

From surviving to thriving in the gig economy: A research agenda for individuals in the new world of work

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Abstract:

How work gets done has changed fundamentally in recent decades, with a growing number of people working independently, outside of organizations in a style of work quite different from that assumed by many organizational behavior theories. To remain relevant, our research on individual work behaviors and the capabilities that enable them must also adapt to this new world of work, the so-called “gig economy.” We first describe the predictable challenges that individuals confront when working in this manner, including remaining viable, staying organized, maintaining identity, sustaining relationships, and coping emotionally. We then articulate a research agenda that pushes our field to focus on the specific capabilities and behaviors that enable people to manage these challenges effectively so as to survive or thrive in this new world of work. Foregrounding individual agency, we articulate the work and relational behaviors necessary for such thriving, and the cognitive and emotional capabilities that undergird them.

Keywords: gig economy | work | work-life balance

Article:

“Making your way in the world today
takes everything you’ve got”

Theme song — Cheers

Introduction

We in organizational studies have long loved the quote, “there is nothing so practical as a good theory” (attributed to Lewin, 1943), but our theories risk becoming far less practical as the world of work progressively changes around us. We are moving from a time in which workers confidently “exchanged labor and loyalty for security” (Barley, Bechky, & Milliken, 2017: 111) to one where economic security is scarce for lower- and higher-income workers alike, technologies are disrupting well-established work and employment patterns, businesses are

downsizing and reformulating, and individuals are beginning to seek new paths for their work, careers, and lives (Cooper, 2014, Davis, 2016, Padavic, 2005). What for many of us seems to be a new world of work has in fact already arrived: Over one-fifth of U.S. workers now work independently, outside of organizations in a so-called “gig economy” (McKinsey & Co, 2016; Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2018). This sector accounted for all of the net employment growth between 2005 and 2015 (Katz & Krueger, 2016) and is expected to grow to 43% by 2020 (Gillespie, 2017) as nearly 40% of organizations report plans to increase their use of contingent workers in the next five years (Ernst & Young, 2018). The new world of work is on our doorstep, and organizational studies seems woefully unprepared. Our research, historically steeped in what Barley and Kunda (2001: 82) label, “petrified images of work” tied to jobs in hierarchical organizations, will lose its relevance unless we can better capture where and how work is done today (Ashford, George, & Blatt, 2007; Barley, 2016, Barley and Kunda, 2001, Connelly and Gallagher, 2004, Kunda, 2006; Kunda, Barley, & Evans, 2002).

While theoretical and empirical work documents these trends (Davis, 2016, Kalleberg, 2009), we are only beginning to examine the psychological experience of workers in this new world of work and the ways they cope with its particular conditions and complexities (e.g., Caza, Moss, & Vough, 2018; Petriglieri et al., 2018). For simplicity, we use the “gig economy” and the “new world of work” interchangeably to describe the context of this work. By these labels, we mean a work context comprised primarily of short-term independent freelance workers (Kuhn, 2016) who contract with organizations or sell directly to the market (Petriglieri et al., 2018). These workers vary on multiple dimensions. For example, Ashford et al. (2007) differentiate independent workers in terms of their temporal, administrative, and physical attachment to companies. Spreitzer, Cameron, and Garrett (2017) further distinguish between high skilled workers who choose to work independently versus low-skilled workers who feel forced to patch together a living. And, while some workers in the gig economy have high levels of various types of control and flexibility (e.g., contract, scheduling) over their work, others find themselves at the whim of their contractors (Barley & Kunda, 2006) or algorithms that control their behavior through rewards and costs built into the software used in their work (Cameron, 2018, Spreitzer et al., 2017). Finally, engagement in the gig economy varies by individual, with some dabbling in it through side gigs or by monetizing their passion projects while holding down a full-time traditional job (e.g., organizational employees who moonlight as Lyft drivers), while others are wholly committed to independent work (Caza et al., 2018). In this essay, we focus our agenda-setting efforts primarily on individuals at the extreme end of some of these dimensions—skilled workers with low levels of organizational attachment who work full-time in this style and have at least a moderate level of flexibility and control over their work. While we believe the structural characteristics and lived experiences we highlight will be somewhat universal to all gig workers, we acknowledge that individuals’ specific experiences will vary according to their particular circumstances. We return to this issue in the future research section.

Gig workers must cope with several challenging conditions. With more independence, workers face both economic and existential precarity as they try to survive financially and maintain a coherent work identity (Petriglieri et al., 2018). Increased transience offers workers more variety and opportunity as they take on different jobs, but also burdens them with managing the growing complexity of their working lives (Caza et al., 2018). With greater separation and autonomy from employing organizations, workers experience greater “aloneness” which can spiral into

loneliness if managed poorly (Kunda et al., 2002, Lam and Lau, 2012). These conditions create a world of work in which the individual comes firmly to the fore. If individuals are to succeed in creating a workable work life – one in which they feel they are surviving and perhaps even thriving – it will be through their personal characteristics and actions that account for and cope with the elements of this new world of work. Put differently, the quote offered in this article’s epigraph is not just a line from an old TV show’s theme song, but is also something more true of the world of work today than ever. For individuals, the new world of work will require much more from them than work ever has and may even take everything they’ve got.

After first expanding on the observation that our existing theories are inadequate for capturing how work is done in this setting, we then turn to our major purpose: articulating a research agenda for understanding the individual behaviors that are likely to enable people to thrive in this new world of work and the cognitive and emotional foundation for these behaviors. As a theoretical foundation, we draw on resource-based perspectives that offer insight into the individuals’ responses to job demands and stressors (Demerouti and Bakker, 2007, Hobfoll, 1989) and foreground individual agency.

Organizational behavior theory and the gig economy

Our theories of the psychological experience of work were developed with a different era in mind (Ashford et al., 2007). They do not capture the new ways that individuals are working today. The organizations that Chandler (1962) described, with their multiple divisions and elaborate hierarchies, are disappearing (Davis, 2016), as are many of the managers enmeshed in the elaborate role sets depicted in Katz and Kahn’s (1978) classic theory of the social psychological dynamics of organizations. Fewer and fewer people work “normal” hours in co-located spaces with a clear supervisor and long-term colleagues (Nicklin, Cerasoli, & Dydyn, 2016; Rockmann and Pratt, 2015, Spreitzer et al., 2017); and a growing number of employees are only virtually connected to a physical workspace. Employers today offer less to their workers; for example offering temporary rather than permanent contracts to control costs (Davis-Blake and Uzzi, 1993, Fisher and Connelly, 2016) and drawing back pension plans to shift retirement risk to workers (Cobb, 2015). Additionally, jobs themselves are now far less secure. Divisions are often precipitously sold or reconfigured (Cascio, 2000), work is contracted out to contingent workers, and layoffs in response to cost pressures are becoming increasingly common (Shoss, 2017).

These shifts in the structure of work have occurred progressively as organizations and workers have evolved to become less dependent on and committed to one another over time. Barley and Kunda (2004) trace the slow unravelling of permanent employment from its stronghold after the great depression, through the layoffs of blue-collared workers in the 1970’s, and then the downsizing and outsourcing of technical, managerial and professional jobs in mass quantities in the 1980’s and 1990’s. This unravelling has continued through the last two decades, with a growing population of blue and white collared workers operating as “free agents,” leading precarious work to be the dominant form of employment today (Kalleberg, 2009). Many individuals across the socio-economic spectrum experience employment and the livelihood it affords them as fundamentally insecure (Cooper, 2014).

Today, while many may initially seek full-time work in organizations, they often become increasingly unbounded from traditional organizations (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996, Cohen and Mallon, 1999, Mallon, 1998, Rousseau, 2001, Sullivan, 1999). The devoted “organization man” (Whyte, 1956) has disappeared and many workers today experience themselves largely as a “company of one” (Lane, 2011). These independent, or gig workers contract with many organizations or sell their products and services directly to the market. Many hold multiple jobs either sequentially or simultaneously, leading them to create plural, portfolio, or mosaic careers (Caza et al., 2018, Cohen and Mallon, 1999, Mallon, 1998) that prevent them from identifying with and becoming loyal to any one organization (or even occupation). Such workers often inhabit “in between” spaces, betwixt and between work roles, organizations and career paths (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). As Barley (2016: 2) put it: “Now that bureaucracies are in decline and organizations are morphing furiously into new forms, our old theories are no longer as relevant as they once were.” What do our theories have to say about how work will be structured and experienced and careers pursued in light of such ambiguity and fluidity? What metrics will workers use to define success when the traditional career ladder with its promotions and salary increases becomes less relevant? From where will workers meet their basic needs for relatedness, existence, and growth (Alderfer, 1972) in the absence of organizations and organizational communities?

Our theories fail to address these essential questions. This failure makes sense given that for decades our theories have had a managerialist imprimatur, considering individual employees largely only for what they might offer the collective (Katz, 1964, Weiss and Rupp, 2011). Now, with the shift away from doing work in defined groups with stable membership in particular settings, we must adjust our thinking about key organizational concepts, rethink taken-for-granted assumptions about traditional career structures and experiences (Ashford et al., 2007), and address new questions within these areas. This shift has powerful implications. For example, while we have long cared about understanding average levels of employee motivation and the between-individual variance in different contexts, it now becomes more important to understand what accounts for the variance in motivation within a single individual over time as he or she struggles to maintain his or her own motivation in changing conditions. Or consider Ashford and Tsui’s (1991) argument that an OB approach to self-regulation adds to the psychological literature on self-regulation by introducing the idea that in addition to self-control, workers in organizations need to tie their control system to the larger control system of the organization. Individuals cannot simply self-reward and punish any way they wish (Kanfer & Karoly, 1972); they need to understand how others around them reward and evaluate. That theory fits well only if there is a fairly stable context in which individuals work. What happens if the context is constantly in flux as it is when independent workers pick up new roles, tasks, and people to report to? There still is a context to which they must attend, but now they often need to meet the transient demands of jobs that come and go, control systems that are relevant one day but not the next, or multiple control systems when workers hold multiple gigs simultaneously. What is required of individuals to self-regulate in contexts like this?

