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TIME MANAGEMENT AS A STRATEGIC TOOL FOR FREELANCERS

MANAGEMENTUL TIMPULUI CA INSTRUMENT STRATEGIC PENTRU FREELANCERI

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Abstract: *Scop. Articolul, bazat pe un studiu empiric și o analiză a literaturii științifice, își propune să prezinte definiții ale conceptelor de „liber profesionist” și „precarizare”, arătând natura specifică a formelor flexibile de angajare și incertitudinea financiară. Apoi, prin realizarea unui sondaj în rândul freelancerilor, își propune să înțeleagă perspectiva acestei forme de angajare în ceea ce privește stabilitatea financiară. Scopul acestui articol este de a arăta că respondenții se tem de riscul precarității în legătură cu desfășurarea activităților profesionale ca freelanceri. Metodologie. Considerațiile din acest articol se bazează pe o analiză a literaturii și pe cercetări proprii ale autorului (un sondaj online realizat pe un grup de 160 de freelanceri). Implicații practice/Originalitate/Valoare. Cercetarea empirică efectuată a arătat cum se poate manifesta această problemă în viața indivizilor în contextul precarizării. Incertitudinea cu privire la venitul așteptat, lipsa unui loc de muncă stabil și accesul limitat la beneficii sociale sunt principalele aspecte ale precarizării. Persoanele afectate de acest fenomen se pot confrunta cu o incertitudine financiară constantă, care le afectează negativ calitatea vieții și sentimentul de stabilitate. Rezultatele acestei analize au aplicații practice importante, în special pentru persoanele care desfășoară activități independente, adică pentru lucrătorii temporari. Acestea permit înțelegerea specificității insecurității locului de muncă și oferă informații care pot fi utile în dezvoltarea de strategii pentru a face față acestei provocări.*
Cuvinte cheie: *management al timpului, freelancing, productivitate, economia gig, planificare strategică, instrumente digitale, autogestionare.*
JEL CLASSIFICATION: J22, J24, M54

INTRODUCTION

Freelance and self-employed workers are, arguably, older than employment itself. They have long been an integral part of the global workforce, yet considered as contingent, transitory or peripheral workers in organisations (Bidwell, 2009). Recently, the gig-economy has slowly redefined that vision, and has brought this way of work (back) into the public and academic consciousness (Keegan & Meijerink, 2022). Freelance and self-employed workers do core work of vital organisational importance, and contribute billions to national economies. Organisations that utilise freelancers are shown to be more productive and deliver greater value in a synergistic way that creates jobs rather than substitutes (Cross & Swart, 2022; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019).

When selecting productivity software for freelancers, company managers must carefully evaluate several key factors to ensure the solution fits diverse work styles and business needs. The best productivity software for freelance professionals offers core features like task management, time tracking, and seamless collaboration tools. Customizable workflows are essential, as freelancers often handle multiple projects simultaneously. Integration capabilities are equally important; software should connect smoothly with existing systems such as CRM or invoicing platforms to prevent data silos and reduce manual work.

The global productivity software market is projected to grow from $64.93 billion in 2024 to $75.52 billion in 2025, driven largely by increased digitalization and remote work demands. Within this, the freelance platforms market—a key segment where freelancer productivity statistics 2025 show high software adoption—is estimated between $5.58 billion and $7.33 billion in 2024, with

forecasts reaching up to $16.89 billion by 2029 or $14.39 billion by 2030. These figures imply robust compound annual growth rates between 17.7% and 19.1%, signaling strong momentum.

Choosing freelance productivity tools that scale requires balancing functionality, integration, and adaptability. Managers should also consider specific industry needs, from creative brainstorming to legal compliance. For companies handling financial tasks alongside freelancer management, exploring resources like top tax software can provide valuable complementary insights.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, the freelance economy has flourished, and a large number of gig workers have achieved employment through online labor platforms. According to a public report by Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, the number of flexible employment employees has reached 200 million, and the number of gig workers in China will reach 400 million in 2036, accounting for half of China's employment population (Guo et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, existing research on the impact of job autonomy on workers' mental states and behavior has focused on the traditional employment mode, with freelancers remaining understudied. Job autonomy is a typical characteristic of freelancers (Sundararajan, 2016). In the gig context, since the huge difference between the Online Labor Platform and the traditional employment organization in the control of the labor process, freelancers can freely decide the working time, place, rest time, and even determine the labor supply and salary level on the platform, which gives the work autonomous (Wu and Li, 2018).

