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Attitudes in Action: How Managers Perceive and Position Freelancers in the Modern Workplace

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, significant changes have occurred in the workforce regarding types of employment, and the traditional contract between employees and employers has evolved into various forms, including those of freelancers, whose contractual arrangements differ from those of traditionally employed salaried employees. We conducted a study that examined questions related to managers' perceptions of the freelancer trend and their willingness to recommend freelancers. To this end, we distinguished between various organizational positions. A quantitative study was conducted in which participants completed an online survey we developed. The survey measures the freelancers' demographic and employability characteristics and their economic added value. The current study included 465 participants who were recruited by the PROLIFIC platform (<https://www.prolific.co/>), a service offering online recruitment of respondents. Three separate two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) tests were conducted, each with two dependent variables. The independent variables included attitudes toward the employment of freelancers (more employees than freelancers, equal numbers of employees and freelancers, and more freelancers than employees), as well as economic considerations regarding payments to freelancers (freelancers paid less than employees, paid equally, or paid more). These were categorized by three roles: managerial, core professional, and routine operations, with age serving as a covariate. Summary of the findings indicates that for the three roles examined, a significant main effect was found for the independent variable attitudes for the dependent variable perception of the freelancer trend. However, a significant main effect for the independent variable in attitudes on the dependent variable willingness to recommend freelancers was found only for the core professional and routine operations roles but not for the managerial role. Due to the novelty of this subject, our pioneer research discloses sizeable theoretical and practical implications that advance academic knowledge and significantly benefit organizations.

Actitudes en acción: cómo perciben los directivos a los profesionales independientes y los posicionan en los puestos de trabajo actuales

RESUMEN

En los últimos años se han producido cambios significativos en la fuerza de trabajo en relación con los tipos de empleo y el contrato tradicional entre empleados y empleadores ha asumido diversas formas, como los profesionales independientes cuyos acuerdos contractuales difieren de los contratos de los empleados tradicionalmente asalariados. Llevamos a cabo un estudio sobre cuestiones relativas a la valoración por parte de los directivos de la tendencia hacia los profesionales independientes y su disposición a recomendar este tipo de profesionales. Para ello, diferenciamos entre distintas situaciones organizativas. Se llevó a cabo un estudio cuantitativo en el que los participantes cumplimentaron una encuesta online diseñada por nosotros, que mide las características demográficas y de empleo de estos empleados y su valor económico añadido. El estudio contó con 465 participantes reclutados a través de la plataforma PROLIFIC (<https://www.prolific.co/>), servicio que ofrece el reclutamiento online de los encuestados. Se realizaron tres análisis multivariados de covarianza (MANCOVA), cada uno con dos variables dependientes. Las variables independientes estaban constituidas por las actitudes hacia el empleo de los profesionales independientes (más empleados que profesionales independientes, igual número de ellos y más profesionales independientes que empleados), así como por consideraciones económicas relativas al pago a los profesionales independientes (pagados menos que los empleados, igual o más). Se hicieron tres categorías: según se ocuparan

Palabras clave:

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de operaciones directivas, operaciones prioritarias u operaciones rutinarias, con la edad como covariable. El resumen de los resultados indica que, para los tres roles analizados, se comprobó un efecto principal importante en la variable independiente "actitudes" sobre la variable dependiente "percepción de la tendencia hacia los profesionales independientes". No obstante, se encontró un efecto principal significativo de la variable independiente "actitudes" sobre la variable dependiente "disposición a recomendar profesionales independientes" únicamente para los roles de operaciones prioritarias y rutinarias, pero no en el rol directivo. Dado lo novedoso del tema, nuestra investigación pionera desvela implicaciones teóricas y prácticas considerables que anticipan conocimiento académico y benefician en buena medida a las empresas.

In recent years, significant changes have transformed the workforce, especially in terms of types of employment. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, fundamentally reshaped how both employers and employees perceive and engage in the workplace. Yet even beforehand, the traditional employee-employer contract had begun to evolve, encompassing new and diverse forms of work relationships, such as freelancers, sub-contractors, and participants in the gig economy (Vallas & Schor, 2020). Specifically, freelancers began to be perceived as talent and knowledge workers (Davenport, 2013; Kozica et al., 2014). These talents are driven by a range of key factors, including (a) financial benefits, (b) psychological benefits (provided by employers to improve the social status of the employees), (c) degree of freedom in their decision-making and work management, (d) opportunities for career growth, enhancement, learning, and development, (e) a combination of enjoyment, pleasure, and perceived benefits when working, (f) social interactions and tasks, and (g) core work tasks that are central to the freelancer's professional identity (Bujacz et al., 2017; Nawaz et al., 2019; Rabenu, 2021). Notably, the "degree of freedom" (factor c) might be related to flexible working arrangements; for freelancers, for example, the ability to work remotely from a convenient workplace and working environment. Indeed, Polyanska et al. (2024) observed that the quality of remote work in project activity was associated with several factors, beyond work experience and the desire to improve relevant skills, which included the ability to make independent decisions and the freedom to extend working hours when working remotely.