Or consider Heath and Sitkin’s (2001) persuasive description of three approaches to researching organizational behavior. The first emphasizes the study of behaviors alone, which they see as the purview of psychologists. The second and third are “contextualized behavior” (understanding behavior in a work context), and what they call “Big O” behaviors, those behaviors that are

central to the task of organizing in an organizational context. We propose that to keep pace with the changing workplace, we need to evolve our research perspectives and approaches. Specifically, we need to retain the emphasis on behaviors central to organizing, but understand that the responsibility for that organizing now lies more with individuals as they interface with and have intermittent contact with many different organizations as they move from contract to contract, and sometimes bypass organizations completely as they sell directly to market. We need new theory, perhaps what Shamir (1992) terms a theory of “nonorganizational work psychology,” and especially new research that better describes and specifies what individuals can do to be most successful when working in this new way.

To develop theory about individual-centered organizing in the gig economy, we begin by articulating the structural conditions of such work, carefully specifying the dimensions of differences between this and more traditional forms of work. This specification helps us to develop a portrait of the lived experience of such work, and a sense of the important outcomes that might serve as the dependent variables of this research. These include surviving, of course, but we are most concerned with articulating what it would mean to thrive in this environment: to experience both vitality and learning while at work (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). These considerations allow us to then to specify the individual behaviors and the underlying cognitive and emotional capabilities that should be researched as optimal responses to that lived experience; the ones most likely to bring about thriving.

In developing this research agenda, we seek to highlight the opportunities and the losses workers face in the gig economy. The receding of formal organizations from individuals’ experience of work is profound. We propose that, for all the negative portraits of organizations with their pressures for conformity and exploitation of labor (e.g., Ho, 2009, Hochschild, 1983, Kunda, 2006), there are many, often taken-for-granted elements of organizations that independent workers might miss. These include a rooted sense of place and belonging (Petriglieri et al., 2018), having someone else responsible for setting direction, and handling some tasks that are important but less central to individuals’ specific work identities, such as budgeting, marketing, and possibly unsavory politics. For example, a graphic designer in an organization focuses on the design work and not necessarily the hardball negotiation that won the work in the first place. Similarly, organizations often protect scientists in think tanks or universities from the mundane administrative tasks such as securing research space, servicing equipment, grant budget management, and so forth. They do not need to account for their hours strictly nor determine what their hourly billable wage should be. Independent workers in the gig economy must attend to all of these details. And while their task demands increase as they step outside the protection of an organization, they also often lose a sense of community, stability, and predictability.

Structural characteristics and the lived psychological experience of gig work

Important structural differences between work done in organizations and in the gig economy shape the lived, psychological experience of work. We depict those differences in Table 1 and show the impact they have on people’s lived experience of work in Fig. 1. While variance in both organizations and types of work may make the structural differences and their impact more or less pronounced, the differences do matter.

Table 1. Structural dimensions of difference.

	Old World of Work	New World of Work
Financial instability & Job insecurity	Lower	Higher
Autonomy	Lower	Higher
Career path uncertainty	Lower	Higher
Work transience	Lower	Higher
Physical and relational separation	Lower	Higher

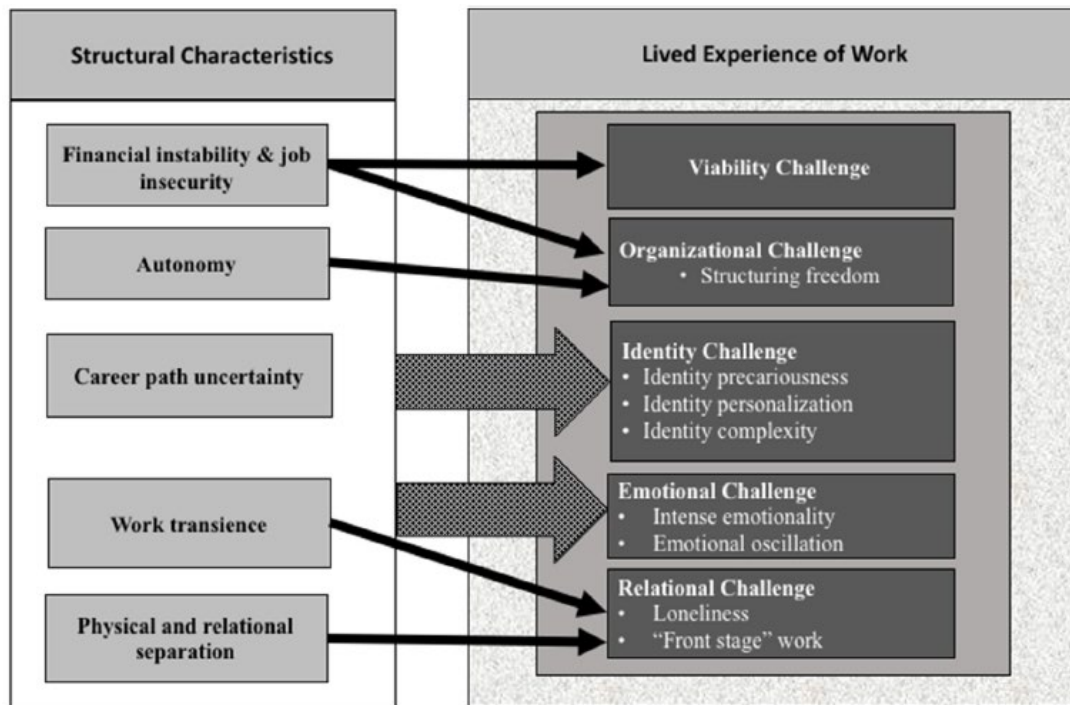


Fig. 1. Structural characteristics create a lived experience of work.

Note: Thin arrows represent paths from specific structural characteristics to specific aspects of the lived experience. The two fat arrows suggest that these two aspects of the lived condition are affected by all of the structural characteristics.

First, on a practical level, financial instability and job insecurity create a viability challenge for workers in the gig economy. While job insecurity has long been a topic of study (e.g., Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) and is certainly present for many jobs in organizations today (Lee, Huang, & Ashford, 2018), it is a key defining attribute of an economy based on freelance work and short-term contracts. Those who work independently describe themselves as living very close to the economic edge (e.g., Butler and Russell, 2018, Petriglieri et al., 2018), with unpredictable work leading to highly variable income, cycles of feast or famine, and concern about basic income continuation.

A second key structural difference is the high level of autonomy and independence enjoyed by gig workers (Donovan, Bradley, & Shimabukuro, 2016; Kunda et al., 2002, Petriglieri et al., 2018). Hackman and Oldham (1976: 258) note that people have a high degree of autonomy “when outcomes depend increasingly on the individual’s own efforts, initiatives, and decisions rather than on the adequacy of instructions from the boss or on a manual of job procedures.” Gig workers often operate without a boss and with no manual, leaving them on their own to determine their work methods, the projects they will pursue, and/or which products they will create. This autonomy prominently shapes the psychological experience of working independently outside of organizations by creating organizational and identity-based challenges. Indeed, many choose this work style explicitly to gain this freedom (Ashford et al., 2007, Spreitzer et al., 2017), and some even cite maintaining that freedom as a reason to avoid working in organizations (Caza et al., 2018). The autonomy is not absolute, of course. Individuals are beholden to the contracts they enter into, to their own needs for income, as well as to the market and its particular demands (Barley and Kunda, 2006, Kunda et al., 2002). But within those bounds, people experience enhanced freedom to choose how to accomplish the work, when to tackle the work and, for some, what work to do (Petriglieri et al., 2018). Writers decide between fiction or nonfiction, independent consultants choose to focus on leadership or technology, and graphic designers may opt to exercise or socialize during the day and tackle work at night.

Taken together, these two conditions of financial uncertainty and autonomy create a particular reality for gig workers, one that is well described in anecdotal media reports and recent surveys (CLC, 2016, Epstein and Taylor, 2017, PEPSO, 2015). On the plus side, long-established theories of work and recent qualitative and survey research on independent workers suggest that having high discretion over the tasks one performs, including how and when one performs them, will increase the meaningfulness of the work (Donovan et al., 2016, Hackman and Oldham, 1976, McKinsey and Co., 2016, Petriglieri et al., 2018; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Discretion increases motivation and satisfaction as well (Fried & Ferris, 1987; Kulik, Oldham, & Hackman, 1987). However, this discretion also creates a challenge around organization for individuals. First, autonomy means that gig workers must deal with the logistics of conducting the work, creating routines, and enforcing those routines when no one is holding them responsible for doing so (Ashford et al., 2007, Caza et al., 2018, Petriglieri et al., 2018). Choices about these issues are made highly charged by the financial stress these workers experience. Good choices contribute to financial success while bad ones will undermine it. These workers cope with what Fleming (2017: p. 693) terms “radical responsabilization:” individuals becoming solely responsible for their own short-and long-term economic survival. Such responsibility can be daunting at times (Grant, Christianson, & Price, 2007; Jackson & Mullarkey, 2000; Schmitt,

Den Hartog, & Belschak, 2015). Indeed, while freedom may be empowering, decades of research has documented the negative consequences of too much choice, including cognitive overload, dissatisfaction, and de-motivation (e.g., Iyengar and Lepper, 2000, Schwartz, 2004).

A third structural characteristic of the gig economy is the lack of clear, available, and relevant career paths. Organizations and occupations provide some clarity regarding expected career paths along which individuals can anticipate moving, giving them guidance about the sort of roles they might take on in the future (Tolbert, 1996). While we are developing a sense of how people conduct and arrange gig work on a short-term basis, we are only beginning to understand how they might live out an entire career or life span doing work in this manner. Recent research on the careers of comedians suggests that the infrastructure supporting individuals' careers in the gig economy is deeply relational in nature, and perhaps more forgiving of setbacks than is the case in careers with more institutionally anchored pathways (Reilly, 2017). How people navigate various jobs over time, and whether notions of career trajectories, pathways and advancement are relevant or irrelevant, is unclear.

