulative percent does not equal 100 percent due to rounding in the published data set.

Available data on Canadian gig work can also be analyzed by immigration status, though not readily by ethnic or racial identity. When immigration status is considered, distribution by gender varies. In every immigration status category other than Canadian born, more men than women do gig work. In general, the longer someone lives in Canada, regardless of gender, the more likely they are to do gig work. Seventy percent of gig-working women are Canadian born, while only 64.3 percent of gig-working men are Canadian born. While there are more Canadian-workers overall, there is a higher prevalence of new immigrants doing gig work. This means that a disproportionately high number of people with immigrant backgrounds do gig work (Ziegler et al., 2020).

The impact of gig work on overall incomes varies by gender as well. Importantly, while men make more money than women in T4-reported earnings and gig earnings, men's overall incomes rose 1 percent and women's rose 8 percent five years after entering gig work compared with what they made five years before entering gig work (including both earnings from gig work and T4 work) (Ziegler et al., 2020). This happens because when men enter the gig economy, they experience a bigger spike in earnings relative to their former incomes, and they continue to make more money in gig work than women even after five years. However, after five years of doing gig work, women make 5 percent less in their T4-affiliated work than they did five years prior to entering gig work, while men experience an 8 percent drop in T4 income (Ziegler et al., 2020). Overall, while men continue to make more money than women (consistent with the rest of the labour market), gig work entry improves women's net incomes 7 percentage points more than men's over time.

While most gig workers conduct gig work on a temporary basis—only half of gig workers in a given year report income from gig work the following year—about a quarter of gig workers conduct gig work for three or more years (Jeon et al., 2019). Just less than half of gig workers reported no other employment besides gig work, and the other half reported that gig work supplement one or more jobs. For about half of gig workers, gig earnings consist of more than three-quarters of their total annual income. For more than 25 percent of gig workers, 89 percent of their total annual income comes from gig work.

It is this nebulous nature of gig workers that has catalyzed several efforts to categorize and understand the field using taxonomies and archetypes. Developing a conceptual framework offers researchers one way to conduct primary research with gig workers to understand and bring the voice of gig workers to policy discussions. Likewise, understanding and embracing the diversity and complexity that characterize gig work both structurally and experientially will help inform a more human-centred and dynamic public policy dialogue than currently exists. Gig workers may be well educated or have unusually low skills. They may be working in ways akin to self-employed sole

proprietors in incorporated business, even using gig platforms to test out their business idea, or they may have no interest in opening a business and instead just want to eke out extra income to reach a particular financial goal, aiming to invest minimal time and sources into skilling for the task at hand. There have been several attempts to make sense of gig workers and to draw attention to the important differences between their involvement in gig work activity. Policy makers need a nuanced and detailed understanding of the existing landscape of gig work: the inequities, the risks, and the opportunities for job creation and meaningful employment. A one-size-fits-all policy solution does not exist for gig work because gig work is not universally good or bad for workers. The specifics of the gig worker experience are important for understanding how to protect workers' rights while recognizing the appeal of loose labour market attachment for many workers in Canada.

Perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of gig work depend on power and status, as well as supply and demand. Below we discuss existing models of gig work and then introduce our own typology, which is derived from synthesis of our secondary research but is yet to be tested with gig workers. The main element we identified as missing from the taxonomies below and that we tried to centre in our typology is the operation of the conditions of human, social, and economic capital, and how these forms of capital mediate entry into gig work for different workers in Canada. Based on our research, we hypothesize that a gig worker's experience of gig work varies dramatically depending on the kind of skills they have and the kind of income they can expect to earn from gig work, as well on the capital investment required for them to enter gig work. Work insecurity and lack of benefits may matter less to someone who knows their skills are in demand and who can reasonably expect that their next gig will bring in the income they need to pay off debt accrued in times without a gig. For gig workers in low-skill and low-pay jobs, however, there is a stable ceiling to the income they can expect to earn based on a limited number of available working hours at a low wage. In this way, instability can have different impacts on workers' quality of life and well-being.

Existing models for understanding types of on-demand labour

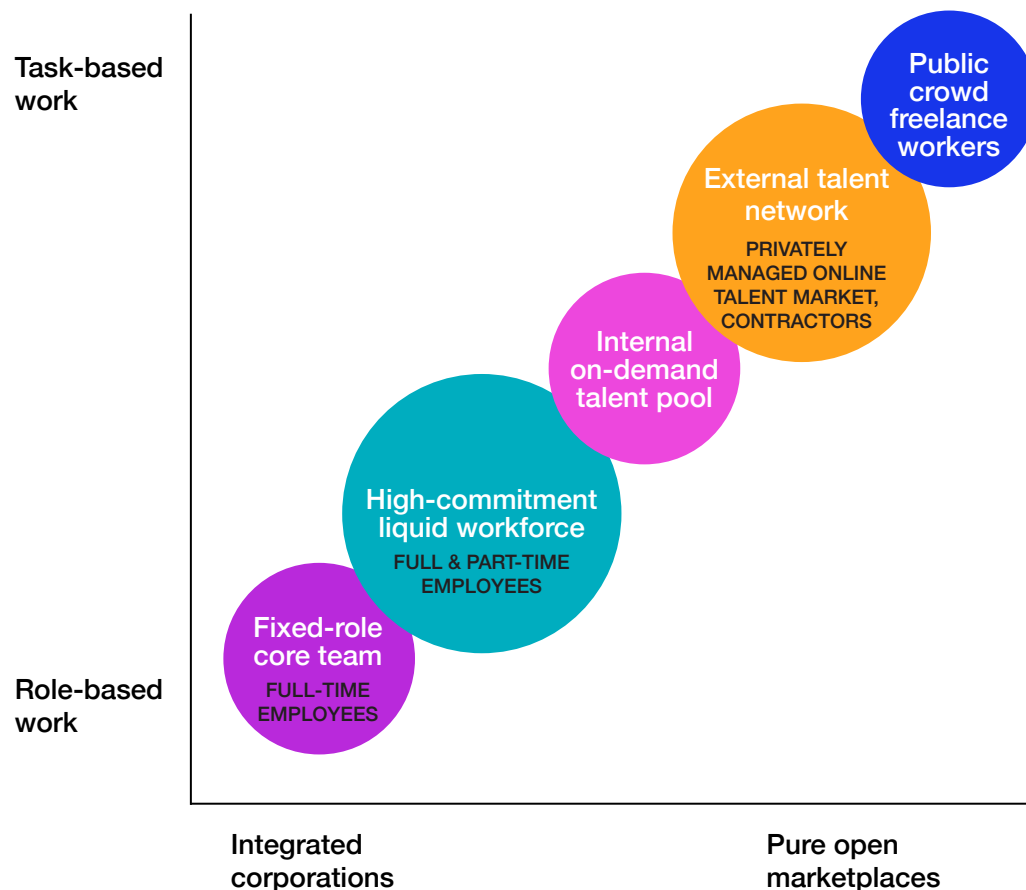
Platforms that enable people and companies to easily access labour pools have also contributed to a new staffing model that takes advantage of the gig economy to fill the need for task-based labourers. Figure 3 below delineates a model that is widely understood to characterize the direction of travel for many businesses. While a small core staff is retained, the majority of the roles in a workforce are unbundled to some degree (Accenture Insurance, 2017; Johal & Thirgood, 2016). This unbundling can take the form of a "liquid workforce," wherein people are moved from role to role as required in the business, or this unbundling may be codified even further in an internal

