7. Online Labour Platforms, Human Resource Management and Platform Ecosystem Tensions: An Institutional Perspective

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THE SOCIAL PROBLEM: HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TO CONTROL FREELANCE GIG WORKERS

This chapter addresses the tensions arising from institutional complexity that are associated with the use of human resource management (HRM) activities by many online labour platforms (OLPs). OLPs use HRM activities to control freelance 'gig' workers and those who request their services. The use of HRM activities by OLPs generates institutional complexity because OLPs circumvent the employment relationship which is central to HRM as a disciplinary field. Extant HRM thinking is founded on the idea that HRM activities like staffing, training, appraisal, compensation and job design serve to shape and manage the employment relationship (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Nishii & Wright, 2008; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). HRM scholars look on, somewhat bemused, at current developments linked with work in OLPs in the gig economy. As intermediaries between supply and demand for labour, most OLPs view themselves as not employing gig workers who instead are regarded as independent contractors that provide services in the online market(s) that OLPs create (Koutsimpogiorgos, van Slageren, Herrmann, & Frenken, in press; Veen, Barratt, & Goods, 2019; Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2019). Although gig work mainly takes place outside the confines of an employment relationship, most gig workers are nevertheless subject to a range of HRM activities including: recruitment, selection, appraisal, compensation and job design (Duggan, Sherman, Carbery, & McDonnell, 2020; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). This new phenomenon – HRM activities without employment relationships – is the platform puzzle we examine in this chapter.

According to Meijerink & Keegan (2019), a platform ecosystem perspective best explains the use of HRM activities in the non-employment context that characterises most OLPs. For the purposes of this chapter, we define platform ecosystems as the aggregate of gig workers, requesters, and online labour platform firms who are semi-autonomous, yet interdependent actors (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer, 2018). Gig workers and requesters (organisations and/or consumers that wish to outsource a fixed-term task) are interdependent. A limited supply of gig workers poses challenges for requesters to outsource activities, while low levels of labour demand from requesters mean gig workers' opportunities for generating income are compromised. Moreover, OLP firms' revenues are based on charging fees for intermediation services, meaning they are also dependent on gig workers' and requesters' willingness to (continue) transact(ing) with each other in online marketplaces created by OLPs (Jacobides et al., 2018). HRM activities are instrumental in retaining and even locking gig workers and requesters in to the platform ecosystem (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019).

The above implies that, despite the absence of employment relationships, gig workers are subject to control by HRM activities initiated by OLPs. Such activities are traditionally central to the standard employment relationship (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Tsui et al., 1997), which creates a puzzle, as most platforms deny the existence of an employment relationship and refute claims that there should be one (Rosenblat, 2018). For example, in their study of OLPs, Duggan et al. (2019: p. 3) hold that "the means by which gig organisations view their workers has been controversial". Likewise, Kuhn and Maleki (2017: p. 183) suggest that "[t]he rapidly growing number of people who find work via online labour platforms are not employees, nor do they necessarily fit traditional conceptualisations of independent contractors, freelancers, or the self-employed. The ambiguous nature of their employment status and its implications for worker well-being have attracted substantial controversy". The key platform economy puzzle that this creates is the confusion about whether gig workers are employed by platform firms, or whether they are freelancers, as platform firms claim. It is precisely this puzzle, sparked by OLP's use of HRM activities to control gig workers, that we focus on in this chapter.

We explain that many OLPs adopt HRM activities to control freelancers and coordinate platform ecosystems, and that this creates tensions that can be conceptualised as institutional complexity, i.e. complexity arising from alignment by organisations to contradictory institutional logics (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011). In line with the work of Frenken, Vaskelainen, Fünfschilling, and Piscicelli (2020) and Meijerink, Keegan, and Bondarouk (in press), the logics in question, we will argue, are those of the corporation and the market. We argue that these tensions are observed by societal stakeholders/institutional players – residing outside, but relevant to, the platform ecosystem – and are used to challenge the legitimacy of OLPs. At the same time, OLPs may take the opportunity afforded by the currently fragmented nature (Vermeulen, Zietsma, Greenwood, & Langley, 2014) of the emerging gig economy to establish novel HRM activities that are less likely to occur within standard employment relationships. Accordingly, we examine how OLPs seek to address institutional complexity by controlling gig workers, while simultaneously disavowing they are employers to gig workers, which ultimately (re)produces the platform puzzle of HRM for freelance gig workers. We conclude with directions for future research on the institutional complexity associated with the use of HRM activities for controlling gig workers.