A fourth structural difference is work transience. While a long-term career in a single organization or even a single occupation is not guaranteed today, workers typically enter into traditional jobs with the expectation of some continuity of employment. Gig work, by contrast, is often based on short-term contracts that guarantee work only for a period of time, but leave future work and relationships uncertain. Instead of belonging to a particular organization or a continuous, bounded, occupational group, workers may instead find themselves in a liminal space working between occupations (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), requiring them to apply their skills and expertise to new combinations of tasks as they move between jobs (Damarin, 2006).

A final structural characteristic of the gig economy is that work is most frequently done alone, physically separated from others working in this style or from the recipients of the work products, leaving these workers feeling like "perpetual strangers" (Kunda et al., 2002: p. 250). For example, a recent survey showed that nearly half of independent workers feel lonely and disconnected from others (Deloitte, 2016). While, of course, more and more organizational workers today coordinate work with geographically distant colleagues, they often are co-located with at least some work colleagues while doing so (Rockmann & Pratt, 2015). This co-location puts them close to sources of support that are less readily available to those working independently. The rise of co-working spaces makes evident that many gig workers are feeling a relational void due to their physical separation from others (Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017).

Physical separation creates relational challenges for gig workers as they often lack career mentors or role models, and therefore miss hands-on skill development opportunities (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2011). They may also feel alone in a more existential sense as work in the gig economy, perhaps due to its autonomy, transience, and financial instability, seems to demand their deep engagement and rapid responsiveness. These conditions disrupt the formation and nurturance of personal and family relationships (Rowlands & Handy, 2012), creating an even deeper sense of isolation with enduring consequences. Aloneness, however, is not entirely negative. Gig workers also may relish their escape from the ongoing political conflicts and the long-term, draining, relationships that can permeate many organizations.

Gig workers face another serious relational challenge because of their disconnection from organizations and their constant work transience: a higher load of what we are terming “front stage work.” Front stage work occurs when an individual (actor) is conscious of being observed by others and is working to perform according to audience expectations (Goffman, 1956). In the gig economy, individuals are often pressured to become their own “brand” (Vallas & Christin, 2018), and face demands to “put themselves out there” at networking events, on social media, and within their professional communities to develop a demand for their brand. As one informant in Hennekam and Bennett’s (2016) study of independent creative workers explains, “I’ve learned how to be an actor, but I’ve not learned during my training how to network with producers, how to put myself at the forefront, how to sell myself... You have to be damn good at self-monitoring, and managing the image you project to others, more so than being good at acting” (p. 36). We suspect that this ongoing effort at being “front stage” might be especially taxing on individuals with certain personality characteristics, such as introverts.

In addition to these specific effects, these five structural characteristics – financial instability and job insecurity, autonomy, career-path uncertainty, work transience, physical and relational separation – taken together have significant identity implications for gig workers. First, they make maintaining a coherent work self difficult (Ashford et al., 2007, Petriglieri et al., 2018). The frequent loss and gain of jobs lays bare a lack of clear structure rooting these workers to a sense of place or role. As Petriglieri et al. (2018) point out, it is easy for these workers to lose a sense of identity as a particular kind of worker or professional (Am I really a coach if I am sitting in my living room and have not had clients for a while?). These workers must continually re-claim and revise their identities as they move in and out of organizations and roles (e.g., Bennett & Hennekam, 2018). With autonomy, identity also becomes quite personalized for gig workers. Their choices, being autonomous, also are highly personal ones — their best bet regarding what will be effective in the marketplace. As such, the market’s reaction to those choices have ego and identity implications for the worker as well as the financial ones described above.

Transience and career path uncertainty create an additional identity challenge, as these workers’ identities are necessarily more complex than is typical for workers in traditional organizational roles (Caza et al., 2018). Fewer and fewer people today can use a simple declaration such as “I’m a banker” to fully capture and express their work identity, especially over the course of their careers. Rather, many today hold multifaceted jobs composed of many different hybrid roles (Caza and Wilson, 2009, Caza and Creary, 2016; Creary, Caza & Roberts, 2015; Leavitt, Reynolds, Barnes, Schilpzand, & Hannah, 2012). Further, gig workers’ frequent shifts between positions, organizations, and even occupations (Damarin, 2006, Rowlands and Handy, 2012) and the increasingly common need or desire to straddle of multiple jobs simultaneously (Sliter & Boyd, 2014), means that individuals are likely to develop a complex, layered work identity over time. Some may experience combining different positions to craft a career as empowering and contributing to a more individualized, authentic work identity (Caza et al., 2018). Others may find it practically and psychologically difficult to balance demands from competing work identities and cope with the lack of consistency involved in wearing multiple role hats (Leavitt et al., 2012; Wynn, Fassiotto, Simard, Raymond, & Valentine, 2018). Finally, physical and relational separation is likely to leave individuals feeling unmoored from others, as part of our

identity is derived from our relationships with others (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). In this way, aloneness might prompt identity work of its own.

These five structural characteristics also create the final, important lived reality for these workers — a world of heightened emotions. While all workers experience emotions at work, scholars have suggested that independent workers experience a greater variety of emotions (perhaps primarily induced by financial stress), more extreme emotions (as more identity-related questions occur raising existential and interpersonal issues), and more frequent oscillations between emotions (as work transience and instability make working lives unpredictable) (Petriglieri et al., 2018). For example, stand-up comedians often experience a pleasure-pain tension tied to the love of their work (pleasure) and high economic insecurity (pain) (Butler & Russell, 2018). While gig workers' affective arousal seems to be just as often appraised as stress, frustration and agony as it is joy, excitement, and ecstasy (Petriglieri et al., 2018), they do seem to feel more while doing work.

Gig economy outcomes: failing, flailing and thriving

The lived experience we have described is challenging. Workers are on their own to create and maintain job security, training, learning, and finances. Success is much more ambiguous and uncertain. Workers are tasked with building their own brand and work identity and connecting with others in meaningful ways. While this picture of gig life is fairly grim, it is not always experienced negatively as an ongoing struggle for survival. Instead, as Wilkin's (2013) meta-analysis demonstrated, independent workers are a heterogeneous group with wide-ranging outcomes. For example, consider Bob and Jill, both independent graphic designers who bid for contracts that last anywhere between three days and two months. Each has periods of overlapping work commitments, and is without any contract for between five and seven weeks a year. While Bob occasionally has a day or two a month where he feels secure with his employment, he wakes up most days worried about whether or not he will make his rent payment. At month's end, his anxiety manifests in enough sleeplessness and agitation that his wife has begun taking her kids to her mother's for the last two weekends of the month. Jill, however, finds herself energized by the variety of her work, viewing each contract as an opportunity to learn fresh routines and practice new skills. She embraces her downtime as a chance to grow other elements of her life. One of these graphic designers is clearly only surviving whereas the other one is thriving. The most important focus for future research is understanding what individual capabilities and actions might drive the results one way or the other. What actions and capabilities will impact individuals' outcomes in the new world of work?

The outcomes for gig workers can be dire. Initial studies and popular media reports suggest that many gig workers, like Bob, demonstrate indicators of negative strain including decreased subjective well-being (e.g., Diener, 2000, Keyes, 2002) and increased psychological dysfunction such as anxiety and depression, negative affect, and poor job attitudes (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Probst, 2003; Quesnel-Vallée, DeHaney, & Ciampi, 2010; Shoss, 2017). For example, a large study of UK musicians working independently found that approximately 71.5% self-reported high levels of anxiety, and 68.5% reported high levels of depression, which was mostly attributed to the precarious and unstable nature of their work

(Gross, Musgrave, & Janciute, 2018). When facing persistent stressors, such as those produced by viability, organizational, identity, relational, and emotional challenges, one's coping resources are constantly being depleted by a low-grade constant strain (Hobfoll, 1989), leaving no time for recovery. Further, because of the accumulating nature of certain types of gig work strain, workers may have a hard time pinning blame on a single, discrete "event," complicating their ability to develop a plausible account that promotes a sense of meaning and growth (Vough & Caza, 2017). The prevalence and impact of these sources of strain make gig workers a somewhat vulnerable employee population "in need of advice and possible intervention" (Tran & Sokas, 2017).

Yet, despite these struggles, emerging research suggests that the experience of gig work is not uniformly negative. Some individuals, like Jill described above, are able to fend off the well-known negative, dysfunctional impact of stress on their well-being. They move beyond merely surviving to find ways grow and learn in their gig working conditions, indicating thriving. Spreitzer et al. (2005: p. 538) defined thriving as a forward-facing psychological state "in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work." An independent coach in Petriglieri et al.'s (2018) study demonstrated such a state when remarking, "There's an aliveness that accompanies work. It's learning my craft, reading about it, delivering it, being with people. That gives me life. Life is the ongoing journey of becoming my craft." One of Caza et al. (2018) multiple jobholding informants exhibited the second dimension of thriving, learning, in the gig economy when she described:

"I am thinking a lot more about development and excellence more broadly rather than, 'oh, am I being a good little X or Y [in a company]... And maybe that is facilitated because I have been in the wilderness of having no single, clearly identifiable job title for the last ten years or so... Maybe having identity taken away facilitates the process. It forces you to really consider and use your potential rather than waiting for someone to give you a job."

Importantly, informants in both of these studies did not deny the struggles involved in the new world of work, instead, they emphasized the positive states that accompanied these challenges. Additionally, these data suggest that workers can even experience growth, including new ways of understanding their work and themselves as a direct result of engaging in the gig economy with its inherent challenges.

These empirical and hypothetical examples suggest that some individuals are able to take full advantage of the positive dimensions of working in this way, allowing them to create work lives that are fulfilling and energizing. Thriving at work allows people to demonstrate adaptation that progresses their careers (Spreitzer et al., 2005, Spreitzer and Sutcliffe, 2007). It is also correlated with other important facets of well-being, such as psychological and physical health (e.g., Keyes, 2002) as well as higher-quality relationships (Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012).

Despite this qualitative evidence of thriving, we still lack a clear understanding of how and when people move from flailing amidst the creeping strain of the gig economy toward surviving and enduring, and then past that to thriving. And yet, for many current and future workers, this question will be crucial to their experience of work. In the next sections, we invoke a resource

theory perspective (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, Hobfoll, 1989) to articulate the changes workers will need to make in the way they think, feel, and act, to thrive in the gig economy. Our intent is not an exhaustive list, but a stimulus to research on the individual psychological experience of independent, gig work, and the agency and resources individuals will need to thrive doing it.