on-demand talent pool. For example, if a firm needs someone with web development skills to provide a web development service, instead of commissioning an external consultant or hiring a new web developer, they could tap into an internal database to identify which of their staff members have the skills to temporarily join a different team to carry out the task. External talent networks are another step removed from role-based work. These privately managed talent markets connect businesses with task needs to independent contractors and self-employed workers who make themselves available for contracts. The final form of unbundled, task-based work takes the form of the freelance workers many of us think about when we think about gig workers.

Figure 3 illustrates how Canadian businesses are invested in role unbundling even among employees. We can expect Canadians to continue to supply temporary labour through platform-mediated gig work as long as firms continue to organize their teams in ways conducive to the inclusion of freelancers.

FIGURE 3

A trajectory of unbundling: From role to task across integrated corporations to open marketplaces

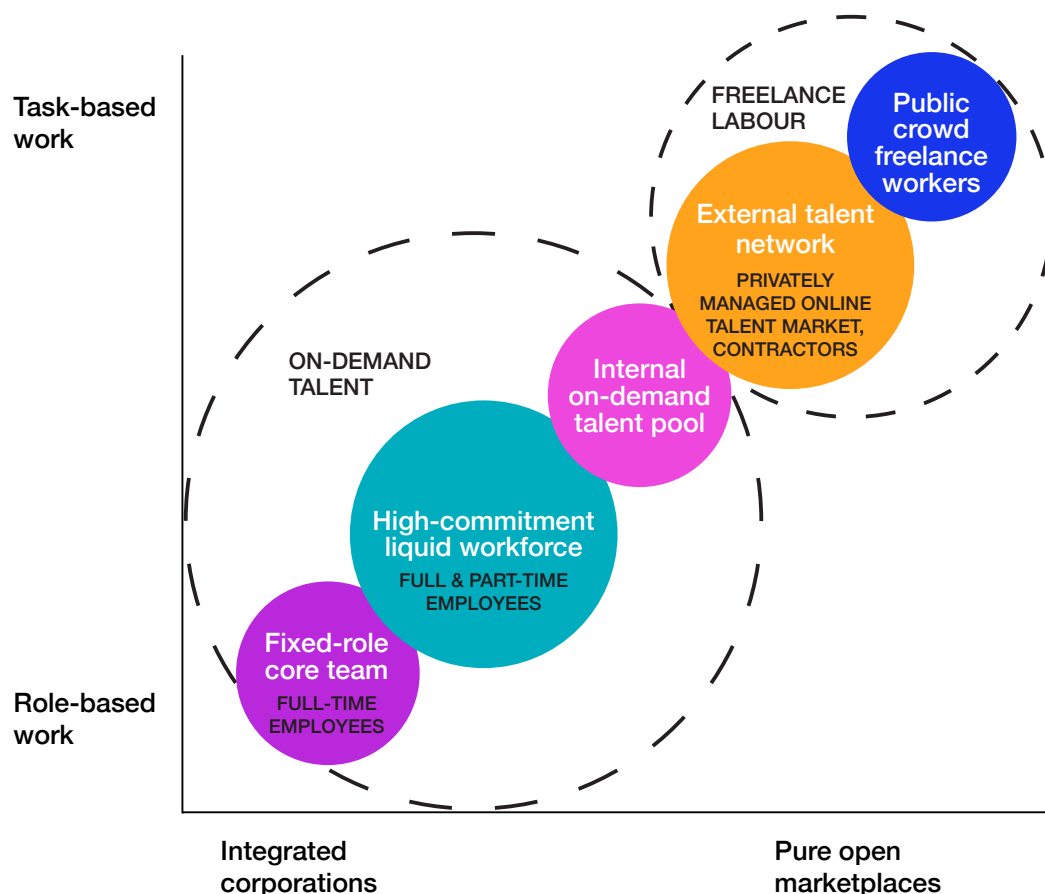


Source: Modified from Accenture Insurance, 2017.

In Figure 4, we overlay a distinction between freelance labour and on-demand talent onto the model from Figure 3. While all gig work is of this nature—freelance and on demand—we see below that segments of salaried income earners now also supply on-demand talent. The overlay is shown with a broken line to illustrate an inexact boundary between each category of worker. This trend in business suggests that statistical data on who is earning in the gig (unincorporated sole proprietor) category versus those earning in the traditional economy (either T4 earners or sole proprietors with business numbers) only represents the tip of the iceberg, with T4 earner roles being further unbundled from jobs into tasks (Chhabra, 2018). Accenture Insurance (2017) predicts that on-demand labour and corporate investment in on-demand labour pools will be a primary driver of economic growth in emergent economies. In summary, the growth of the gig economy is happening in tandem with unbundling of roles and with a trend towards highly flexible “liquid” workforces across employment types.