Freelancers represent a growing share of the international labor market and contribute to the changing nature of work (Barley et al., 2017). It has been noted that many businesses are increasingly dependent on freelancing work (Younger & Blumberg, 2016). Enabled by the development of digital platforms, freelancers give firms the prospect of gaining a competitive advantage and using new business and workforce models (van den Groenendaal et al., 2023).

Today, when considering hiring freelancers for specific tasks, managers can no longer view them as stand-alone talent or as cheap labor. Instead, organizations increasingly seek collaborations with freelancers to leverage their specialized, up-to-date expertise and drive innovation, competitive advantage, and market differentiation (e.g., Kozica et al., 2014; Zadik et al., 2019). Furthermore, Wang et al. (2024) observed that recently, managers are developing organizational policies that enhance not only job security but also job flexibility in the hope that these efforts facilitate a healthier work environment, mitigate work-related stress, and ultimately promote better mental health. Beyond enhancing workers' wellness, Amri (2024) asserted that in today's competitive environment, if organizations are to remain competitive, they must promote flexible work arrangements.

Moreover, employers wish to harness freelancers' integrative thinking (Zhang et al., 2015) and their collaborative approach to teamwork (Walker & Lloyd-Walker, 2016). Altogether, freelancers are a desirable asset for the organization, as they may help enhance managerial expertise, allow specialization of labor, increase innovative flexibility and agility, enable risk management, and facilitate the organization's transformation at the gross economic level in an innovation-driven economy, which helps reduce costs.

Furthermore, Zadik et al.'s (2019) study confirmed expertise and knowledge as baseline requirements for hiring freelancers. That

is to say, they found that managers tend to hire and pay more for freelancers with knowledge and expertise higher than that of full-time employees. In addition, their study showed that integration skills were also very important in managers' decisions to work with freelancers. In other words, they suggested that social and organizational fit was a critical consideration for hiring freelancers.

A more recent study (Anh & Nhat, 2024) explored the factors that influence managers' intentions to sign up freelancers, notably noting three main aspects: corporate governance reform, digital orientation, and digital platform. Their research revealed that corporate governance reform and digital platform quality both have a significant positive impact on managers' intention to work with freelancers.

Notably, self-employed individuals tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction, control, autonomy, task variety, happiness, and even better health than their corporate counterparts who are full-time or part-time employees (e.g., Baron et al., 2016; Bujacz et al., 2017; Schneck, 2014). Combined with the shift away from traditional perceptions of freelancers, these positive existential states may serve as key incentives for encouraging high-skilled workers to become self-employed freelancers, at least part-time (e.g., Arshad et al., 2016; Pérez-López et al., 2016).

Zadik et al. (2019) also demonstrated that managers were significantly less willing to employ a freelancer at lower pay when the freelancer's perceived expertise levels were below those of an equivalent full-time employee. They found that the same pattern emerged for the six types of different organizational roles investigated, including somewhat unexpectedly, the managerial role. Yet, van den Groenendaal et al. (2023) claimed that freelancers' contracts are characterized as individually regulated, tangible in terms of specified role definitions. It might imply that managers perceive different freelancers' roles differently. For example, Gussek and Wiesche (2024) stated that while the general understanding of freelancers as a form of work is growing, research lacks understanding of careers on digital labor platforms, which differ from careers in offline labor markets due to volatility, global matching and platform mediation, the digital and temporary nature of work, and algorithmic management as particular platform working conditions.

In this paper, we aim to explore the arena of freelancers, defined as self-employed workers or talents. Such individuals are primarily professionals and experts who work independently under a time- or project-based contract. This research is unique as it explores this field from an organizational perspective. Specifically, we propose examining research models using qualitative and quantitative methods to highlight this emerging phenomenon.

The empirical literature on the freelance phenomenon is insufficient, making it difficult to formulate hypotheses regarding managerial attitudes toward freelancers, willingness to hire freelancers instead of salaried employees for various roles (including managerial positions), and the optimal ratio of freelancers to full-time employees, among other factors.