A capabilities-based research agenda for thriving in the new world of work

A research agenda for the new world of work should focus on helping individuals to navigate the viability, organizational, identity, relational, and emotional challenges in ways that enable them to survive and even thrive. Our proposed research agenda has two parts. First, we describe the behaviors necessary to meet these challenges. Second, we draw on psychological theories of resources, which have for decades been adopted to explain variance in individuals' responses to job demands and stressors (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Hobfoll, 1989), to help us articulate the cognitive and emotional resources (i.e., individual capabilities) that enable those behaviors.

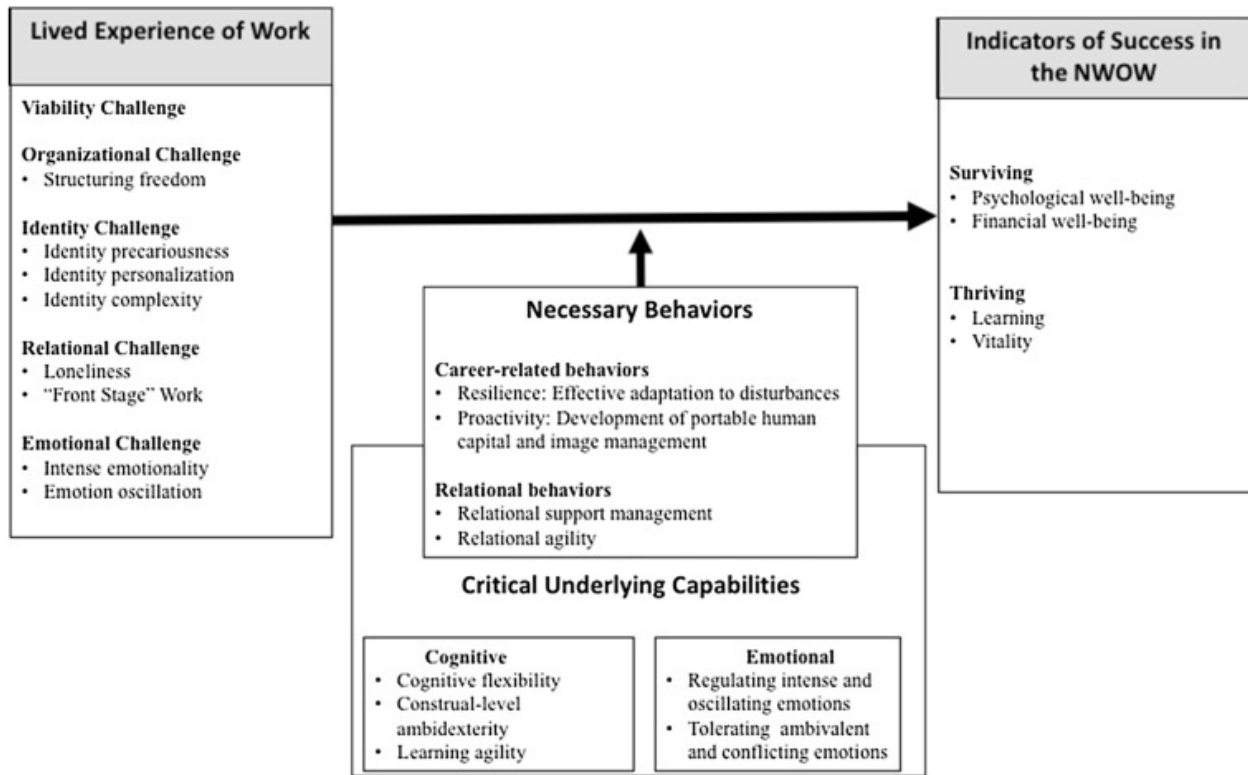


Fig. 2. Capabilities of the gig economy.

Resource theories propose that individuals seek to acquire and maintain the resources needed to sustain the behaviors necessary for their particular context (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018) and that positive employee well-being and performance results from being able to do so (Demerouti et al., 2001). Resources can come from the organization (e.g., pay, security), social relationships (e.g., social support), the job's design (e.g., feedback), or from personal characteristics or capabilities (e.g., initiative) (Demerouti & Bakker, 2007). Resource-

based theories of stress and coping, for example, assert that when individuals are exposed to stressors in the form of job demands, their level of job and personal resources predict their ability to cope with job demands (Hobfoll, 2011). Given that the structural conditions of the new world of work have decreased workers' organizationally provided resources, we need to understand how gig workers can attain and maintain the personal resources needed to sustain the necessary behaviors for surviving in the new economy. We draw on existing research to propose two categories of such resources, cognitive capabilities and emotional capabilities, which enable gig workers to buffer themselves from the negative aspects of these new working conditions and increase their positive functioning (thriving) amidst its changing demands. While these capabilities are functional for workers in most settings, we believe they are especially critical to the well-being of gig workers in the new world of work, as depicted in Fig. 2.

Necessary behaviors: moving forward in the gig economy

The gig economy is one of action. Individuals seek work, contract for it, do the work, and form and disband relationships and partnerships. This section highlights the important reactive and proactive behaviors that will help gig workers embrace the opportunities afforded by this economy without falling prey to its costs.

Resilience: adapting effectively to disturbances

Gig workers need to foresee and respond to frequent setbacks effectively and adaptively. In other words, they must demonstrate resilience. We join Caza and Milton (2011), Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003), and Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe, Shepherd, and Zhao (2017) in conceptualizing resilience as a trajectory that begins with the experience of a disturbance that threatens an individual's viability, functioning, or development (Masten, 2014) and ends with some indication of positive adaptation rather than a trait. Through resilience, individuals gain important insight and strength and grow from the experience of disruption (McAdams, 2001, Richardson, 2012).

The challenges we have identified as endemic to the lived experience of the gig economy are each sources of creeping strain: stressors that may go unnoticed or ignored initially, but with long-lasting exposure can increase the risk of psychological and physical harm (Frese and Zampf, 1988, Kahn et al., 2018, Sonnentag and Frese, 2003). However, as we point out, this strain results in dire outcomes for some gig workers, but quite positive ones for others (e.g., Caza et al., 2018, Petriglieri et al., 2018). Here, we draw from the growing literature on resilience at work (for reviews see Caza and Milton, 2011, Kossek and Perrigino, 2016, Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003, Williams et al., 2017) to explain how two complementary behaviors, persistence and bricolage, enable gig to thrive amidst rather than succumb to the constant creeping strain of life in the gig economy.

Persistence

There will be many setbacks, from the day-to-day creeping strain of working in an unstable and precarious environment, to potentially career-halting events like the loss of central job role or the abrupt end of a contract. Workers first need to learn to expect setbacks, recover quickly from disappointment, and persevere in pursuing their long-term career goals (London, 1983, London

and Noe, 1997). For instance, rather than becoming disheartened and withdrawn during lulls between contracts, gig workers need to continue to pursue job opportunities and self-development. Achieving this may be difficult. Precariousness and the lack of a stable identity that accompanies it, may be experienced as a threat. Given theory suggesting that people often “freeze up” when threatened (Petriglieri 2011; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981; Weick, 1993), resilient gig workers will have to be intentional about persisting under these conditions as persisting may go against their initial instincts. Without the support and accountability that comes from being a part of a stable organization, individually derived job and career persistence is foundational for gig work resilience.

Bricolage

Second, to thrive, workers will also need to respond to their situations by engaging in bricolage: relying on and creatively applying the available resources at hand to accomplish critical tasks or goals (Duymedjian & Ruling, 2010) by developing new combinations of resources to deal with a problem or opportunity that has arisen in their work environment (Baker & Nelson, 2005: p. 333). By generating additional resources through such combinations, individuals can cope more effectively with, say, a sudden loss of job resources, allowing them to cultivate resilience (Hobfoll, 2011) and sustain their work over the long-term. Bricolage helps individuals overcome the resource constraints inherent to the gig economy by allowing them to maximize the resources they have to find solutions that will likely satisfy current employers.

Bricolage also helps build individuals’ behavioral repertoires in useful ways. Creative use of constrained resources in the wake of a career disturbance may initially be difficult given that individuals’ initial instincts are often to fall back on well-practiced behavioral patterns (Staw et al., 1981). However, research on bricolage in unexpected work crises (e.g., Weick, 1993) and early stage entrepreneurial ventures (e.g., Senyard, Baker, & Davidsson, 2009) demonstrates that it is possible to stimulate and it is critical for resilience in such resource-constrained environments (Williams et al., 2017). Future research should seek to understand these capabilities that serve as a foundation for gig workers’ resilience.

Proactivity: acting in advance to create desirable outcomes

The new world of work demands more than reacting to inevitable disturbances. It also requires exercising agency and proactivity. Proactive behavior is “anticipatory action that employees [workers] take to impact themselves and/or their environments,” (Grant & Ashford, 2008: p. 8). When people are proactive, they take an active approach to work, acting in self-starting ways that often exceed formal role requirements and expectations (Crant, 2000; Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997). Proactive behaviors are future-focused with the goal of making changes or modifications in self or context to enable that future. The frequent shifting of work roles in the gig economy requires individuals to engage in proactive, self-initiated behaviors to anticipate external shocks and to introduce changes into their work on a regular basis (Frese and Fay, 2001, Grant and Parker, 2009). Luckily, the gig economy is rich with the three environmental conditions (autonomy, accountability, and ambiguity) that Grant and Ashford (2008) proposed would stimulate proactivity. Engaging in proactive behaviors in the gig economy will likely become self-reinforcing, as doing so helps individuals to reduce uncertainty and cope with the

draining effects of high levels of outcome responsibility, by anticipating setbacks and acting in advance to reduce them (Zellars, Hochwarter, Perrewé, Hoffman, & Ford, 2004).

Gig workers can exercise their proactivity through *individual career-oriented behaviors*, summarized here, and through *interpersonal relational behaviors*, highlighted in the next section. Here we focus on two key proactive career-oriented behaviors that we predict will be especially critical for gig workers' thriving: (1) the development of portable human capital, and (2) image management.