THE SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM: THE NEED FOR AN INSTITUTIONAL COMPLEXITY LENS

The issues around employment status have become more complicated in recent years, and with the rise of platform-enabled gig work, this is likely to intensify. Hepple (1986: 73)'s writing at the end of the 1980s already held that "[w]hat has changed over the past few decades has been the pattern of work, from full-time employment in the "core" of the labour market towards part-time and temporary work (particularly among women) and a variety of forms of self-employment or of work in the twilight area between employment and self-employment". Arguably, that twilight area is becoming far greater with the advent on OLPs, and the controversy over employment status of gig workers (Aloisi, 2016; De Stefano, 2015), which has been developing for decades is likely to grow. In our view, this controversy is the result of the HRM-enabled control that OLPs exercise over gig workers who, as independent contractors, are supposed to be autonomous in their work activities (Meijerink et al., in press).

We are not the first to write about how OLPs create tensions between control and autonomy. For instance, multiple authors refer this to as the 'autonomy paradox' between workers' desire for autonomy that is negated by the OLPs' need for control (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017; Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017; Veen et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2019). Moreover, OLPs are criticised for promising autonomy, freedom and flexibility to gig workers, while actually restraining and controlling gig worker behaviour by means of online appraisal schemes, algorithmic dispatching, or predetermined compensation schemes that harm gig workers' interest (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). For example, in research on the remote provision of digital services mediated by OLPs, Wood et al. (2019: p. 56) argue that "[a]lgorithmic management techniques tend to offer workers high levels of flexibility, autonomy, task variety and complexity. However, these mechanisms of control can also result in low pay, social isolation, working unsocial and irregular hours, overwork, sleep deprivation and exhaustion".

To conceptualise these tensions, a majority of gig economy researchers (implicitly) draw on labour process theory (Edwards, 1975; Smith, 2015) to examine how OLPs extract and control gig workers' labour effort and how gig workers resist to (re)gain autonomy (Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, in press; Veen et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2019). Although this has helped to shed light on gig workers' coping mechanisms to ensure freedom and flexibility – like circumvention and manipulation of control (Jarrahi & Sutherland, 2019) – little is known about how OLPs themselves balance the tension between control and freedom/flexibility. This is important since some of the OLPs' HRM practices – like staffing, compensation, training, appraisal and job design – serve to control gig workers, while others – such as autonomy on where, how, when and for who to work – offer gig workers the freedom and flexibility that is supposed to go along with their freelance status (Meijerink et al., in press). It is precisely the combined use of control- and freedom-enhancing HRM activities that sparked debates on the employment status of gig workers and the legitimacy of OLPs. Moreover, OLPs also control the actions of requesters (for instance, restaurants that work with Deliveroo riders) by means of HRM activities like online appraisal schemes, selection of requesters, admitting requesters access to online marketplaces, and sanctions such as the algorithmic restriction of the number of consumers that requesters can serve (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019; Rosenblat, 2018). These activities obviously go against the independent status of requesters – as independent businesses – a fact not necessarily captured by labour process theory. To better understand how OLPs balance control and autonomy by means of HRM activities, researchers such as Frenken et al. (2020) and Meijerink et al. (in press) propose institutional theory as a useful theoretical lens. Specifically, the concept of institutional complexity can be fruitful.

Following Vermeulen et al. (2014), institutional complexity arises as organisations face diverse influences arising from the coming together of different institutional logics due to unprecedented levels of environmental turbulence, and fading boundaries between firms and industries (Greenwood et al., 2011). Institutional logics are "the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organise time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999: p. 804). They represent ideal type representations of an organisation's institutional field which shape the actions of organisations by explicating which goals and activities are seen as legitimate (Thornton, 2004; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Careful responses are required to secure legitimacy from different sources while also ensuring performance and survival of the organisation, all of which requires negotiation and trade-offs between institutional logics (Greenwood et al., 2011). Institutional logics, such as the market and corporation logics, are supported by macro-institutions such as social dialogue and worker rights (in the case of corporation) and antitrust law (in the case of market logic). OLPs create institutional complexity when they attempt to combine different logics such as the corporation logic (i.e. control and coordination) with the market logic (autonomy, freedom and flexibility) (Frenken et al., 2020). As explained below, it is the use of HRM activities by OLPs, for coordinating and controlling the efforts of both gig workers and requesters for gig labour, which creates tension between the logics of the market and corporation (Meijerink et al., in press).

HRM ACTIVITIES AS SOURCES OF INSTITUTIONAL COMPLEXITY IN ECOSYSTEMS

HRM activities, freelancing and the market logic

OLPs, gig workers and requesters are rooted, to some degree, in the market logic. Under the market logic, profit-making is seen as a legitimate goal which can be achieved through free, unregulated competition (Thornton, 2004). By aligning with the market logic, OLPs claim to be neutral intermediaries, offering software as a service, and simply facilitating online marketplaces where gig workers – as one-person businesses – can engage in free and unregulated competition for making profits (Rosenblat, 2018; Schmidt, 2017). For some platforms, like Helpling, Fiverr, and Upwork, this market logic alignment is highly consistent with the way the platform treats its workers – i.e. as freelancers. Instituting a market logic aligns well with the OLPs' business model and more specifically, making profits. Namely, by working with freelance workers, OLPs' try to avoid the (labour) costs associated with the standard employment relationship, such as pensions, social security, paid holidays, and insurances (Aloisi, 2016; Daskalova, 2018).