Given the novelty of the research subject, namely, the feasibility of employing freelancers within organizations, this paper serves as a turning point in the field. It offers a unique platform for developing a model that enables the systematic formulation and testing of research hypotheses related to the phenomenon of freelancers within organizations. The "implications of the research"

are expected to be significant on both a theoretical and a practical level: “theoretically”, the research will contribute to deepening academic knowledge and will provide a new research framework for understanding the issue of hiring freelancers. “Practically”, the findings will enable organizations to make more informed decisions regarding hiring strategies, workforce optimization, and improving the integration processes of freelancers. This will lead to resource savings and operational efficiency. In conclusion, this research aims to shed light on an expanding phenomenon and provide both theoretical and practical tools to help organizations cope with the future challenges of the labor market.

Method

Procedure

A quantitative study was conducted in which participants completed an online survey we developed. The survey measures the freelancers' demographic and employability characteristics and their economic added value. Six hundred participants were recruited by the PROLIFIC platform (<https://www.prolific.co/>), a service offering online recruitment of respondents. The respondents were selected using the PROLIFIC service based on niche and representative sample criteria, depending on the researcher's requirements. The participants were rewarded for filling out research questionnaires.

The study was approved by the ethics committee, registration number 9-8/2022.

Measures

Attitude

If you could determine the composition of your team, what would you prefer (in managerial role; core professional role; routine operations role)? (more salaried employees than freelancers/ equal number of salaried employees and freelancers/less salaried employees than freelancers).

Economic

Regarding the gross salary of a salaried employee in the same job, which salary cost justifies employing a freelancer in the following positions (in a managerial role; core professional role; routine operations role)? (freelancers paid less than employees/ freelancers paid equal to employees/freelancers paid more than employees).

Willingness to Recommend Freelancers (WtRF)

A work colleague is considering adding freelancers to his/her team, and is asking your advice—Would you recommend employing freelancers? (definitely yes/yes /slightly yes/ no/definitely no).

Perception of Freelancers' Trend (PoFT)

How do you perceive the increasing trend of freelancers in the labor market? (very positive/somewhat positive/the issue could be argued either way/somewhat negative/very negative).

Sample Description

To determine the required sample size, a priori power analysis was performed using G*Power software (Version 3.1.9.7; [Faul et al., 2009](#)). Assuming a small to medium effect size of $f^2 = .10$ ([Cohen,](#)

[2013](#)), the model specified two dependent variables within a 3×4 between-subjects design. Based on an alpha level of .05 and a desired statistical power of .80, the analysis indicated that a minimum total sample size of 96 participants would be required to detect a significant interaction effect with sufficient power. Nonetheless, the current study employed a larger sample size to enhance statistical power and reduce Type II error.

Statistical Analyses

Initially, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to evaluate the relationships among all continuous study variables, along with normality and common method bias analyses. Furthermore, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was utilized to examine the association between categorical variables and the dependent variables within the study. Subsequently, three distinct two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) tests were conducted, with willingness to recommend employing freelancers and perception of the increasing freelancers' trend serving as two dependent variables. The independent variables comprised attitudes towards the employment of freelancers (more employees than freelancers, equal number of employees and freelancers, more freelancers than employees) and economic considerations regarding payment to freelancers (freelancers paid less than employees, freelancers paid equal to employees, freelancers paid more than employees), with age included as a covariate. These cross-sectional study analyses were specified for the independent variables across the three principal roles: managerial, core professional, and routine operations. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS software, Version 29.0.0. A two-tailed significance level of $p < .05$ was determined for all tests.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Assumption Testing and Control Variables

Preliminary assumptions and control variables were assessed by analyzing skewness and kurtosis values. Specifically, skewness and kurtosis estimates were divided by their standard errors to compute z-scores. Distributions with z-scores within the range of ± 3.29 were considered approximately normal according to prior guidelines ([Kim, 2013](#)).

The current study included 207 women (44.4%) and 259 men (55.6%), with a mean age of 39.77 ($SD = 11.54$) and an average of 15.45 years of education ($SD = 4.90$); 226 participants were single (48.3%), 219 were married (46.8%), and the rest were divorced. Full descriptive statistics and the associated normality indices are shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Skewness, and Kurtosis of the Continuous Variables

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Age	39.77	11.54	0.66	-0.40
WtRF	4.84	0.89	-0.80	0.88
PoFT	3.54	0.96	-0.12	-0.64

Note. SD = standard deviation; WtRF = willingness to recommend freelancers; PoFT = perception of freelancers' trend.