Developing portable human capital

Gig workers will need to self-initiate the development of portable skills that allow them to adapt to a frequently changing marketplace and variable work demands. Building core competencies, such as communication, marketing ability, and up-to-the-minute digital capabilities will make workers more qualified to carry out a number of different types of work roles and therefore more appealing to a wider range of employers. Gig workers cannot depend on employers for the development of needed skills — their connection to employers is fleeting and those employers likely lack the HRM infrastructure to do any training and development for them (Davis, 2016, Kuhn, 2016; Lemmon, Wilson, Posig, & Glibkowski, 2016; Tran & Sokas, 2017). Yet in this competitive employment environment, not having necessary competencies can cause workers to be passed over for positions. By engaging in proactive competence building in generic, multi-use core areas, gig workers will have a solid base for performing a wider variety of jobs that in turn will provide them with the opportunities to develop more specific skill sets in a variety of areas.

Further, given the rapid growth of new technologies that change the way work is done within various occupations (Bartosova, 2011), and the reality that gig workers often shift between organizations and occupations (e.g., Damarin, 2006), gig workers need to pursue opportunities outside their comfort zone, so as to learn new routines, practices, and knowledge. Doing so may be challenging because they can fall prey to the imposter syndrome: the persistent feeling that one is unqualified and may be uncovered as a fraud when learning a new role (Caza et al., 2018, Frenette, 2013). This discomfort may deter individuals from broadening their behavioral repertoire when a particular job does not demand it specifically. To expand their human capital rather than contracting it in the face of setbacks, workers will also have to resist the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and sometimes occupational pressure to specialize (Ferguson and Hasan, 2013, Leung, 2014; Zuckerman, Kim, Ukanwa, & von Rittmann, 2003). As specialization tends to be more highly valued in society (Abbott, 1988, Leung and Ng, 2005), it feels positive and safe in the short run as one's expertise is reinforced and in demand. Specialization alone, though, is a poor long-term strategy in the gig economy as conditions and demands are constantly changing. With career sustainability in mind, it is critical for gig workers to find ways to grow and utilize their skills and abilities by crafting job opportunities and fostering a life-long learning mindset.

Image management

The ability to understand how others are seeing you and shape your image effectively to highlight your capabilities is important for success in any workplace (Roberts, 2005). It influences whether one is hired (Gorman, 2005, Rivera, 2015) and how one's performance is assessed (Reid, 2015). In organizations, workers typically hold a shared understanding of the characteristics of a successful employee (Ibarra, 1999). Clients too, hold clear ideas about professionals' skills and abilities that shape relationships between workers and their clients (Vough, Cardador, Bednar, Dane, & Pratt, 2012). In the gig economy, such image exemplars are less clearly available, and so image management may be more difficult and idiosyncratic. Individuals have far less opportunity to work "backstage." Instead, their livelihood depends on their ability to get in front of peers and clients to develop a positive brand image (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016; Vallas & Christin, 2018).

Some independent workers may be able to tap into commonly shared images to convey who they are and what they do. For instance, celebrity chefs adopt specific "personas" (e.g., homebody, chef-artisan, maverick, gastrosexual, see Johnston, Rodney, & Chong, 2014). Tax preparers, even as short-term workers without professional credentials, still aim to present a traditional professional image and maintain expert authority as they interact with clients (Galperin, 2017). Yet, the evolving nature of the post-industrial economy – with the disappearance of certain sectors, and growth in others – means that novel areas of work and expertise are emerging as workers move from shrinking industries into new ones. In these novel areas, the boundaries of occupations can disappear, and people's work can be defined by sets of tasks for which they lack easy labels with which to describe themselves (e.g., workers involved in producing websites during the early years of the internet, Damarin, 2006). Workers in these newer and less familiar areas of the economy may face greater challenges in constructing a productive image of who they are, what they do, and how their work relates to that of others.

Image matters in the gig economy, but maintaining one is no easy task. The need to constantly sell themselves, as gig workers ask for new contracts and seek new clients (Hennekam and Bennett, 2016, Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010, Rowlands and Handy, 2012), requires a positive, confident self-presentation (e.g., Butler & Russell, 2018). Yet this can be challenging, as the emotional stress and emotional labor involved in being constantly evaluated, jockeying for favorable position with clients (Gandini, 2018) and being forever "for sale" can seep into one's self-image (Lane, 2011; Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005), reducing felt confidence (Sharone, 2013). Gig workers also need to show competence while entering unfamiliar organizations, industries, and types of work. Here they likely experience a "learning-credibility" tension similar to management consultants encountering new clients — the need to appear credible, while still learning about a new context (Bourgoin & Harvey, 2018). Similar tensions are apparent among music industry interns, who aim to impress with their skills while being simultaneously new to the industry (Frenette, 2013). Being able to present a positive and a competent image when meeting potential clients and employers will be difficult yet also crucial for getting new work. How people achieve this is an important focus for future research.

Given that calibrating one's image requires some sense of how one appears to others, image management also critically involves a second proactive behavior, feedback seeking (Ashford, De Stobbeleir, & Nujella, 2016). Individuals can seek feedback through two strategies: They can ask others for it directly (inquiry) or attend to the cues around them (and those given off by others)

and infer a feedback message (monitoring) (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). The more individuals are aware of the need for feedback and seek it proactively, either by asking for it or attending to cues, the better able they will be to manage the image that they are putting out into the marketplace. In addition, individuals might seek feedback on their products, their web design, their service speed, and the like to understand the true impact they create. Feedback seeking may be particularly important in the new world of work as being outside of formal organizations means that workers will be less likely to receive job and career feedback on a consistent, predictable basis, such as during quarterly or annual performance reviews. Instead, gig workers may interact with a wide variety of individuals who evaluate them from various perspectives and provide simple judgments based on their evaluations (e.g. a number of stars), but who may not feel compelled or even able to share more nuanced and constructive feedback with them. Therefore, gig workers who seek out feedback proactively from those with whom they interact should be better able to manage their image and grow over the span of their careers, allowing them to thrive. Empirically examining this proposition will be critical for future research.

Relational behaviors: architecting and managing a relational infrastructure

Relationships shape individuals' experiences of the work (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003, Dutton and Ragins, 2006). While workers in traditional organizations likely enjoy a somewhat stable set of relationships, independent workers must construct relationships agentically, building a constellation of social ties, including to other independent workers with similar skills, potential clients, supporters, and employers (e.g., Alacovska, 2018, Petriglieri et al., 2018; Schwartz, 2018). Two relational capabilities seem especially important to workers' thriving in the gig economy. The first is finding relational support — crafting a support system that includes ties both inside and outside the work realm that provide human connection and allow workers to buffer the stresses of work (Petriglieri et al., 2018). A second one is cultivating relational agility — the ability to form, maintain and dissolve work relationships productively.

Relational support management

The constantly changing nature of the gig work world (and the strong, ambivalent feelings it triggers) makes it especially important to have the capability to craft a social support system that can both buffer the demands of the work domain and enable feelings of stable personal connection and belonging (Petriglieri et al., 2018). Organizations have long acted as holding environments — settings wherein relationships help workers to manage potentially debilitating emotions and anxiety (Ghosh, Haynes, & Kram, 2013; Kahn, 2001; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). Crafting personalized social support systems that act as holding environments can be helpful for independent workers in buffering anxieties and maintaining a focus on their work (Petriglieri et al., 2018). Such a personal social support system could include multiple potential mentors with different areas of expertise, each of whom could provide a different lens on a particular challenge (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). In the gig economy, such personalized developmental networks may be especially useful as they support people as they cope with the novel challenges they face, help them to devise creative and flexible approaches, and offer them a sense of connection in an often isolating world of work (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010).

Nonwork relationships, such as families and friends also are important. They can provide workers with a variety of resources, such as differing perspectives, psychological and physical resources, social capital, flexibility, and material resources, that are useful for performing well and feeling positively about one's work (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014, Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). A spouse's job can provide a financial buffer that reduces a gig worker's felt pressure (Cooper, 2014); a personal friend can provide emotional support when he or she confronts work challenges. Further, close nonwork relationships might provide workers with some respite from the demands of the work domain, reducing feelings of stress (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999) and offering sources of belonging, meaning and direction apart from work success (Patterson, 2002). Ironically, however, the nature of the "on-demand" economy, with its heightened demands for mobility and work devotion as well as the addictive, compelling nature of its work and reward system, might push people to put work first, impeding their abilities to form and sustain meaningful nonwork friendships and relationships (e.g., Rowlands & Handy, 2012). Thus, workers in the new world of work may need to attend carefully to cultivating close relationships outside of the work domain, and to ensuring that there are clear, shared expectations about how and when they will manage work demands.

Relational agility

The constant change in jobs and clients – moving across various organizations and work contexts – makes relational agility, which we define as the ability to quickly form, maintain and productively dissolve work relationships, nearly essential. In traditional organizations, the set of necessary relationships is in many ways determined based on workflow and authority structures. As organizational employment disappears, occupations and the communities formed around them may become increasingly important to workers' experiences (Anteby, Chan, & DiBenigno, 2016; Tolbert, 1996). Indeed, existing research on independent workers suggests that forming relationships with communities of workers doing similar work may be essential to individuals' learning and growth, their ability to identify opportunities, and their opportunities for collaboration on projects (Kunda et al., 2002, Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010, Osnowitz and Henson, 2016). These communities may be local ones in which relationships are formed principally through in-person meetings and interactions during work or at conventions (Maroto, 2011). Alternatively they may be mainly virtual, with infrequent in-person meetings (Caza et al., 2018), exist in the online meeting spaces frequented by creative and IT workers (Schwartz, 2018), or in increasingly popular co-working spaces (Garrett et al., 2017).

In typical organizations, relationships are formed and sustained through the projects, departments, or spaces to which people are assigned. For independent workers, however, community relationships are sustained over time only through their voluntary actions and interactions, which may be formal or informal. These workers maintain ties through collaboration on projects, offers of advice and feedback, and the provision of favors, barter, and other acts of voluntary and reciprocal support (Alacovska, 2018, Osnowitz, 2006, Schwartz, 2018). Finding individuals doing similar work – through trade fairs, conferences, or online communities – and forging ongoing relationships with them through formal and informal interactions may be essential to independent workers' ability to survive and thrive in the gig economy (Caza et al., 2018). For example, maintaining community relationships, particularly

relationships with experts and mentors is critical for digital workers' skill development (Schwartz, 2018).