FIGURE 4

On-demand versus freelance labour within and beyond corporations



Source: Modified from Accenture Insurance, 2017.

Another study, summarized in Table 2, defines a typology based on Intuit's 2017 report on gig worker segments and a LinkedIn ProFinder Survey (Bose, 2017). Using this data, researchers define one category of gig worker as the "side gigger," noting that "side giggers" are likely to have another job and make an average of 19 percent of their total income through gig work. Another category of gig worker, the "substituter," uses gig work to make up income after a job loss, making about 22 percent of their income from each gig and putting together multiple gigs just until they can get a role-based, stable job. "Career freelancers" are considered quite different again; they are giggers who pursue gig work in order to network, gain skills, and develop their careers, and they generate about 26 percent of their income through the average gig contract. "Business builders" supplement or expand an existing business using gig platforms and earn about 30 percent of their income through their current gig. "Passionistas" are the last category of gigger in this typology, which refers to well-educated giggers who work the least and are paid the best, earning about 25 percent of their income from their average gig. In this typology, gig workers earn an average of \$7,600 to \$12,300 USD annually from their gig work. We do not know from this model what proportion of gig workers constitutes each type.

TABLE 2

Intuit's 2017 report on gig worker segments and a LinkedIn ProFinder Survey typology of five gig workers

	Side giggers	Substituters	Career freelancers	Business builders	Passionistas
How much of their income are they making through their current gig?	19%	22%	26%	30%	25%
How much do they make gigging in a year? (USD)	\$7,600	\$9,400	\$9,700	\$12,300	\$9,000
Education level	57% have a Bachelor's degree or higher	59% have a Bachelor's degree or higher	52% have a Bachelor's degree or higher	54% have a Bachelor's degree or higher	70% have a Bachelor's degree or higher
Other job?	Yes, they are likely to have another job	No, they do gig work between bouts of employment	Yes, although may do gigging instead of a standard jobs in order to gain skills or facilitate a career move	Yes, they are gigging to supplement or expand an existing business venture	Yes, they work the least often in the gig economy although get paid the most for their hours

Source: Adapted from Bose, 2017.

While this typology gives us some interesting characterizations of gig workers based on averages, gig workers constitute a population where differences matter enough that what is true for the average cannot be usefully reduced or generalized. While the median net total income for a gig worker in Canada in 2016 was \$4,303, we know that gig workers make a wide range of incomes (Jeon et al., 2019). The majority of gig workers net less than \$45,000 CAD, and we know that the prevalence of gig work is twice as high in the lower 40 percent of income earners than in the top 60 percent (Jeon et al., 2019). Still, there are also very high earners in the gig economy. Data from the Canadian Employer–Employee Dynamics Database (CEEDD) reported in Jeon et al. (2019) note that 5 percent of gig income earners net more than about \$45,000, though the top range of this income bracket is not publicly available nor reported in the study.

Similarly, a typology drawn up by the McKinsey Global Institute based on research conducted with about 8,000 American and European survey respondents sought to divide gig workers based on two dimensions: choice and the proportion of income made through gig work (Manyika et al., 2016). Their typology, re-created in Table 3 below, suggests that gig workers can be divided along a spectrum of those who are trapped into supplementing their income with gigs through financial need and those who freely choose to make most of their income through gig work because of the benefits it offers. While we feel these dimensions begin to deal with the elements of power, choice, and control and are very important to understanding gig work, we again find that these concepts of choice and control are insufficiently accounted for in the typology.

In Canada, only the top 5 percent of gig work earners net more than \$45,000 a year (Jeon et al., 2019). If this data reported by Manyika et al. (2016) is accurate, then we may well assume that the vast majority of the 44 percent of all gig workers who earn their primary income gigging (both in the preferred and out of necessity categories) are accruing less than \$45,000.

TABLE 3

Share of working-age population in gig work

	Primary income	Supplemental income
Preferred choice	Free agents 49 million people 30% of all gig workers	Casual earners 64 million 40% of all gig workers
Out of necessity	Reluctants 23 million 14% of all gig workers	Financially strapped 26 million 16% of all gig workers

Source: Developed from Manyika et al., 2016.

We can ask further questions thrown up by this data related to how peoples' experiences of gig work relate to other household characteristics—are gig workers more likely than others to be secondary earners in dual-income households? And how does jobs satisfaction and choice relate to the pressure of gig workers to provide financially?

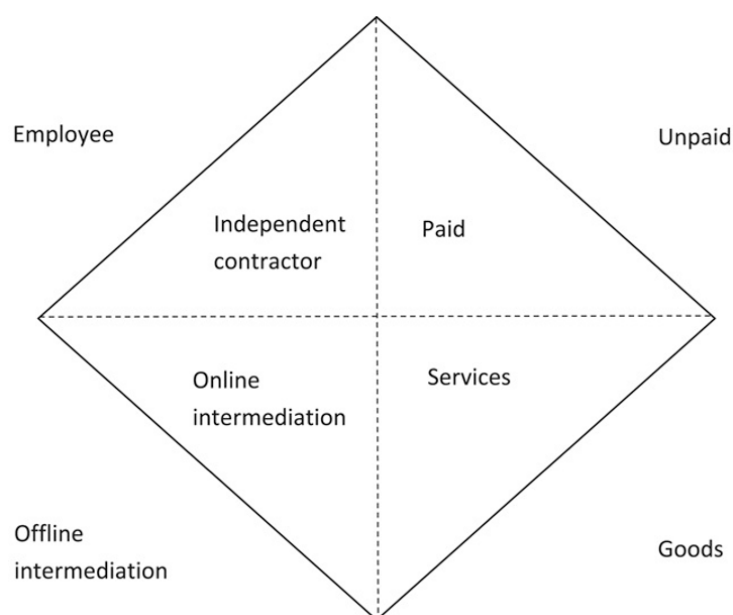
Another way researchers have sought to categorize gig workers is through a consideration not of archetypes but of dimensions. Koutsimpogiorgos et al., (2020) conceptualize the gig worker experience as moderated through four dimensions, replicated in Figure 5. This model suggests that four dimensions moderate and characterize the different forms of gig work a person might conduct, aiming to capture all of the variations possible. According to their diagram, a gig worker is usually a paid, service-providing, independent contractor who accesses gigs through online platforms.