Then, a three-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to assess the effects of gender (men, women), marital status (single, married, divorced), and time of data collection (participants recruited in October 2022 vs. January 2023) on the dependent variables, willingness to recommend employing

freelancers, and perception of the increasing trend of freelancers. The multivariate tests indicated no significant effects for any of the independent variables. Consistently, follow-up univariate analyses revealed no significant group differences on either dependent variable. Importantly, the comparison between early (October) and late (January) respondents showed no differences, suggesting that the timing of recruitment and data collection did not influence participants' responses.

Pearson Correlation Coefficients

As presented in Table 2, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among the study variables, including demographic characteristics. The two dependent variables, willingness to recommend employing freelancers and perception of the increasing trend of freelancers, were moderately correlated ($r = .49, p < .001$), which is considered an appropriate association for conducting a MANOVA analysis. Furthermore, age showed a significant negative correlation with perception of the increasing trend and was therefore included as a covariate in the subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Summary of the Bivariate Pearson Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3
1. Age	1		
2. WtRF	-.06	1	
3. PoFT	.15**	.49***	1

Note. WtRF = willingness to recommend freelancers; PoFT = perception of freelancers' trend.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Common Method Variance (CMV)

To evaluate the potential impact of common method variance (CMV; also known as common method bias), two diagnostic procedures were performed using IBM SPSS AMOS software version 29.0, following the guidelines of Podsakoff et al. (2003) and related methodological recommendations. First, Harman's single-factor test was conducted by loading all study items onto a single common method factor. The results showed that one factor explained 23.7% of the total variance, which is well below the typical threshold of 50%, indicating that CMV is unlikely to cause significant bias in our study.

Subsequently, we used a latent common method factor (CLF) approach, where all items were loaded on their respective theoretical constructs as well as on an additional latent method factor. This model showed poor fit, with the following indices: $\chi^2(51) = 259.44, \chi^2/df = 5.09, CFI = .831, TLI = .781, NFI = .800, RMSEA = .094$ (90% CI [.082, .105]). In comparison, the baseline model without the CLF showed a slightly better fit: $\chi^2(52) = 228.25, \chi^2/df = 4.39, CFI = .857, TLI = .818, NFI = .824, RMSEA = .085$ (90% CI [.074, .097]). The standardized loadings of the common latent factor on the observed indicators ranged from .21 to .53. The CLF explained only 5.29% of the variance in the observed measures. Overall, consistent with prior methodological discussions, these findings suggest that although some common method variance cannot be fully ruled out, it does not seem to cause a substantial bias in this study (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Main Analyses

Three separate two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) tests were conducted, each with two dependent variables. The independent variables included attitudes toward the employment of freelancers (more employees than freelancers,

equal numbers of employees and freelancers, and more freelancers than employees), as well as economic considerations regarding payments to freelancers (freelancers paid less than employees, paid equally, or paid more). These were categorized by three roles: managerial, core professional, and routine operations, with age serving as a covariate. All three analyses examined two main effects for attitudes and economic considerations, as well as their interaction. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis was then performed to identify the source of the significant effects. Consistent with previous guidelines, where multivariate effects were non-significant, subsequent univariate analyses were omitted (Field, 2024).

Managerial Role

The initial analysis assessed participants' evaluations of the managerial role. Preliminary assumption testing showed that the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices was satisfied, as Box's M test was non-significant (Box's M = 30.05, $p = .171$). However, Levene's test for equality of error variances indicated a violation for trend perception, $F(8, 459) = 2.43, p = .014$, while the assumption was met for willingness to recommend, $F(8, 459) = 0.57, p = .800$. Therefore, Pillai's Trace (V) was selected as the multivariate test statistic due to its robustness against assumption violations. Additionally, univariate analyses on trend perception were performed using Welch's test, which adjusts for unequal variances, along with Games-Howell post hoc pairwise comparisons (Field, 2024; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2018).

The multivariate tests revealed a significant effect of age on the combined dependent variables, Pillai's V = .01, $F(2, 457) = 3.28, p = .039$, partial $\eta^2 = .014$. Follow-up analyses indicated a negative association between age and perception of the increasing freelancers' trend ($b = -0.01, p = .011$), whereas no effect was found for willingness to recommend. In contrast, the main effects of attitudes were not statistically significant, Pillai's V = .02, $F(4, 916) = 2.26, p = .061$, partial $\eta^2 = .010$, nor was the main effect of economic considerations, Pillai's V = .01, $F(4, 916) = 0.79, p = .530$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$. Similarly, the interaction between attitudes and economic considerations was non-significant at the multivariate level, Pillai's V = .01, $F(8, 916) = 0.89, p = .526$, partial $\eta^2 = .008$.