Not all relationships will be equally strong, nor equally relevant over time. The magic of a particular collaborative relationship can fade as individuals move into new areas of expertise. Some relationships are also context dependent: when independent workers come together in project-based fields such as in film-making, where, collaborations can take on the feeling of a "total institution" (Bechky, 2006), and in which people form intimate and intense relationships that do not easily survive once the project is complete (Rowlands & Handy, 2012). To advance in their careers, gig workers may need to be able to step back from strong and perhaps constraining relationships so that they can move forward effectively. Just as when individuals begin to separate from their mentors (Humberd & Rouse, 2016) and entrepreneurs begin to disengage from enterprises they have founded by developing side-businesses (Rouse, 2016), gig workers may need to step back from strong relationships. They do so by building mutual projects with other individuals, developing flexible work relationships in which both partners can morph into different roles at different times, or learning how to sustain relationships in different forms, perhaps to be resurrected at later dates. Such relational agility is likely to be a key capability for these workers and an important focus for future research.

The necessary behaviors we have discussed here – resilience (persistence and bricolage), proactivity (development of portable human capital and image management), and relationship management (relational support management and relational agility) – are critical for gig workers to be viable in the new economy. Yet, many of these behaviors are difficult to cultivate. Underlying successful engagement in them are a set of cognitive and emotional resources in the form of specific capabilities that provide workers with the necessary foundation for engaging in resilience, proactivity, and relationship management.

Cognitive capabilities: thinking flexibly and adaptively in the gig economy

The transience and volatility of the gig economy may advantage particular cognitive tendencies. Current studies of gig workers suggest three cornerstone capabilities: cognitive and identity flexibility, construal level ambidexterity, and learning agility.

Cognitive and identity flexibility

Cognitive flexibility represents individuals' general ability to switch between tasks and goals (Buttelmann & Karbach, 2017) and effectively manage novelty (Hirt, Devers, & McCrea, 2008). It involves three elements: (1) awareness that there are alternatives available in any given situation, (2) willingness to be flexible and adapt to the situation, and (3) a sense of self-efficacy about one's ability to be flexible (Martin & Rubin, 1995). This capacity is invaluable in the gig economy, where occupational reorientation is often required. Individuals who are high on cognitive flexibility are adaptable to frequent career change (Chong & Leong, 2017), and have the ability to enact new and novel strategies to address work challenges (Hirt et al., 2008; Steffens, Gocłowska, Cruwys, & Galinsky, 2016).

One critical way that gig workers need to be cognitively flexible is in regards to their own self-views. Identity flexibility, defined as the degree to which individuals can imagine different identities for themselves (Grotevant, Thorbecke, & Meyer, 1982; Whitbourne, 1986), captures the ease with which individuals can morph and adjust their self-understandings (Cardador & Caza, 2012). Because their careers are no longer monolithic and stable, gig workers need to be able to consider their current work identities in light of other possibilities (Obodaru, 2012). This flexibility may need to be cultivated consciously because the lived experience of financial instability and a precarious future may instead prompt a rigid, defensive identity reaction (Petriglieri, 2011, Snow and Anderson, 1987, Weick, 1993). People experiencing threat tend to focus on potential losses rather than potential gains, which can narrow their attentional scope (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008) and restrict their information processing, leading them to enact well-learned responses (Staw et al., 1981). This tendency leads individuals to be neither open to new ideas about the self nor able to develop novel strategies for attaining a possible self (Petriglieri, 2011, Weick, 1993). In a working world where individuals pivot from one job to the next, this work identity rigidity could become quite dysfunctional. As a result, gig workers need to cultivate and practice identity flexibility.

Many of the successful plural careerists in Caza et al. (2018) study demonstrated identity flexibility by being able to move fluidly between multiple work roles and envisioning themselves in different future jobs. Yet this qualitative study also suggests that such flexibility only grows slowly, over time, as workers engage in practices that help them to feel secure and authentic in their simultaneous work roles. Other research suggests that individuals may be able find a shortcut to identity flexibility by actively considering and perhaps even investing in, alternative or provisional selves, the selves they might not currently be but could become (Ibarra, 1999, Obodaru, 2012, Obodaru, 2016). The strategy works because it allows individuals to diversify their contingencies of self-worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), and be less reactive to work precariousness. Envisioning plausible alternative career identities may also help them to adapt their work identities productively in the face of a career related setbacks (e.g., Maitlis, 2009, Vough and Caza, 2017), moving in a new career direction if needed. Identity flexibility can also help workers move between various work contracts without feeling insecure and inauthentic (Caza et al., 2018), because lateral self-thinking may help workers construct cohesive and continuous career narratives even in the face of non-linear career trajectories (Ibarra, 2003, Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010).

Importantly, because our identities, and work role identities in particular, are co-constructed with others (Ashforth, 2001, Cooley, 1902, DeRue and Ashford, 2010), the effectiveness of identity flexibility strategies depend on validating reactions from interaction partners (Swann, 1983). In the workplace, individuals engage in identity negotiation in which two people define role expectations and obligations for each other (Swann, 1987; Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009). Gig workers are tasked with negotiating their identities more frequently as they enter into new work relationships. These frequent job transitions with new partners also provide gig workers with the opportunity to renegotiate new identity terms (Ibarra, 1999), thus promoting further identity flexibility. At the same time, engaging in such negotiations frequently may lead them to create and rely upon a clear and well-rehearsed script for such interactions in order to save cognitive resources thereby minimizing improvisation or deviation. Future research should investigate if and how the gig context promotes or constrains identity flexibility.

Construal-level ambidexterity

A second cognitive capability that would help gig workers to thrive is construal-level ambidexterity (Wiesenfeld, Reyt, Brockner, & Trope, 2017). According to construal level theory, individuals can understand the same event or object differently depending upon their construal level (Liberman and Trope, 1998, Trope and Liberman, 2003) — ranging from a low construal level where the focus is on concrete, specific details about a situation to a high-level construal that involves more abstract conceptualizations (Liberman, Sagristano, & Trope, 2002; Rosch, 1975, Vallacher and Wegner, 1987). Lower construal levels are often associated with the “means” to do an activity while higher construal levels lead individuals to reflect on the purpose of that activity (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Individuals tend to be more pragmatic, detailed, logistical, and loss-avoidant in lower levels of construal and more idealistic, broad, values- and goal-based in higher level of construal (Kivetz and Tyler, 2007, Pennington and Roese, 2003, Reyt and Wiesenfeld, 2014).

Construal-level ambidexterity is the ability to shift fluidly between high- and low-construal levels. Moving between construal levels allows individuals to feel, think, and act differently toward the same object or experience, thereby creating psychological distance (Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). This ability to switch perspectives, specifically to zoom out to a higher level of construal to get a broader picture of one’s job and career, will be an asset to workers who are juggling multiple, short-term gigs and bogged down in the logistical and sometimes minute details of their work. These conditions may lower people’s construal levels, pressuring them to focus “attention on the unique and idiosyncratic demands of their present circumstances” (Wiesenfeld et al., 2017: p. 369). As such, the stressors they may be experiencing in a single contract job can become all-consuming and depleting. Workers who can balance this tendency by stepping back and creating psychological distance from their current work experience can then reflect on a more decontextualized, abstract picture of their work. Distance makes the day-to-day depleting stressors seem less significant. It also allows workers to create a sense of meaningfulness (Rosso et al., 2010) as higher-construal levels help people feel more connected to their broader, more distant goals (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010; Soderberg, Callahan, Kochersberger, Amit, & Ledgerwood, 2015). Once so connected, the daily grind may become imbued with more significance and positive meaning (Carton, 2018). It also may help gig workers with multiple roles create psychological coherence by allowing them to see the bigger picture of how the jobs and tasks in which they are engaged are related (Caza et al., 2018).

Having flexible cognitive representations about one’s work through construal-level ambidexterity allows individuals to take advantage of the benefits of both low and high level construal processing. But, empirical research has not yet indicated how individuals may learn to become more ambidextrous in this way (Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). Moving fluidly between construal levels may be especially useful for gig workers because it allows them to focus on having very positive and rich contextualized experiences within specific gigs, thereby facilitating movement toward short-term goals, and then switching to more abstract, long-term thinking to plan their careers strategically. This ambidexterity will require dedicated practice and self-management. We need research on the conditions and practices that especially prompt

individuals to engage in more “big picture thinking” about their work and careers because a lower-level construal level will naturally be reinforced in their work.

Learning agility

A third critically important cognitive capacity for gig workers is learning agility. Considered part of an individual’s overall ability to learn (Eichinger & Lombardo, 2004), learning agility refers to a person’s ability “to come up to speed quickly in one’s understanding of a situation and to move across ideas flexibly in service of learning both within and across experiences” (DeRue, Ashford, & Myers, 2012: p. 264). As work within organizations began to be more uncertain and fast changing, scholars began highlighting the general ability to learn on the job as an important predictor of success (Eichinger & Lombardo, 2004). However, in the new world of work, the narrower element of learning agility becomes an increasingly worthy research focus. As (Toffler, 1971) noted long ago: “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” Individuals with high levels of learning agility are able to learn new skills quickly and flexibly and to reimagine and redeploy old skills in new work contexts and/or in service of different aims.

High levels of learning agility will enable gig workers to adapt to their precarious and complex work environments positively in several ways. First, a gig worker with high levels of learning agility will be able to carry over appropriate lessons from one gig to the next. In this way, learning agility may make workers more resourceful (Sonenshein, 2017). Much of what people already know how to do can be useful and valuable across various gigs. However, individuals also need the ability to reimagine the ways in which they use these skills. In addition, learning agility will help individuals add more skills to their repertoire quickly because these individuals will be prone to experimentation and reflection. In sum, the agility with which individuals learn, both in and across new situations, allows them to adapt positively when juggling multiple short-term contracts.