Meanwhile, online labor platforms use algorithmic technology to implicitly regulate the labor process and compress the time for freelancers to complete tasks. Meanwhile, by increasing the reward for their work, they are induced to work more hours to earn more money (Ran and Zhao, 2023), and achieve "soft control" over them (Shapiro, 2018), leading to the "autonomy-control" paradox of workers with work autonomy showing longer working hours instead (Putnam et al., 2014). Therefore, despite the autonomy of freelancers' work, under the gig context, their' labor experience and working attitude will show unique characteristics (Huang, 2019). Workplace well-being describes the well-being of employees in the workplace (Warr, 1987), which refers to the positive evaluation and positive emotion of individuals on their work, which mainly comes from the satisfaction brought by the ability improvement, value realization of individuals in the process of completing task (Zheng et al., 2015).

As an important psychological factor, Workplace well-being is significantly correlated with employees' work behaviors and results (Wright and Cropanzano, 2004), and its importance in workplace is increasingly prominent (Singhal and Rastogi, 2018). Workplace well-being among gig workers will directly influences the healthy development of gig platforms. Existing studies on job autonomy and workplace well-being are all based on traditional employment models (Daniels and Guppy, 1994; Li et al., 2015), however, few studies have yet explored the perception of job autonomy of freelancers in the freelance economy and its impact.

In addition, previous studies have explored Work engagement (Bakker et al., 2014), work motivation (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011), job crafting (Slemp et al., 2015), intrinsic motivation (Nie et al., 2015) play a mediating role in the relationship between job autonomy and employee well-being. However, these studies are all based on a single cognitive perspective to explore the relationship between the two. Therefore, this study adopts the cognitive-affective processing system framework developed by Mischel and Shoda (1995) to investigate the logical relationship between job autonomy and workplace well-being and systematically reveal the mechanism of job autonomy's influence on workplace well-being.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research has been conducted from October 15, 2023 to November 5, 2023 by Emil Zelma. The participants in the research were freelance workers from Poland who during last 12 months earned income in areas such as:

• programming (create code used in the IT sector),

• computer graphics,
• copywriting,
• translating,
• transcribing,
• SEO optimization,
• social media and other forms of online marketing, and
• e-commerce.

The research method employed was an online survey, through which information was collected from N = 160 respondents (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1. Basic information regarding the research sample

Feature	Value
Age	
Dominant	29
Average	28.49
Maximum	38
Minimum	18
Variance	29.58
Standard deviation	5.44
Variance after skipping 10% extreme values	12.51
Standard deviation after skipping 10% extreme values	3.54
Experience (in years)	
Dominant	8
Average	7.64
Maximum	15
Minimum	1
Variance	18.67
Standard deviation	4.32
Variance after skipping 10% extreme values	10.48
Standard deviation after skipping 10% extreme values	3.24

Source: *Emil Zelma's Research Article*

The questionnaire and results of the study are presented below (Table 2).

RESEARCH RESULTS

The survey conducted among freelancers shed light on important issues regarding this type of employment. Questions were asked about income variability, stable sources of income, perceived financial vulnerability, access to social benefits, and assessment of the risk of precarianization. The results show that as many as 80% of freelancers experienced income fluctuations related to the instability of freelance work. Moreover, 65% of respondents do not have a permanent source of income apart from freelance work, which increases their susceptibility to financial uncertainty. More than half of respondents (65%) felt financially vulnerable. Additionally, 70% of respondents encountered difficulties obtaining social benefits such as health insurance or retirement plans. This proves the lack of stability of social security in the freelance economy. Moreover, 70% of respondents expressed a strong belief that the freelance economy carries the risk of precarity, leading to financial instability and job insecurity. Over 85% of freelancers were forced to take on multiple gigs at once to make ends meet. This shows that this form of employment requires flexibility and multitasking. When it comes to satisfaction with their current professional lifestyle, only 25% of respondents were very satisfied and 23% were very dissatisfied.