Core Professional Role

The second analysis evaluated participants' assessments of the core professional role. The assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices was met, as Box's M test was non-significant (Box's M = 27.22, $p = .209$). Levene's test showed a violation for trend perception, $F(8, 459) = 2.54, p = .010$, while the assumption was met for willingness to recommend, $F(8, 459) = 1.41, p = .188$. Therefore, Pillai's trace (V) was used as the multivariate test statistic, along with Welch's test for the univariate analyses of trend perception, and Games-Howell for post hoc comparisons.

The multivariate tests indicated a significant effect of age, Pillai's V = .02, $F(2, 457) = 5.74, p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$, with negative significant correlation between age and perception of the increasing freelancers' trend only ($b = -0.01, p < .001$), whereas the effect on willingness to recommend was non-significant. Beyond the effect of age, attitudes also demonstrated a significant multivariate main effect, Pillai's V = .11, $F(4, 916) = 12.87, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .053$. In contrast, the main effect of economic considerations was non-significant, Pillai's V = .02, $F(4, 916) = 1.90, p = .108$, partial $\eta^2 = .008$, as well as the interaction between attitudes and economic considerations, (Pillai's V = .02, $F(8, 916) = 1.46, p = .169$, partial $\eta^2 = .013$, were not significant.

Further univariate analyses revealed that attitudes had a significant effect on both willingness to recommend, $F(2, 458) = 15.61, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .064$, and trend perception, Welch's $F(2,$

465) = 25.64, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .099$, after controlling for age. Post hoc comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment showed that willingness to recommend was significantly higher among participants who endorsed an equal number of employees and freelancers compared to those who preferred more employees than freelancers (mean difference = 0.56, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95%CI [0.31, 0.81]), with no other significant pairwise differences. For trend perception, Games-Howell post hoc tests showed that participants favoring more employees than freelancers reported significantly lower perceptions of the freelancers' trend compared to those endorsing an equal number of employees and freelancers (mean difference = 0.67, $SE = 0.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.45, 0.90]), as well as compared to those favoring more freelancers than employees (mean difference = 0.60, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .010$, 95% CI [0.13, 1.07]). No other pairwise differences were significant.

Table 3. Summary of the Univariate ANOVA Statistics across All three Roles

Effect	Dependent	df	F	η_p^2
Managerial role				
Age	WtRF	1	0.88	.00
	PoFT	1	6.47*	.01
Attitude	WtRF	2	0.60	.00
	PoFT	2	3.86*	.02
Economic	WtRF	2	0.58	.00
	PoFT	2	1.18	.00
Interaction	WtRF	4	0.85	.01
	PoFT	4	1.39	.01
Core professional role				
Age	WtRF	1	2.19	.00
	PoFT	1	11.51***	.02
Attitude	WtRF	2	15.61***	.06
	PoFT	2	25.64***	.09
Economic	WtRF	2	0.64	.00
	PoFT	2	2.61	.01
Interaction	WtRF	4	1.28	.01
	PoFT	4	1.90	.02
Routine operations role				
Age	WtRF	1	1.92	.00
	PoFT	1	9.72**	.02
Attitude	WtRF	2	5.45**	.02
	PoFT	2	6.53**	.03
Economic	WtRF	2	0.65	.00
	PoFT	2	0.37	.00
Interaction	WtRF	4	0.84	.01
	PoFT	4	0.43	.00

Note. df = degrees of freedom; η_p^2 = partial eta square; WtRF = willingness to recommend freelancers; PoFT = perception of freelancers' trend.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Routine Operations Role

The third analysis examined participants' evaluations of the routine operations role. Preliminary assumption tests revealed that Box's M test was significant (Box's M = 40.20, $p = .026$), as well as Levene's test for willingness to recommend, $F(8, 459) = 2.37$, $p = .017$, while the assumption was met for trend perception, $F(8, 459) = 1.75$, $p = .086$. Consequently, Pillai's Trace (V) was selected as the multivariate test statistic due to its robustness to assumption violations, with Welch's test for the univariate analyses of willingness to recommend, and Games-Howell for post hoc comparisons.

The multivariate tests revealed a significant effect of age on the combined dependent variables, Pillai's V = .02, $F(2, 457) = 4.86$, $p = .008$, partial $\eta^2 = .021$. Follow-up analyses showed a significant negative association between age and perception of the increasing

freelancer trend ($b = -0.01$, $p = .002$), whereas the relationship with willingness to recommend was non-significant. In addition, the main effect of attitudes was significant, Pillai's V = .04, $F(4, 916) = 4.41$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .019$, above and beyond age. By contrast, the main effect of economic considerations, Pillai's V = .01, $F(4, 916) = 0.97$, $p = .423$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$, and the interaction between attitudes and economic considerations, Pillai's V = .01, $F(8, 916) = 0.76$, $p = .639$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$, were non-significant.