As gig workers have higher levels of autonomy than those in organizations, a variety of elements of their cognitive and decision-making capabilities could be studied profitably as part of a research agenda for the new world of work. We highlight three agility concepts: cognitive flexibility, construal-level ambidexterity, and learning agility. The amount and rapidity of change makes such agility important. The precariousness and personalization of the work, however, makes it difficult as both create rigidity, the first due to fear and the second because workers become emotionally and egoistically committed to their choices. Gig workers need to combat both conditions to stay agile and adaptable in this work world.

Emotional capabilities: buffering oneself from the agony of the gig economy

Given the heightened emotions that are part of the lived experience of gig work and the thriving we hope to predict, a third important avenue for research concerns the emotional capabilities needed in this world of work. Regulating one’s emotions in ways that help one to meet external expectations is well-established as critical for individuals’ work success (Grandey and Gabriel, 2015, Hochschild, 1983, Wharton, 2009). Management scholars have long focused on the emotion regulation performed by frontline, or external-facing, employees (Ashforth and

Humphrey, 1993, Heaphy, 2017, Leidner, 1999, Paules, 1991) as these employees' daily experiences and work success depend clearly upon their abilities to meet external expectations of their emotions (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009). Yet, emotional regulation may be even more essential to independent workers' abilities to thrive in the gig economy both because they are constantly making new connections and thus relying on the first impressions created and because they are often simultaneously in multiple roles with multiple sets of feeling rules to which they must comply. One example is the standup comedians mentioned earlier who must suppress their negative emotions and instead find ways to project a positive image as they interact with club promoters who can help them get gigs (Butler & Russell, 2018).

In organizations, workers often have access to shared rules around managing their emotions (e.g., the hidden curriculum in medical school, Smith & Kleinman, 1989), or the jobs they hold are structured so as to enable the expected emotional expressions (e.g., the structure of Disneyland jobs, Van Maanen, 1996). Independent workers, in contrast, lack such socialization and support for emotional management. Rather, these workers must develop and deploy the capabilities necessary to manage their work-related emotions on their own as a form of emotional intelligence if you will (Côté, 2014). Studies of independent workers suggest that at least two types of emotional regulation are likely to be relevant to thrive in the gig economy. The first is the regulation of intense and oscillating emotions (Petriglieri et al., 2018). The second is the management of ambivalence, defined as simultaneously holding "strong, polar opposite feelings or attitudes towards a given object, event, idea or person" (Rothman, Pratt, Rees, & Vogus, 2016: p. 35; for other reviews, see also Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt, & Pradies, 2014; Pratt & Doucet, 2000). We address each of these in turn.

Regulating intense and oscillating emotions

Individuals regulate emotions through a combination of "surface acting" in which they control emotional expressions to conform to external expectations and "deep acting" in which they change their actual emotions (Hochschild, 1983). In the former case, workers may pretend to be happy when they are actually feeling quite sad. In the latter, workers learn to use cognitive strategies to change their perception of a situation before an unwanted emotion is fully developed (Grandey, 2000, Grandey and Gabriel, 2015, Gross, 1998) such that they both appear to be and also feel happy. Engaging in surface acting typically leads to harmful individual-level outcomes such as stress (Bono, Foldes, Vinson, & Muros, 2007; Grandey, 2003), work withdrawal (Scott & Barnes, 2011), and emotional exhaustion (Glomb & Tews, 2004; Uy, Lin, & Ilies, 2016), while deep acting is typically associated with positive outcomes such as a heightened sense of personal accomplishment (Grandey, 2003, Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). These different consequences suggest that the harmful outcomes associated with surface acting are rooted in a dissonance between the emotions one displays and those actually felt (Wharton, 2009).

We therefore suspect that surface acting is a necessary short-run strategy to cope with the intense and swiftly changing emotions in gig work. It also helps these workers develop connections and positively impress a variety of people quickly. However, independent workers' ability to survive and thrive long-term in the gig economy may depend ultimately on their ability engage in deep acting to anticipate and regulate their emotions. By learning to anticipate and alter their emotional reactions to their work, such as frequent anxiety (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010),

independent workers' felt emotions may ultimately become more moderate and stable across time. However, successful deep acting is complex: it involves selecting and modifying the situations in which one finds oneself, managing what and who one pays attention to in a particular situation, and changing one's cognitions (Grandey, 2000, Gross, 1998). Deep acting may also require focused effort on the part of the individual. For example, an independent worker might need to learn to engage deliberately in relaxation exercises prior to an anticipated conflict (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003), to reframe events and situations as challenging rather than stressful (Grandey, 2000), and/or to reframe his or her emotions as passion rather than distress (Wolf, Lee, Sah, & Brooks, 2016). These skills may be easier for some people to learn than for others. For example, deep acting comes easier for individuals who are highly agreeable (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003). Thus, deep acting is an important capability, but not one necessarily easy for individuals to learn.

Tolerating ambivalent and conflicting emotions

Scholars must also understand how the capability to tolerate conflicting emotions – ambivalence tolerance – influences gig workers' outcomes. Current research suggests that independent workers may often feel ambivalent (Petriglieri et al., 2018, Rowlands and Handy, 2012). For example, freelance workers in cultural industries as well as contractors with IT specialties, report ambivalence about the isolation involved in their work: happiness at avoiding office politics coupled with feelings of alienation and lack of belonging brought on by the lack of human contact and membership in a group (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010, Kunda et al., 2002).

As these examples suggest, ambivalent feelings can be triggered by situations that force people to confront incompatible expectations about how they should think, feel, and behave (Merton & Barber, 1976). For example, working multiple “gigs” (e.g., Caza et al., 2018, Sliter and Boyd, 2014) can leave workers feeling torn between different employers' competing and sometimes even contradictory demands. Additionally, the constant demand to sell, and “brand” themselves without any reassurance that this intensive commitment of the self to their work will ultimately be successful (Lane, 2011, Vallas and Christin, 2018), forces gig workers to straddle the line between projecting confidence while feeling self-doubt. Finally, doing well in one job while suffering a letdown or rejection in another can also cause ambivalence, as can change (Piderit, 2000). Independent workers must deal with constant situational change as they move across gigs and clients, and update their work to meet new needs. Together, these conditions make it likely that ambivalence will be a common experience and one that workers must learn to manage.

Ambivalence can lead to paralysis and indecision (Pratt and Doucet, 2000, Sincoff, 1990), and reduce one's psychological and physical well-being (for reviews, see Ashforth et al., 2014, Rothman et al., 2016). However, studies suggest that ambivalence also has some important positive outcomes for individuals (Pratt and Pradies, 2011, Rothman et al., 2016), some of which may be especially useful in the new world of work. For instance, evidence from psychotherapy that patients who simultaneously express both happiness and sadness experience enhancements in their psychological well-being (Adler & Hershfield, 2012) suggests that an ability to integrate conflicting emotions could help some individuals become more resilient. Second, ambivalence may also prime people to be more open to change, by encouraging them to process information more systematically (e.g., Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996), thereby facilitating learning (Pratt &

Pradies, 2011). Third, ambivalence also may enhance creativity (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Amabile & Pratt, 2016) by helping individuals see unusual conceptual relationships (Fong, 2006). Given its potential usefulness for psychological well-being, openness to change, and creativity, the ability to cultivate and sustain a tolerable or productive ambivalence may be an important addition to a research agenda for the new world of work, as it is an important capability that helps employees to thrive within it.

Moving research forward

The new world of work has arrived, and to make our theories of organizational studies relevant for understanding it, we need to move research forward collaboratively and productively. To do so, we propose that our aim as a field should be to conduct empirical research that examines what enables individuals to engage in the necessary work and relational actions we have identified and to develop the cognitive and emotional capabilities that we propose will help sustain those actions. These behaviors and capabilities are likely useful in all contexts, but, as we have discussed, they seem particularly relevant to an individuals' ability to thrive in a context quite different than the one that has shaped organizational behavior to date. To facilitate research on these people in this context, we have developed an initial framework based micro organization theory and on the growing body of empirical research in the gig economy. We first identified the structural conditions that create these workers' lived experiences, the range of outcomes that we might expect based on them, and the necessary behaviors to be successful in light of them. We used resource theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, Hobfoll, 1989, Hobfoll, 2011) to theorize about the underlying capabilities individuals need to develop to thrive in this situation. Our framework considers and integrates enduring elements of the human condition – cognition, identity, emotions, and relationships – and the new ways they that might arise, be needed in, and be shaped by this new world of work. While theory and literature-based, we view this model as but a starting point for research in this domain. Here are our general suggestions for moving research forward.

Side-by-side comparisons of new and old work

There are very few studies that directly compare experiences in the gig economy to those in the traditional economy — people tend to study one or the other. Dedicated scholarship doing so might help us to understand further how structural characteristics of the gig economy uniquely shape people's work experiences. For example, we theorized that emotions in the gig economy are likely to be intense, conflicting, and oscillating, yet, people in the old world of work might also experience such emotional dynamics. Still, recent theorizing by Gandini (2018) suggests that the sources, discrete experience, and expression of these emotions might differ. For instance, if a promising project goes terribly awry, workers in the gig economy might experience intense feelings of disappointment rooted in their personal investment in the project and fear of losing their livelihood. While for workers in organizations, typically embedded in more long-standing, stable, and entwined social networks, a promising project going awry might be highly public and elicit feelings of intense shame. In each case, the project's failure results in intense negative emotions but the work-related sources of those emotions – personal investment vs. public failure – differ tremendously. Further, these differences in affective experiences can catalyze different interpersonal and career-related behaviors.

Comparisons between individuals in the same occupation working in traditional and gig economy structures will also help scholars to better pinpoint the individual capabilities that are adaptive versus maladaptive in the new world of work. Would loyalty, a trait highly valued in the old world of work, be problematic for thriving in the gig economy? Scholars might compare the experiences of graphic designers who work in traditional organizations to graphic designers who work independently: What sort of cognitive capabilities are required of each and, which are required in one and not the other? We invite future scholars to compare people's experiences across these two worlds of work to understand further the distinctions between them.

Sample distinctions within the gig worker population

Another promising direction for future research would be to further differentiate samples of workers in the gig economy to better understand the conditions that influence the relationships between the lived experience of work, individual capabilities, and individuals' success. Here, we outline a few that we view as especially promising.