However—and Koutsimpogiorgos et al., (2020) allow for this in their accompanying description—gig workers do also blur the lines. For example, gig workers conduct a significant amount of unpaid work in order to market themselves online and often conduct their work offline despite initiating the transaction online. In Figure 5, the area inside the square represents gig work, while the area outside the square represents non-gig work.

In addition to income, benefits and pensions frequently feature in the conversation of the tradeoffs and risks workers experience when they enter into any type of self-employment. For both men and women, analysis of data from the CEEDD shows that there is often a spike in income derived from Employment Insurance (EI) benefits the year prior to entering gig work, followed by a drop after entry into gig work (Jeon et al., 2019). EI eligibility criteria brought together with this data would suggest that, for many,

FIGURE 5

Four dimensions that moderate and characterize different forms of gig work



Source: Replicated from Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020.

a period of unemployment precedes entry into gig work, providing evidence of a push, rather than a pull, into gig work. Other studies have measured trends of financial distress immediately preceding gig work entry, also suggesting the influence of environmental push factors (Kousta, 2019). These gig workers may share characteristics with the “reluctants” from the Manyika et al. (2016) typology or the “substituters” from Bose (2017) typology. Reluctants and substituters both get involved in gig work because of a loss of regular employment hours or because of inadequacy of their main income.

Once involved with self-employment, EI eligibility changes, and many have raised alarms that the increasing number of Canadians choosing gig work indicates a corresponding increase of vulnerability, as people earning solely through self-employment forego several forms of employee benefits and labour protections (Jackson et al., 2017; Mumby, 2019). Many benefits are only available for employees, and studies have found that both health insurance enrolment and pension enrolment rates are lower for self-employed workers compared to employees (Jackson et al., 2017). Some government programs are designed to provide support specifically to self-employed Canadians; however, it is common for sole proprietors to misunderstand and/or be unaware of the support available to them (Hilbrecht, 2015). Further, employment supports available to entrepreneurs and registered business operators are not available to gig workers.

As gig work grows in popularity in many countries, it may also be part of an overarching global trend towards the digitization of workplaces and the unbundling of roles into constitutive tasks. Some gig workers are vulnerable, but they are not without agency. As we see above, many people enter into gig work freely, choosing it in order to supplement their incomes or even to offer skills development opportunities, such as “career freelancers” and “business builders” identified by Bose (2017). Still, social policy and labour rights experts are right to worry that the gig workers of today may not have the pension supports, the health insurance packages, or the employee benefits that could protect them through changes such as job loss, the sudden onset of disability, retirement, or an economic downturn caused by a pandemic.

Some studies have recommended that Canada introduce a portable benefits scheme that would attach to individuals rather than to their employers or their employee status (Johal & Cukier, 2019; Lobel, 2019). This would help ensure that gig workers—in fact, all self-employed workers—are protected alongside employees in the case of job loss or hours reductions. Interestingly, recently published Statistics Canada data shows that the number of Canadian trustee pension funds and fund members are dropping in Canada. The latest data from the Census of Trustee Pension Funds survey shows that the discrete number of funds stagnated between 2012 and 2014 and then dropped by 3 percentage points between 2014 and 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2020b). Similarly, the number of fund members grew between each biannual data collection event between 2008 and 2014, only to drop between 2014 and 2016. The assets of trustee pension funds pay for about half of Canadians’ pensions.

We developed the typology below as a way to bring our understanding of gig worker experiences in line with what we know about the experience of people's relationships with work, as well as what we know about how environmental factors influence our economic and social opportunities. This typology builds on the work conducted above and delves more deeply into the human, social, and economic factors that precede a person's entry into gig work and that moderate their opportunities and experiences. We take the view that, while gig workers are in a special employment relationship that is unique from both employed and other self-employed workers, the same factors matter across employee categories and understanding how gig work fits as an extension of standard employment relations can inform policy for gig work. Further, we characterize what is actually unique about gig work in order to get specific about how social policies for gig work should differ from those designed for other self-employed or employed workers.



Human, social, and economic capital: Towards a new typology of gig work

Based on a secondary literature review conducted earlier this year (Ziegler et al., 2020), as well as the latest reports and research from policy, academia, and business spheres, we identify three dimensions as the core thematic areas through which to organize and interpret gig work. Importantly, we want to define Canadian gig work at the broadest level possible while also centering the experiences of the gig worker. These themes are control, relatedness, and motivation.

We identify these dimensions as recurrent ways through which to portray and understand the nature of gig work and the experiences of gig workers. However, these dimensions are not used to define the typology in a matrix. Instead, these dimensions act as over-arching themes through which each type of gig worker defined in our typology is analyzed. Access to capital is the main factor used to sort gig workers in our matrix, while the dimensions of control, relatedness, and motivation are used to systematically analyze them using a common frame. To understand how workers in Canada's rapidly growing gig economy navigate and experience their work, this research focuses on gig work that presents new regulatory challenges and remains relatively understudied.

While it is essential to acknowledge that gig work is an old concept (precarious employment has a long history that is not necessarily technology-enabled), the focus of this research is of unprecedented importance now because gig work represents challenges to our current regulatory labour landscape. Further, gig work holds potentially negative consequences for the financial, emotional, and physical health and safety of workers, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While it is essential to acknowledge that gig work is an old concept, the focus of this research is of unprecedented importance now because gig work represents challenges to our current regulatory labour landscape.



In developing our typology, we asked the following research questions as we probed the literature:

- > Who are gig workers in Canada?
- > How do they navigate and experience their work?
- > How do identities shape these dynamics in Canada?

Within this frame, a set of research focus areas were further identified:

> **Access**

How and why do gig workers gain access and entry to the gig economy?

> **Movement**

How and why do gig workers move around and within the gig economy?

> **Capital**

What are the types of currencies being exchanged, and why?