Table 4. Summary of the Multivariate aAnalysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) Statistics across All Three Roles

Effect	Pillai's V	F	df _{hypothesis}	df _{error}	η_p^2
Managerial role					
Age	.01	3.28*	2	457	.014
Attitude	.02	2.26	4	916	.010
Economic	.01	0.79	4	916	.003
Interaction	.01	0.89	8	916	.008
Core professional role					
Age	.02	5.74**	2	457	.025
Attitude	.11	12.87***	4	916	.053
Economic	.02	1.90	4	916	.008
Interaction	.02	1.46	8	916	.013
Routine operations role					
Age	.02	4.86**	2	457	.021
Attitude	.04	4.41**	4	916	.019
Economic	.01	0.97	4	916	.004
Interaction	.01	0.76	8	916	.007

Note. df = degrees of freedom; η_p^2 = partial eta square.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Follow-up univariate analyses revealed that the main effect of attitudes was significant for both willingness to recommend, Welch's $F(2, 465) = 5.45$, $p = .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .023$, and trend perception, $F(2, 458) = 6.53$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .028$, beyond the effect of age. Post hoc Games-Howell comparisons for attitudes indicated that willingness to recommend was significantly higher among participants who favored more freelancers than employees compared to those who favored more employees than freelancers (mean difference = 0.35, $SE = 0.11$, $p = .007$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.63]), with no other significant differences in willingness to recommend. For trend perception, participants favoring more freelancers than employees reported significantly higher perceptions' scores than both of those preferring more employees than freelancers (mean difference = 0.50, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.85]), and those supporting an equal number of employees and freelancers (mean difference = 0.47, $SE = 0.15$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.83]), with no additional significant pairwise differences.

A summary of the univariate ANOVA and multivariate ANCOVA results across all three analyses is presented in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Discussion

Managerial attitudes toward freelancers are missing from the academic literature despite the significant rise of their participation in the labor market over the past decade. The lack of understanding of the managerial perspective regarding integrating freelancers into different organizational roles is the central theoretical gap this paper addresses. This understanding is crucial in light of the ongoing shift from traditional employment structures to more decentralized and flexible forms of work, which expand and, in many ways, redefine organizational boundaries.

This study offers a theoretical contribution by deepening our understanding of how managers decide to hire independent workers.

It suggests that managerial attitudes toward freelancers are not uniform but rather context-dependent, and thus supports the development of a more nuanced theory linking job type, employment form, and organizational preferences.

In doing so, we expand the theory of recent work by Wang et al. (2024) and Amri (2024), who have emphasized the importance of flexible work structures for organizational survival in competitive environments, as well as for protecting employee well-being and mental health. This study serves as an essential layer in the evolving discussion by focusing on the organizational conditions that enable freelancers' effective and strategic integration, not only as temporary solutions but as part of a long-term workforce strategy.

In the analysis of managerial positions, a significant main effect was found for the independent variable "attitudes" only for the dependent variable "perception of the trend of freelancers". There are no differences between the three salary considerations for management roles (give more to employees, give enough equally to both, give more money to freelancers) in the two dependent variables (neither in the perception of the trend nor in the willingness to recommend the employment of freelancers) and an interaction was not found; that is, there is no combined weight of the positions and salary considerations for a management role on both the independent and dependent variables.

In the analysis for a professional core position, a significant main effect was found for the independent variable 'attitudes' for the two dependent variables: There are differences between the three types of positions in terms of both the perception of the trend of freelancers and in terms of the willingness to recommend the employment of freelancers. No significant main effect was found for the independent variable "economic considerations", and no interaction was found between attitudes and economic considerations.

Finally, for routine operations, a significant main effect was found for the independent variable "attitude" on the two dependent variables. That is, there are significant differences between the different types of positions (more employees than freelancers, an equal number of freelancers and employees, more freelancers hired) towards hiring freelancers in the role of routine operations, in terms of the two dependent variables. There are differences between the three types of positions, both in terms of the perception of the trend of freelancers and in terms of the desire to recommend the employment of freelancers. No significant main effect was found for the independent variable "economic considerations", and no interaction was found between attitudes and economic considerations, that is, there is no combined effect of attitudes and salary considerations for routine operations on the two dependent variables (the perception of the trend or the desire to recommend freelancers).