Table 2. Questionnaire and replies

No	Question	Reply
1.	Have you experienced fluctuations in your income as a freelancer due to the nature of gig work?	[] Yes: 80%
		[] No: 20%
2.	Do you have a stable source of income outside of freelancing?	[] Yes: 35%
		[] No: 65%
3.	Have you ever felt financially vulnerable as a freelancer?	[] Yes: 65%
		[] No: 35%
4.	Have you faced difficulties obtaining benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, or paid time off as a freelancer?	[] Yes: 70%
		[] No: 30%
5.	Do you think the freelance economy poses a risk of precarianization for freelancers, leading to financial instability and insecurity?	[] Strongly agree: 70%
		[] Agree: 10%
		[] Neutral: 5%
		[] Disagree: 10%
		[] Strongly disagree: 5%
6.	Have you ever had to take on multiple gigs simultaneously to make ends meet?	[] Yes: 85%
		[] No: 15%
7.	How satisfied are you with your current freelance lifestyle in terms of financial stability and job security?	[] Very dissatisfied: 15%
		[] Dissatisfied: 23%
		[] Neutral: 15%
		[] Satisfied: 22%
		[] Very satisfied: 25%

Source: *Emil Zelma's Research Article*

As many as 80% of respondents answered positively to the **question 1** (both positive and negative fluctuations) about their income over the last year, while 20% of respondents did not experience such changes. Analysis of the responses indicates that income instability is a common challenge in the freelance work environment. It is worth noting that such a variable situation may result from the seasonality of projects; competition in the labor market; the development of new technologies, especially artificial intelligence; or economic instability.

In the extensive survey conducted, a staggering 65% of the participants disclosed a concerning absence of a consistent and permanent source of income, a circumstance exacerbated by their reliance on freelance endeavors **(question 2).** Conversely, a mere 35% of those surveyed asserted the existence of a stable income stream that extended beyond the realm of their freelancing commitments. These findings illuminate the pervasive challenge of financial instability faced by individuals immersed in project-based work. Of the 35% of freelancers who declare another stable source of income, as many as 80% combine freelancing with full-time work. The remaining 20% use more diverse strategies, such as combining freelancing in one field with running a company employing employees in another market segment. Analyzing the income ratio, for almost 50% of freelancers the earnings from this form of work are lower than from full-time employment. About 25% earn comparable income from both sources, with differences not exceeding 15%–20%. For the remaining one quarter, freelancing is a much more lucrative source of income than full-time employment, generating significantly higher income.

As for **question 3**, 65% of freelancers admitted to experiencing financial uncertainty. This means that financial insecurity is a common problem among gig workers. For example, factors such as the lack of regular orders, fluctuations in the labor market, and the lack of social benefits may affect the sense of financial security. It is important, however, to note that 35% of respondents did not experience this feeling, which suggests that there are freelancers who can effectively manage

their finances. Analyzing these data, we can see that there is a need to develop tools and strategies to support the financial stability of freelancers, e.g., education on financial management or access to security measures in the event of a sudden drop in income. In the long term, labor market policy should take into account the specific needs of this professional group in order to create conditions conducive to a balance between work flexibility and financial security. These observations may be important both for freelancers seeking to improve their financial situation and for decision-makers involved in shaping economic policy.

The vast majority of respondents, i.e., as many as 70%, confirmed that they had encountered difficulties in accessing health insurance, retirement plans, or paid time off, while 30% of respondents replied that they had not had such problems **(question 4).** These results highlight significant social security challenges for these freelancers, who often do not have access to the traditional benefits offered by conventional employment. Difficulties in using such benefits may negatively affect the well-being and sense of financial security of contract workers. It is worth noting that limited access to health insurance and retirement plans can make freelancers more vulnerable to financial risk in the case of sudden events or long-term health care needs. Analysis of these data suggests that there is an urgent need to develop new solutions and flexible benefit models that will be appropriate for the specific nature of contract work.

As many as 70% of respondents expressed a strong belief in the existence of this threat, while another 10% agreed with this position **(question 5).** Only 3% were neutral on the rating, while a total of 15% (counted as 10% “disagree” and 5% “strongly disagree”) expressed a degree of disagreement. Of these, 10% were not entirely sure of their position, and 7% strongly disagreed with the thesis about precarianization. These results suggest that most people working as freelancers recognize the risks of precarianization in the context of the freelance economy. This fear can lead to financial instability and a sense of insecurity. It is worth noting that this perception may result from the lack of stability of orders, lack of social benefits, and high competition in the project-based labor market. When examining these data, there is a need to consider important regulatory and support options that can reduce the risks associated with job insecurity in the freelance economy, which will benefit both freelancers themselves and the overall stability of the labor market. These insights are important both for gig workers seeking to improve working conditions and for policymakers taking action in order to create a more sustainable and safe environment for the freelance workforce.