One important within-category distinction is the role of choice: did individuals choose to move into the gig economy, or were they forced into it, due to shifts in their organization (e.g., widespread layoffs), shifts in their industry (e.g., reduced number of full-time positions), personal constraints (e.g., health issues) or an inability to find jobs in the traditional economy? People who choose to move into the gig economy would perhaps be more likely to fall on the positive side of the elements involved in the "lived experience of work" than would those forced into it. Those who chose it are more likely to approach events as opportunities rather than threats. However, they might also be more likely to have high expectations for their work experiences and will perhaps have a more intensely negative emotional reaction to a negative experience (e.g., losing an important client) than would someone who had been forced into working in this way and was already perhaps skeptical. Even individuals who chose to move into the gig economy likely did so for different reasons; the reasons underlying their choices might influence their experiences. For instance, someone who chose to enter the gig economy out of a desire for more autonomy might be positively disposed to the organizational challenges that are inherent in the lived experience of the work (e.g., filing and scheduling) than someone who chose to work independently because they hoped to escape office politics. Just how many workers are in the gig economy by choice is unknown — some attribute the movement of individuals into and out of the gig economy as indicative of its role as a backup possibility, secondary to having a "real job in a real company" (Rugaber, 2018).

A second contrast is future aspirations: whether individuals intend to continue working in this way or are actively seeking a foothold in an organization. Some workers may decide to temporarily venture into the gig economy in order to meet short-term financial goals (e.g., paying off student loans) or to accommodate a particular life stage (e.g., working while raising small children), and intend to later join a traditional organization. Others could not imagine ever going back to the traditional working world and hope to remain in the gig economy long-term. These different temporal orientations towards gig work will undoubtedly impact individuals' lived experiences and their cultivation of adaptive capabilities.

A third point of comparison would be between people who work in occupations that have long included gig-work in their collective narrative versus in occupations that have only recently separated from organization-based models of work. For example, occupations that are practiced on a contract basis, such as film work and IT, share common assumptions about the moves necessary to advance in one's career across organizations (O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006). Such occupations are likely to have developed models of expertise development, networking, and mentoring, perhaps through communities of practice, that are not reliant upon a single organization. Occupations that are relatively new to the gig economy, such as scientists, however, might not have yet developed such models and individuals may struggle more when working in this new style.

Finally, it might be profitable to examine differences across people who work independently and primarily contract with organizations, people who sell their work directly to the marketplace, and people whose work is governed by a labor-market intermediary (e.g. an app such as Lyft or Task Rabbit that sets terms, reward systems, and so forth) (c.f., Cameron, 2018). Spreitzer et al. (2017) remind us that it is also important to keep an eye on the possibly different experiences of those doing higher- and lower-skilled independent work. The experiences of the Lyft driver and the errand-doer for Task Rabbit are likely quite different than the experiences of independent knowledge workers such as consultants and scientists.

Diversity and the gig economy

Diversity scholarship has aimed to better understand the sources of inequality in workplaces along different social identity dimensions and find ways to reduce and counteract this inequality. Yet, the available remedies for redressing inequality, such as HR strategies to (1) reduce bias at the point of hire and in promotion processes (Bielby, 2000; Cundiff, Zawadzki, Danube, & Shields, 2014), and (2) continuously identify and disrupt oppressive social practices (Ely & Meyerson, 2000) mostly assume that people are employed in a traditional organization. Governments have also passed legislation mandating that organizations treat all workers equally (Dobbin, 2009), yet independent workers cannot benefit from these remedies, however imperfect they may be (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Without organizations as a site for intervention, how can we reduce inequality in the world of work? How can we interrupt biases? How can we ensure that employers do not take advantage of individuals hired on a contract basis? How will workers know the "rules of the game" and whether they are being systematically violated? Recent evidence suggests that better understanding the sources of and remedies for inequality in the gig economy are critical foci for research. For example, Sondag (2018) found that men were 22% more likely than women to achieve a "perfect ranking" in online feedback systems, a disparity even more pronounced in male-dominated fields such as software development. If such rankings affect the ability to obtain subsequent gigs, then bias is an important topic warranting further study.

A deeper dive into success metrics

In our model, we posit that people's level of success in this new world of work runs the gamut from failing to surviving to thriving. While it is clear that there is a range of functioning, these common well-being indicator markers are simply general labels, and more research is needed to

fully flesh out the metrics individuals use to assess their satisfaction and performance at work. It may well be that independent workers will define and measure success, particularly long-term success, differently than has been typical in the past. For instance, gig workers who move frequently between organizations on a short-term basis cannot assess whether or not they are meeting career expectations by simply looking at their place in the organizational hierarchy. Further, historically prominent age-graded comparisons with friends as gauges of success (Lawrence, 1984) become less meaningful as careers become more chaotic and idiosyncratic. Individuals' notions of thriving may also involve more dimensions than simply learning and vitality. Further still, individuals' expectations and definitions of success may change over time as their gig economy experiences allow them to take lateral steps between roles more fluidly. One possible direction for future research is a qualitative study on how individuals define success when working this way — both in the short run (a successful day) and in the longer run (a successful life).

Given that gig working tends to blur the boundaries between individuals' work and home lives, leading to a higher potential for work-family spillover, metrics of success in the gig economy likely will need to be broad and holistic rather than specific to the domain of work. When work has the potential to take everything you've got, it can easily be at the expense of other life responsibilities and goals. What it means to be "doing well" in the gig economy needs to consider all facets of life — work, family, friends, and hobbies. Our theories on work-life balance assume a stable connection to an organization and examine how relationships, organizational structures, specific policies and local norms about work and nonwork combine to influence choices available to workers and how they typically navigate those choices (Ramarajan and Reid, 2013, Reid, 2015, Trefalt, 2013). But what does work-family balance mean when you are no longer travelling to a formal workplace each day but instead spend your days working in the room downstairs or juggling multiple gigs? Is it easier to balance or tougher? Are the spillover issues the same or do they take a new form? Are there different things required of individuals that have not been featured in our prior theories?

It is important to examine other aspects of relational health as indicators of success in the gig economy. For instance, how do today's workers find community? Do occupations or professions become surrogates for organizations to provide a sense of community as suggested by some studies (Galperin, 2017, Schwartz, 2018)? Or do new forms of work relationships that operate outside the realm of both organizations and professions become more important? Such new forms of work relationships might be alliances of freelancers or the community offered by a co-working space. What relational demands do these new sources of relationships placed on individuals who hope to meet their basic needs for relatedness at work (Ryan & Deci, 2002)?

A more dynamic examination of personal resources

Our framework is rooted in theories of personal resources (e.g. Demerouti et al., 2001, Hobfoll, 1989), which have been extensively used to study people's experiences of stress in traditional work settings (Hobfoll et al., 2018). By applying these theories to experience in the gig economy, we lay the groundwork for future research that also pushes this theory in two ways. First, it shifts the emphasis from job- and organization-provided resources to highlighting more the personally cultivated resources necessary for individuals to thrive. In doing so, we expand the

portfolio of individual-level capabilities that resource researchers may consider. However, empirical tests are required to understand fully when and how these proposed resources may impact individual outcomes in the gig economy. In particular, we suggest that future scholars could assess which resources/capabilities are necessary for people to survive, and which enable thriving.

Second, our discussion of resource use in the gig economy suggests the need for a more thorough examination of the unfolding resource-activation and use process than has occurred to date. That is, while we (mostly) treated the cognitive, emotional, and relational capabilities separately in this paper as they relate to the necessary behaviors and thriving outcomes, these capabilities are likely deeply interrelated, with several causal relationships and reinforcing feedback loops that could be pursued in future research. For instance, how individuals act will shape how they construct their identities (Weick, 1995). Specifically, in the context of gig work, proactive behavior can cultivate role-breadth self-efficacy and lead employees to define their roles in a more flexible manner (Parker, 2001; Parker, Wall, & Jackson, 1997). This identity flexibility could lead to greater proactive behaviors and the cultivation of future career opportunities. Further, because identity complexity and identity flexibility are linked to increased creativity and resourcefulness (Gaither, Remedios, Sanchez, & Sommers, 2015; Steffens et al., 2016), the ways in which individuals think about themselves will likely also influence their behavior.

One research agenda among many

If indeed the world of work is changing as fundamentally as we (and others) have described, the research opportunities are plentiful. Like all research agenda-setting efforts, we carved out a particular territory to cover: Individuals' agentic efforts to enable their own thriving in the gig economy. This agenda is complementary to research on other important questions about the gig economy. For example, what is the role of the government, policy makers, and organizational administrators in regulating this emerging work form? What laws need to change to enable this way of working and what protections should be offered to these workers? What are the ancillary policy changes that need to be made to account for the diminishing responsibility organizations play in securing workers' financial and physical security? For example, many have argued that our health insurance system, with its ties to full-time work in corporations, no longer fits with how work is done today (Berg, 2016). Another important research agenda is understanding individuals' agency directed towards changing the system rather than that focused on their personal thriving within this new world of work. What strategies might gig workers engage to make the work world better for other gig workers? Is power fundamentally shifting to employers with little recourse for gig employees, or is there the potential for countervailing power that might influence important changes that leave workers better off? Is individual agency the only recourse in the new world of work or is there potential for collective action as well?

Conclusion

To end where we began, surviving, functioning, and thriving in the gig economy will demand much from individuals. The necessary behaviors to thrive will tax their cognitive and emotional capabilities. If people are to make it, they need to expect and understand the structural conditions that define this new form of work and to develop the capabilities to cope and even thrive in the

particular lived experience that these conditions create. This new world of work is hungry — it demands more from individuals than what has typically been required to survive in many (though not all) organizational settings, because there are fewer scripts for appropriate action, norms for specific behaviors, and patterns for lifelong careers. Individuals will need to make work and life up more on-the-fly in the short run as well as narrate a “good enough” life over the long run, with fewer societally endorsed prescriptions for what that should look like. They will be writing their own scripts as they cope with the complexities that come their way. For individuals in the future, making their way in the world of work will literally take all they’ve got. Yet, the potential reward of a personalized, multi-dimensional, and exciting career can be worth the effort.

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