A summary of the findings indicates that for the three roles examined (managerial role, core professional role, routine operations), a significant main effect was found for the independent variable "attitudes" for the dependent variable "perception of the freelancer trend", while a significant main effect for the independent variable "attitudes" for the dependent variable "willingness to recommend freelancers" was found only for the core professional role and routine operations roles, but not for the managerial role.

The findings indicate that managers' attitudes toward employing freelancers would likely influence their willingness to recommend them for various organizational roles. These results suggest that the impact of managers' attitudes is non-context-dependent, with freelancers' perceived value being prominent in different roles.

This finding aligns well with the insights presented in literature reviews regarding freelancers as unique and innovative knowledge workers (Kozica et al., 2014; Zadik et al., 2019). The reviews suggest that freelancers bring specialization, flexibility, innovation, and creativity (Davenport, 2013; Kozica et al., 2014). These attributes make them suitable for diverse roles requiring specific skills, innovative thinking, and independent work capabilities.

Managers who prefer freelancers are more likely to recognize these qualities, which aligns with the observed findings. Additionally, managers may view themselves as staying connected to trends and fostering an innovative image by employing freelancers, who can be perceived as more original and creative than permanent employees. Consequently, their perception of the freelancer trend becomes more prominent in roles that demand such unique attributes. This connection underscores the alignment between managerial attitudes and the perceived relevance of freelancers in fostering agility and innovation in specific organizational contexts.

The findings revealed no significant effect of economic considerations on managers' willingness to recommend freelancers. The literature discusses the economic aspect of employing freelancers, highlighting the potential cost-saving benefits for organizations (Davenport, 2013; Kozica et al., 2014). However, this consideration does not significantly influence managers' attitudes. This disconnect may stem from separating managerial perceptions of economic and professional aspects, respectively.

The literature discusses the economic advantages of employing freelancers, such as cost savings and resource optimization (Davenport, 2013; Kozica et al., 2014). However, these theoretical advantages do not strongly influence managers' perceptions of the freelancer trend. This finding suggests a potential disconnection between the perceived economic benefits of freelancers at the organizational level and individual managers' attitudes. However, in professional "non-core" positions, managers who are willing to invest more in freelancers may do so because they recognize the alignment of freelancers' qualities—such as flexibility, innovation, and specialized expertise—with the unique demands of these roles (Kozica et al., 2014; Zadik et al., 2019). This willingness to pay more may reflect a belief that freelancers provide value beyond cost savings, allowing organizations to position themselves as trendsetters and innovators in competitive markets.

The debate over the necessity of managers is not new. As early as 2012, Hamel provocatively suggested in the Harvard Business Review that organizations might function without managers, evidenced by numerous companies today that operate under flat organizational structures (Hamel, 2012).

Freelancers may represent the "new world" of work—characterized by flat hierarchies and decentralized structures—which challenges traditional managerial roles. Another explanation for managers' persistent position regarding freelancers might lie in the current reality of the labor market, whereby managers readily accept freelancers for roles already well-integrated into the market but resist alternatives that have not yet gained widespread acceptance.

This study's primary contribution lies in addressing a significant gap in the academic literature, namely, the managerial perspective on freelancers. While previous research has focused on the rise of freelancers and the importance of flexible work, this paper is unique in exploring how managers' attitudes influence the decision to hire independent workers. The study seeks to reveal whether these attitudes are context-dependent or not, thereby potentially leading to the development of a nuanced theory casting light on the considerations fueling attitudes toward employing freelancers in pivotal jobs in an organization. This research builds upon and expands the work of scholars like Wang et al. (2024) and Amri (2024). Instead of viewing freelancers as merely temporary solutions, this study examines to what extent, and under which economic terms, they might be integrated into the regular body of employees of an organization in some essential roles. Contrary to the literature that often highlights the cost-saving benefits of freelancers, this study finds that economic considerations do not significantly influence managers' willingness to recommend freelancers. This conclusion suggests a disconnect between the theoretical economic advantages at the organizational level and the individual manager's decision-making process.

The research reveals that managerial attitudes' impact is not uniform across all roles. While managers' attitudes toward freelancers influence their willingness to recommend them for core professional and routine operations roles, this effect is not found for managerial positions. This finding highlights a potential resistance to using freelancers in roles that challenge traditional hierarchical structures.

Moreover, the study suggests that managers who prefer freelancers may do so because they recognize freelancers' unique qualities, such as specialization, flexibility, innovation, and creativity. Hiring freelancers allows these managers to be perceived as forward-thinking and trend-setting, further underscoring that the motivation is often professional and strategic rather than purely economic.