These three focus areas brought to light three additional insights that we organized further into three key themes:

- > The meaning of work
- > The organization of work and workers
- > The shifting and bartering of risk

Within each theme, we generated a set of insights specific to how the gig economy represents a historic shift in the Canadian economy and labour market. Drilling down on the insights derived from this research frame brought us the below gig worker typology that we propose as a new way to classify and understand gig workers.

Gig worker types

Based on the literature reviewed and on an analysis of common gig work platforms available in Canada, a typology of gig workers was developed using points of entry into the Canadian gig economy as a common framework. These points of entry are strongly influenced by the level of capital that workers are willing or able to leverage. Specifically, the level of skill (human capital) that a gig worker is willing and able to contribute, and the amount of investment (economic capital) they are willing or able to invest in assets, service offerings, knowledge or experience, and the amount of social capital they are willing and able to leverage. Based on this, a typology delineating four types of gig workers in Canada was developed (see Table 4):

- > The Platform Professional
- > The Entrepreneurial Influencer
- > The Asset Enabler
- > The Tasker

TABLE 4

A gig work typology based on human, social, and economic capital

		Gig worker type			
		Platform Professional	Entrepreneurial Influencer	Asset Enabler	Tasker
Capital requirements for access	Economic capital	High	Low	High	Low
	Human capital	High	High	Low	Low
	Social capital	High	High	High	Low

It is important to note that an individual platform may engage with gig workers across the typology and that a single worker may embody multiple gig worker types or may grow and move within these types at different moments along their career.

The Platform Professional

The Platform Professional must make a large economic investment and have a high level of skill or human capital for access.



Characteristics of work

Consulting model:

Work mimics a consulting work model. For example, it follows the idea of selling individual capabilities for a contract fee to execute a wide variety of tasks.

Specialized skillsets:

Work typically requires more specialized skillsets to be executed (specialties can be built through either education or experience).

Individual or small business markets:

Work is available for either small business professionals or individual consultants for hire.

Deskilling work:

While Platform Professionals need to have skills to participate in their work, platforms that support Platform Professionals can be seen to be de-skilling work. They allow someone with a range of professional skills to isolate the skills they want to leverage for income and help that person to sell only those skills to the exclusion of others. This is similar for all gig workers, but perhaps in this category we see the largest number of skills being stripped away from a qualified professional in order that they may conduct specified tasks.

Hypotheses about worker capital

Economic investment:

The Platform Professional has and chooses to invest moderate to high economic capital in assets or skills required for the gig. This can look like investment in small business staff and overhead or individual education and experience.

Skills required:

This gig worker has skills and qualifications that they could take to the standard workforce or use to start their own business, but they use gig platforms to leverage their high skill levels for maximum returns.

Core examples

Companies that offer gig work that most closely demonstrates this gig worker type in Canada include²:

TALMIX

Slogan:

“The home of business talent.”

Description:

Online professional talent marketplace that works to connect businesses to talent, for all their strategic and executive resources.

Reasoning:

Talmix is a core example of the Platform Professional gig worker type because workers require a high level of skill and economic investment (in obtaining that skill) in order to participate in the work. Talmix is an example of the professional service consulting model, digitized. Workers are highly educated/experienced and sell their services project-to-project as freelance workers. One assumption to test in this example is whether workers need to be formally educated in order to participate.

Website:

talmix.com

JIFFY

Slogan:

“Home maintenance booked when you need it.”

Description:

Web and mobile platform that connects homeowners with service providers in real time, based on proximity and availability.

Reasoning:

Jiffy is a core example of the Platform Professional gig worker type because workers require a high degree of skill and economic investment (in building their businesses) in order to participate in the work. Jiffy is different than labour platforms like TaskRabbit because it provides an online marketplace to place on-demand home maintenance requests to small businesses, acting as a marketplace for their labour. One assumption to test in this example is whether the platform contributes to small business marketing opportunities or a race to the bottom (in skill and pricing of labour).

Website:

jiffyondemand.com

² While not exhaustive list, these examples are provided to ground the typology and illustrate the essential character of each type.

UPWORK

Slogan:

“In-demand talent, on-demand.”

Description:

Global freelancing platform where businesses and independent professionals connect and collaborate remotely.

Reasoning:

Upwork is a core example of the Platform Professional gig worker type because workers require a high degree of skill and economic investment (in obtaining that skill) in order to participate in the work. Upwork is the largest global freelancer platform. It is similar to Talmix in that it connects clients and freelance workers for a wide variety of services. The most visible difference seems to be that it has a broader scope of services than Talmix (which more closely targets “professional services” like a traditional consulting firm). Similar to Talmix, one assumption to test in this example is whether workers need to be formally educated in order to participate and whether requirements differ between the platforms.

Website:

upwork.com

99DESIGNS

Slogan:

“Design makes anything possible.”

Description:

Freelancer platform that connects contract graphic designers to clients.

Reasoning:

99Designs is a core example of the Platform Professional gig worker type because workers require a high degree of skill and economic investment (in obtaining that skill) in order to participate in the work. Similar to the other examples, designers can respond to design briefs or design competitions on this platform to sell their services—freelance—to clients that need them. Questions about the degree to which workers require formal education to participate on this platform should be tested, though the assumption is that there is less of a focus on formal education here and more on a portfolio of work.

Website: 99designs.ca

Peripheral examples

Companies that offer gig work that demonstrates many, but not all, of the Platform Professional characteristics in Canada include:

FIVERR

Slogan:

“Find your favorite freelancer.”

Description:

Online marketplace for freelance services to connect to customers worldwide.

Reasoning:

While Fiverr operates similarly to other core examples of the “Platform Professional” gig worker type (it’s an online marketplace connecting freelance work to freelance requests), Fiverr exists as a peripheral example because of its historical connection to low-skill requests. While it’s possible to request a high-skill worker through Fiverr for services like social media marketing or computer programming, clients can also post requests that are more comical or ridiculous in nature, for example, for someone to film themselves getting hit in the face with cream pies.