As part of a survey among freelancers, the **question 6** achieved significant results, with as many as 85% of respondents confirming this type of experience. These numbers clearly show that accepting multiple orders simultaneously is a common strategy in situations where the revenue from a single project is not sufficient to cover current needs. This situation may be caused for example by the:

- irregularity of orders,
- seasonality in the labor market, and
- unpredictability of income from freelance work.

It is worth noting that only 15% of respondents were not forced to take on multiple orders at the same time, which suggests that there is a group of freelancers who maintain financial stability without having to work on various projects. Analyzing these data highlights the need for freelancers to better understand their work and financial management strategies and provides information that can be useful in creating tools and support to help them effectively balance different projects. These findings have important implications especially for freelancers seeking to optimize their work.

Only 25% of respondents expressed very high satisfaction with the financial balance and job security achieved, while another 22% were generally satisfied with the current situation **(question 7).** It is worth noting that the neutral group constituted 15% of respondents, which may suggest a lack of a clear assessment. However, 23% of freelancers were dissatisfied with their current professional situation, and 15% expressed a very high level of dissatisfaction. These results shed light on the complexity of the gig worker experience, where differences in satisfaction levels can result from individual preferences, project availability, and changing market factors.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the growing importance of the freelancing world as an alternative to traditional, inflexible (due to, among other factors, labor law regulations) full-time employment, freelancing is beginning to be perceived as a factor that should be taken into account from points of view such as politics management in enterprises and state economic policy, including labor market legislation.

The study's conclusions suggest that the freelance economy, despite its flexibility, carries a real risk of job uncertainty. Fluctuations in income, lack of stable sources of income, difficulties in obtaining social benefits, and the need to take on many gigs at the same time put freelancers in a precarious financial and professional situation. In the long run, this may lead to increasing problems related to job uncertainty in this form of work.

The reasons why the freelance economy is becoming more and more important for businesses, especially in specific industries, are probably:

• The intangible nature of the work performed. If the business does not require the physical movement of goods, the freelance economy allows the use of temporarily employed specialists without the need for their presence in the company's office.

• The specificity of services. If a company offers one-off services, the freelance economy becomes an attractive option for performing specific tasks.

• Innovation. The freelance economy fosters innovation, giving companies the opportunity to experiment with new strategies and implement changes quickly. Access to specialists for one-off projects supports the development of new concepts.

• An increased share of the freelance economy.

As Conen and Schippers note (Conen, Schippers, 2019) after a century of intense changes in employment (from an economic and legal point of view), most workers in advanced economies now obtain their livelihoods through standard employment relationships. In the European Union, solutions such as protection against harmful working conditions (including in relation to working time), unfair treatment, and unemployment are common. Social security in old age in the form of a pension is also an inherent element. Additionally, employees benefit from sickness and disability insurance and parental leave.

This was also noticed, for example, by Bögenhold (Bögenhold, 2019b), who states that in the group of self-employed people there are significant differences, e.g., in terms of the level of income obtained, and the category of "freelancers" is so broad that it includes both people performing simple and uncomplicated work, e.g., manual workers, as well as specialists engaged in work requiring high qualifications and who enjoy high respect in the local community due to their profession.

However, it should be borne in mind that even qualified specialists are not fully protected against instability, as they still work on the basis of short-term contracts. Either way, their professional qualifications provide greater financial and professional independence, while for freelancers performing simple jobs, precarity seems to be an inherent element (Piwowar-Sulej, BąkGrabowska, 2024).

Cieślik and Van Stel (2023) note that concerns about the vulnerability of self-employed status are not relevant for high-end professionals with unique skills who are hired by large corporations for major restructuring or technology projects. In such projects, freelancers join larger teams led by corporate employees. All strategic directions, time allocation, and the content and sequence of tasks are decided at the planning stage and must be adhered to by all team members. Concerns about freelancers' lack of autonomy are therefore unfounded. Their ability to integrate into the team allows them work more efficiently and strengthens their position in the freelance market.

Although there is a certain increase in the number of well-qualified people who are self-employed, in particular as freelancers, it is necessary to bear in mind the significant differences between self-employed people and full-time employees. In particular, attention should be drawn to the significantly lower level of income security of self-employed people (or rather, the lack of such employment), as well as their severely limited access to social security (Cieślik and van Stel, 2023).

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