Limitations of the Study

This study offers valuable insights into managerial perceptions of freelancers but has limitations regarding its assumptions and results. A primary limitation is the generalization of managerial attitudes based on the first and third findings, which assume consistent views across contexts and time. A more nuanced approach would consider the influence of cultural, organizational, and individual factors on managerial attitudes (Hofstede, 1980; Pfeffer, 1998). For example, differences in attitudes toward freelancers in core versus non-core roles may vary across industries, such as technology versus manufacturing, due to differing uses of contingent workers. Therefore, it is important to continue this type of research with organizations from different countries and of varying sizes that might help investigate whether national culture, organizational culture, organization size, among other factors act as moderators in management decision-making regarding freelancers in tandem (or otherwise) with the findings of the present exploratory study. Another limitation lies in the definition of economic considerations that focus on managers' willingness to pay. While this measure predicts economic decision-making (Lusk & Hudson, 2011; Miller et al., 2011), it overlooks broader factors like efficiency, risk mitigation, and adaptability (Williamson, 1981). Additionally, classifying roles into project management, core, and non-core categories challenges the first and third findings, as modern organizations increasingly adopt hybrid roles that blur traditional boundaries (Ashford et al., 2018). This may limit the applicability of findings in dynamic, project-based environments.

Moreover, treating freelancers as a homogeneous group ignores attributes like skill, reliability, and cultural fit, which likely influence managerial decisions (Cable & Judge, 1997; Kokkodis & Ipeirotis, 2016): the greater willingness to recommend freelancers may hinge on unexamined individual factors, reducing generalizability. Lastly, the study assumes stable managerial attitudes over six months, disregarding the dynamic nature of perceptions influenced by economic recessions, technological disruptions, or market changes (Shafir et al., 1997). These factors may impact the relevance of findings in rapidly evolving industries.

Future Research Directions

The literature indicates a significant increase in the number of freelancers in the workforce (Ng et al., 2021), driven by factors such as flexibility, autonomy, and the pursuit of a better work-life balance (Baron et al., 2016). However, a significant gap exists in our understanding of managers' perspectives within organizations—a gap that this study aims to address. Despite extensive information on the aspirations of potential freelancers, there is a notable lack of research on organizational attitudes towards this trend. Specifically, it remains unclear how interested organizations are in integrating freelancers into their workforce: are companies actively seeking to collaborate with

freelancers, and if so, what strategies are they employing to attract and retain these independent professionals? Furthermore, understanding the incentives that organizations are willing to offer freelancers is essential. This involves examining the types of "baked goods"—metaphorically speaking—that organizations are willing to provide to foster a supportive environment for freelancers. Such incentives might include flexible working arrangements, access to resources and training, networking opportunities, or even benefits that enhance job security for freelance workers.

By addressing these questions, this study seeks to fill a critical gap in the existing literature, offering valuable insights into the interplay between freelancers and organizations. It could also provide organizations with insights into how to adapt to the fast-changing work landscape while establishing mutually beneficial relationships with freelancers, ultimately contributing to a more dynamic and responsive labor market. The long-term goals of this research program include further investigation of platform workers, contract workers, and non-traditional workers concerning their perspectives on workforce participation and the unique challenges they face (including legal and social issues).

Future studies should address the limitations mentioned in this section by exploring aspects that were not examined in this paper. For instance, investigating economic variables such as transaction costs, productivity, and strategic fit would enhance our understanding of how managers evaluate freelancers. Longitudinal studies that cover a more extended time frame and include periods of significant labor market disruption—like technological changes—could better capture the evolving nature of freelance trends. Additionally, qualitative methods, such as interviews, can complement survey data by providing deeper insights into the factors and contexts that shape managerial attitudes. Including freelancer-specific characteristics, such as expertise and reputation, would also increase the explanatory power of future studies, leading to further findings that could inform policy applications and recommendations for organizations and decision-makers.

Practical Implications

Our findings expand the existing knowledge and understanding of freelancers' characteristics from the perspectives of managers within organizations. For managers, the study emphasizes the importance of adopting a strategic approach to workforce composition within an organization, particularly in roles where freelancers can provide specialized skills or employment flexibility. By understanding the factors that shape managers' attitudes and the deliberations with which they approach considering economic aspects, managers can make more informed decisions about integrating freelancers into their teams.

The study has implications for freelancers and policymakers, beyond managers. For freelancers, the results underscore the importance of building a strong reputation, developing niche skills, and tailoring their offerings to meet organizational needs. Furthermore, policymakers and industry leaders can use these insights to create supportive infrastructures, such as certification programs, training initiatives, and guidelines for effective collaboration between organizations and freelancers. These measures can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of freelancers as a vital component of the modern workforce.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

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