Website:

[fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com)

The Entrepreneurial Influencer

The Entrepreneurial Influencer is unique in that they rely on a high level of social capital and skill for success but do not require a high level of economic investment for access.



Characteristics of work

Not a given:

Work (or success in work) for the Entrepreneurial Influencer is not a guarantee. The ability to do work relies heavily on the creative input from the individual.

Social capital:

To a larger degree than for gig workers in the other categories, for Entrepreneurial Influencer's social capital becomes a new source of currency—in this work, crowdsourced attention (as a result of skill, popularity, or novelty) is an essential and highly valued asset.

Economic opportunity:

For the Entrepreneurial Influencer, there is a possibility of high economic reward for successful work, which resembles more traditional risk-versus-reward relationships for entrepreneurs. There is not, however, a long-term guarantee. Success is dependent on social taste.

Hypotheses about worker capital

Economic investment:

For the Entrepreneurial Influencer, economic capital is not necessarily required to participate in this work; having capital alone without creative skill is not enough. However, like other types of entrepreneurial activity, having economic capital to invest is typically disproportionately advantageous to those who do.

Skills required:

The worker is likely to have high skill to invest in the gig (although anomalies exist that prove high skill is not always required).

Core examples

Companies that offer gig work that most closely demonstrates this gig worker type in Canada include:

YOUTUBE

Slogan:

“Broadcast yourself.”

Description:

Online video sharing platform. YouTube allows users to upload and interact with on-demand media content worldwide, on a self-serve, open-access basis.

Reasoning:

While initially designed as a free, self-serve video-sharing platform, YouTube now holds much of the same power it was initially created to subvert. Now, YouTube is where superstars are discovered, the news is broadcast, and entertainers make a full-time—albeit gig-based—living. YouTube is a core example of the Entrepreneurial Influencer because it demonstrates that:

Skill, not capital is essential:

While you don’t need a great deal of economic investment to participate, novelty, talent, or creativity (i.e., high skill) are essential.

Work is not a guarantee:

“Work” (or paid opportunities) is not a guarantee (a worker’s success can disappear as quickly as it appears). Once moderate success has been established (in the form of a following), high economic investment can be advantageous.

High economic benefit:

Once successful, workers stand to benefit greatly from their investment (as opposed to other forms of gig work).

Website:

youtube.com

INSTAGRAM

Slogan:

“Capture and share the world’s moment.”

Description:

Photo-sharing app that allows users to upload photos and videos to a public or pre-determined audience.

Reasoning:

While initially designed as a social media photo-sharing platform, Instagram “influencers” have been increasingly able to monetize their influence on the platform with vehicles like paid promotions and direct links to e-commerce sites. #gigeconomy is now common in the lexicon of social media influencers who leverage their online following to generate sales. Instagram is a core example of the Entrepreneurial Influencer type for many of the same reasons that YouTube is. Economic investment is certainly an advantage for success, but typically only if the worker is able to trade on some degree of novelty, creativity, or skill to establish their influence. It too provides no guarantee of long-term success, but the worker does stand to benefit financially if they are successful, mirroring a more traditional entrepreneurial cost–benefit exchange of risk.

Website:

[instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com)

KICKSTARTER

Slogan:

“Help bring creative projects to life.”

Description:

Global crowdfunding platform that connects ideas to funding.

Reasoning:

Like Instagram and YouTube, Kickstarter requires high skill (in the form of creativity or novelty), above all else, to participate. With Kickstarter, success (i.e., obtaining funding) is only achieved if you successfully meet the crowdfunding goals of your target. This typically relies on your ability to demonstrate the creativity and novelty of your business or product idea. Kickstarter has some of the same overall characteristics as YouTube and Instagram—no guarantee of work, high skill required, low economic investment to participate—but is different in that participants are typically not reliant on Kickstarter for their long-term income earning efforts. Users generally obtain funding to begin a company or launch a product.

Website:

[kickstarter.com](https://www.kickstarter.com)

Peripheral examples

Companies that offer gig work that demonstrates many, but not all, of the Entrepreneurial Influencer characteristics in Canada include:

AIRBNB

Slogan:

“Belong anywhere.”

Description:

Online marketplace for travel accommodations and tourist experiences. The company does not own any of the real-estate listings, nor does it host events. Instead it acts as a broker receiving commissions from each booking.

Reasoning:

Airbnb is a peripheral example of the Entrepreneurial Influencer gig worker type because its workers are a hybrid across the worker typology framework. Airbnb workers are like Asset Enablers in that they require real estate assets (in the form of rented or owned property) in order to participate (i.e., they must make a high investment). However, Airbnb workers are more similar to Entrepreneurial Influencers in that they require high skill, because work on Airbnb relies on creative experiences sold by well-curated social media marketing campaigns and personal influence.

Website:

airbnb.ca

The Asset Enabler

The Asset Enabler is required to make a large economic investment, such as through the use of a personal durable asset such as a car or home, while needing a lower level of human capital or skills to execute the work. For the purposes of this typology, “asset” is used to refer to property or “durable assets.”



Characteristics of work

Asset dependent:

For Asset Enablers, work depends on the availability of an individually owned asset, such as a car that they own/lease or a property/ accommodation that they own/rent.

Service by nature:

The Asset Enabler’s work is service based in nature, but directly tied to an asset. For example, an Uber driver is in the business of service, but that service is dependent on their asset.

Hypotheses about worker capital

Economic investment:

The worker has and chooses to invest moderate to high economic capital in an asset for the gig. This economic capital may be in the form of available cash or available debt.

Skills required:

This category of gig worker requires few entry-level skills, so the appeal of the work may also be that an asset can be substituted for human capital/skills and qualifications.

Core examples

Companies that offer gig work that most closely demonstrates this gig worker type in Canada include:

UBER

Slogan:

“Your day belongs to you.”

Description:

A globally operating, technology-based, ride-hailing platform whose services are accessed through a mobile app.

Reasoning:

Uber is a quintessential example of the Asset Enabler gig worker type. While the labour requires little skill overall, the worker’s ability to participate in this labour market is entirely dependent on their ownership of an asset (a vehicle). The asset becomes both the vehicle to participation in the labour market and the barrier to entry.

Website:

uber.com

LYFT

Slogan:

“Riding is the new driving.”

Description:

A globally operating, technology-based, ride-hailing platform whose services are accessed through a mobile app.

Reasoning:

Lyft is one of the main competitors to Uber and can be understood as a core example of the Asset Enabler for the same reason: access to the low skill labour market depends on the worker’s ownership of an asset (a vehicle). In both instances, asset ownership can be the result of excess capital or the ability to incur debt.

Website:

lyft.com

HOMEAWAY

Slogan:

“Your home, away from home.”

Description:

Online vacation rental marketplace.

Reasoning:

HomeAway operates like a traditional vacation property rental market, online. “Workers” in this context are granted access to this online market through the direct ownership of their real estate asset. Some labour is required for the asset to be utilized, but it more closely resembles a rental market with some labour than a service market with some assets.

HomeAway is considered to be low skill because the worker’s labour isn’t directly required as a service in order for the asset to become utilized (as is the case for an Uber driver), and because it doesn’t require or heavily rely on digital or social media marketing influence (like Airbnb) to participate.

Website:

homeaway.com

TURO

Slogan:

“Way better than a rental car.”

Description:

Peer-to-peer car sharing company.

Reasoning:

Turo is an example of the Asset Enabler gig worker type because it resembles more of a traditional rental market than a service market that relies on labour. It’s like Uber without the driver.

Website:

turo.com

OUTDOORSY

Slogan:

“Passionate people unlocking the outdoors.”

Description:

Multinational peer-to-peer RV rental platform.

Reasoning:

Outdoorsy is an example of the Asset Enabler gig worker type because it resembles more of a traditional rental market than a service market that relies on labour. It's like Uber without the driver, for road trips.

Website:

outdoorsy.com/

The Tasker

The Tasker faces the lowest-barrier point of entry into the gig economy and generally requires low economic investment and low skill.



Characteristics of work

1:1 return on investment:

For Taskers, return on investment is directly correlated to the amount of labour—or time—invested. For example: Taskers make money from hard work (working multiple jobs, long hours etc.), not creativity or entrepreneurialism.

Filling the gaps:

Taskers' work focuses on filling the (often undesirable) task gaps in the lives of businesses or individuals. For example: picking up laundry, doing the cleaning, walking the dog, or tagging photos.

Visibility:

Tasker work can often be done without being seen.

Hypotheses about worker capital

Economic investment:

Taskers either have or choose to invest little economic capital in the gig.

Skills required:

Taskers either have or choose to invest little or low-valued skills in the gig.

Core examples

Companies that offer gig work that most closely demonstrates this gig worker type in Canada include:

TASKRABBIT

Slogan:

“Revolutionizing everyday work.”

Description:

Online marketplace that matches freelance labour consumers with on-demand help with everyday tasks.

Reasoning:

TaskRabbit offers a quintessential example of the Tasker gig worker type. Work is made available to workers in the form of tasks that fill the gaps in the lives of workers or businesses. These tasks are often undesirable or menial in nature (e.g., laundry pick up, kitchen cleaning, furniture assembling etc.). As a result, the work can often seem “invisible.”

Website:

taskrabbit.ca

FOODORA (no longer operating in Canadian markets)

Slogan:

“Bringing good food into your everyday.”

Description:

Multinational online food delivery brand that delivers on-demand orders from restaurants to customers’ homes, usually via bike.

Reasoning:

Foodora is also a core examples of the Tasker gig worker type—the labour is simple in nature and requires little unique investment from the worker (other than time). Workers as part of Foodora can likely profit from hard work (working many hours or multiple jobs), but not the application of creative or entrepreneurial skills.

Website:

foodora.ca

Peripheral examples

Companies that offer gig work that demonstrates many, but not all, of the Tasker characteristics in Canada include:

AMAZON MECHANICAL TURK

Slogan:

“Access a global, on-demand, 24x7 workforce.”

Description:

This crowdsourcing website is designed for businesses/task requesters to find and hire “crowd workers” from any location to conduct on-demand work that computers are currently unable to do from automatable functions. “Requesters” post jobs, or “Human Intelligence Tasks” (HITs), such as identifying content in an image or video, drafting product descriptions, or answering questions.

Reasoning:

Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) is similar to core examples of the Tasker gig worker type because the work can be seen as undesirable to the “requester” and is invisible in nature. For example, many tasks on AMT exist because a computer cannot do them independently, but the work is repetitive and menial enough to be outsourced to an invisible worker (e.g., image tagging). AMT is considered a peripheral example of the Tasker gig worker type because, while many tasks associated with the platform can be “low skill” (or “de-skilled”), it’s possible that higher skill work exists (e.g., coding) because of the digital nature of the service platform.

Website:

mturk.com

ROVER

Slogan:

“Good dogs, good people.”

Description:

Online marketplace for people to buy and sell pet services including pet sitting, dog boarding, and dog walking.

Reasoning:

Rover is similar to the core Tasker gig worker type because the work requires low economic investment to participate, exists to fill a gap in the lives of individuals, and can often be done without persistent or direct contact with the client (e.g., dogs are walked

while the client is at work). Rover is considered a peripheral example, however, because of the caretaking nature of the work. Since workers are responsible for something that is highly valuable to the client (the well-being of their pet), it's debatable whether this example is as "low skill" as other core examples of this type.

Website:

[rover.com/ca/](https://www.rover.com/ca/)

SOSSITTER

Slogan:

"Helping families since 2009."

Description:

Online marketplace connecting families to babysitting, nannying and eldercare providers. SOSsitter is not a staffing agency, but an intermediary that connects families to caregivers that best suit their needs.

Reasoning:

SOSsitter presents many of the same challenges to the Tasker gig worker type as Rover. An online marketplace for caregiving opportunities (babysitting, nannying, and eldercare), it could be argued that SOSsitter is an example of the Tasker because the work exists to fill a gap in the lives of individuals and is often seen as undesirable (because of its generally low paid nature). However, low pay in this case does not always mean low skill, making SOSsitter a peripheral example of this type.

Website:

[sossitter.ca](https://www.sossitter.ca)



Implications of this typology for future research

We found that there are different types and tiers of gig workers, such as gig workers with low skills versus those with high skills. We also found that access to capital largely determines how easy it is for an individual to enter the gig economy and what type of work they can conduct. We found that three types of capital interfaced with the gig economy to create distinct types of gig workers:

> **Economic capital:**

The money a gig worker has available to invest and the physical assets at their disposal (e.g., car, bicycle, camera equipment)

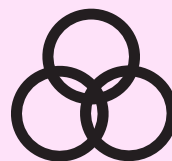
> **Human capital:**

The skills or credentials a worker has, which dictate their ability to perform certain types of work or tasks, from simple and “undesirable” to complex and specialized.

> **Social capital:**

A worker’s ability to self-brand and assert influence on others and their connection to strong personal relationships and networks that they use to succeed in personal/professional endeavours.

This typology improves upon others available by acknowledging a wider array of conditions required for entry into gig work, which allows for a more nuanced analysis of gig worker agency and experience. By addressing the known conditions of social, human, and economic capital required for entry, we are given clues about the demographics of gig workers and who they are, as well as insights into the inequalities that exist across the spectrum of gig work. By triangulating different forms of capital (economic, human, and social), and thinking about the utility of each under different conditions of work (i.e., different categories of gig workers), we begin to see inequalities in both who gets access to particular forms of capital as well as how valuable that capital is under certain work conditions, depending on other social factors associated with worker identities. For example, a new immigrant with an engineering degree unrecognized in Canada might have human capital (skills) and economic capital (savings)



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upon entry to Canada, but not social capital, lacking the networks required to get a job related to their degree. Or a young person might not have economic capital on hand (income or savings) or much human capital (education or qualifications), but might have the social capital (youth and performance skills) necessary to do gig work as a brand ambassador. The point we aim to make by complicating the story of gig work entry is that not everyone who does gig work gets into gig work for the same reasons, nor do they get the same outputs from it. Furthermore, not everyone can access gig work or the same types of gig work, which means that people have differing levels of agency around gig work. There are ceilings and barriers for different types of gig work.

The meaning of gig work can vary, from being a temporary career stop-off point to the way a person earns all their income for many years. Perhaps the solution to job disintegration from roles to tasks is for gig workers to identify less with their organization and more with the identity of gigging. Perhaps we can take the best of technology-enabled gig work (removal of friction), leaving behind the worst (regulatory arbitrage), and support gig workers and others in understanding the full array of options and mobility pathways that are available in the gig economy. While some gig workers—those with high amounts of social capital—may already work across platforms and sectors, there is perhaps a need to have greater dialogue about the trade offs and options available. For example, someone who has been driving for Uber might lack human or social capital, but having the economic capital of the asset of the car, they might be interested to know what other sorts of gigs are available that can be accessed through vehicle ownership, such as other types of couriership. Or, understanding how they can move from Asset Enabler to Platform Professional, they may wish to sell their car, invest in further training, and start gigging as a Platform Professional.

Future research

Policy needs a nuanced and detailed understanding of the existing landscape of gig work—the inequities, the risks, and the opportunities for job creation and meaningful employment. A one-size-fits-all policy solution does not exist for gig workers, and gig work is neither universally good nor bad for workers. As we’ve shown, the specifics of gig workers’ experiences are important for understanding how to protect workers’ rights while recognizing the appeal of loose labour market attachment for many workers.

It is important to think through how gig workers operate within the Canadian workforce. Someone who is gig working today may have been employed as a standard worker last year and might aspire to be self-employed with a registered business number next year. Like all workers in Canada, gig workers would benefit from skills development opportunities and need policies that will protect them from income loss due to workforce disruption caused by automation and technological advancement. It is in the interests of provincial, territorial, and the federal governments to understand how to support and protect people who conduct gig work. Further, we need to more thoroughly understand how gig work might operate as a first step on a career path toward business ownership or, in some cases, as a step backwards for qualified immigrants with systemically unrecognized credentials.



It’s essential to tease apart the role of structure and agency in the Canadian gig economy—who has access and choices and who does not—so that policy discussions and decision making can ensure economic and social inclusion for all workers. Gig workers make up a growing component of the Canadian labour force, and innovative policies are required to ensure that workers benefit holistically, over the short and long term, from the increased accessibility of gig work opportunities in Canada.

There are several obvious pressing questions around gig work, elaborated below, most of which pre-date, but are exacerbated by, technology-enabled gig work. These issues and areas of research were drawn out in the research and development of our typology, and they have particular relevance for skills development and worker protection policy and practice.

Firstly, we need to understand in more detail the differences between different types of gig workers in terms of their experiences, aspirations, and challenges and the broad implications of these differences for public policy. The typology in this paper acts as an applied framework that requires further validation through the addition of first-hand gig worker perspectives.

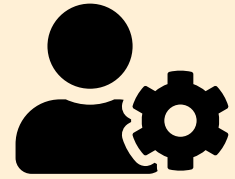
Secondly, we need to understand the implications of the changing nature of work for gig workers and how to address their needs for skill development based on their personal aspirations and existing aptitudes. This is particularly true for workers pushed into gig work who aspire to transition into more traditional employment.

Thirdly, we need to explore the full range of regulatory and policy options and their implications to ensure that gig workers have appropriate protection against exploitation and access to benefits. With increasing numbers of gig workers, there is additional impetus for discussions of basic income and portable benefits.

Finally, to the extent that many gig workers are self-employed and effectively running their own businesses, there is a need to understand which gig workers are part of the continuum of entrepreneurs and the skills and supports they need to operate their own ventures. Freelancers, for example, often lack basic business skills needed for success and may benefit from additional training and support.

The ability to apply the typology developed in this report with real gig workers across Canada would help to inform the dialogue around skills, training, and supports (social, economic, employer, and government), that is currently underdeveloped in the Canadian conversation around gig work.

We need to understand the implications of the changing nature of work for gig workers and how to address their needs for skill development based on their personal aspirations and existing aptitudes.



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