OLPs may use several HRM activities that enable them to align with market logics. As noted by Meijerink et al. (in press) these may include staffing and autonomy. By setting few selection criteria and easily granting access to the online platform, new gig workers face low barriers to join online marketplaces that OLP's create. For instance, applying to work for Deliveroo is decidedly uncomplicated and easy as selection is very liberal. All riders who meet basic criteria (for instance, have a suitable smartphone and can legally work) are accepted (Meijerink et al., in press; Veen et al., 2019). Moreover, by granting autonomy and freedom to gig workers to decide when, where, how, for who, and against which price to work, OLPs further align with market logics. Offering autonomy enables gig workers, at least in theory, to create (more) profit as they have the freedom – as entrepreneurs – to make choices themselves like working for those clients willing to pay a premium price for a gig worker's service, by competing on the basis of price, and/or by competing on the basis of service (quality).

Though platforms disavow that they employ workers, and claim simply to facilitate a digital marketplace where labour providers and labour requesters can interact (Rosenblat, 2018), this market logic is contradicted by the hands-on involvement of some platforms in the interactions between gig workers and requesters (Frenken et al., 2020). Specifically, the autonomy that gig workers should enjoy according to the market logic, is offset by HRM activities such as platform-set compensation schemes, algorithmic matchmaking between gig workers and requesters, and performance appraisal (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). As explained below, these HRM practices are needed to coordinate platform ecosystems which reinforce the corporation logic of control, but which contradicts the market logic of free and unregulated competition among gig workers that OLPs also propagate.

HRM activities, platform ecosystems and the corporation logic

OLPs, gig workers and requesters are also rooted, to some degree, in the corporation logic. Under the corporation logic, market share and revenue growth are seen as legitimate goals that are achieved by means of control and coordination (Thornton, 2004). Despite working with stakeholders – i.e. gig workers and requesters – who are supposed to be independent (i.e. market logic), there is a clear need for OLPs to exercise coordination and control over gig workers and requesters. Some platforms align tightly with the corporation logic, and seek high levels of control and coordination over their workers, including examples like Foodora, who actually employ their workers. The need for coordination and control however is shared to some degree by all platforms, and follows from the fact that gig workers, requesters and OLPs make up a so-called platform ecosystem of interdependent, yet semi-autonomous actors (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). A platform ecosystem refers to a group of interacting, yet semi-autonomous entities – including at least gig workers, requesters and the OLP – that depend on each other's activities and therefore are somewhat hierarchically controlled (Jacobides et al., 2018; Wareham, Fox, & Cano Giner, 2014).

Interdependencies in platform ecosystems

Managing the interdependencies among the three ecosystem actors is important for ensuring smooth transactions in online marketplaces and generating revenues. We explain this using the example of the Deliveroo platform ecosystem. First, gig workers and requesters are mutually dependent on each other regardless of whether OLPs align more to market than to corporation logics for managing workers, or vice versa. In the case the Deliveroo ecosystem, for example, when many meal-deliverers leave the ecosystem (i.e. stop using the online platform to acquire meal delivery orders), there is limited value created for restaurants and consumers as meals are not delivered or delivered too late. The same is true, however, for a platform like Foodora, who employ their riders.

Moreover, meal deliverers have to ensure that meals are delivered appropriately (i.e. keep a good temperature, items kept separate, etc.) to avoid damaging the reputation of the restaurant and to ensure consumers receive high-quality meals. At the same time, gig workers (and restaurants) are also dependent on consumers: when consumers stop ordering food via the Deliveroo platform, both restaurants and gig workers will not reap benefits as insufficient earnings can be made. Moreover, gig workers are dependent on restaurants: when restaurants take too long preparing an order, it means gig workers end up wasting time that could have been spent on delivering extra orders and thus, generating more earnings (Meijerink et al., in press; Veen et al., 2019).

Secondly, the value to OLPs also depends on the ongoing contribution of gig workers and requesters: when many gig workers, restaurants and/or consumers decide to leave the Deliveroo ecosystem, it means there are limited ongoing transactions in Deliveroo's online marketplace, lowering Deliveroo's capacity to capture fees from transactions. Actors within platform ecosystems should therefore be considered complementary and mutually dependent: the actions of one ecosystem actor have implications for other ecosystem actors, while at the same time impacting on value other actors can derive from participating in the ecosystem (Adner, 2017; Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Wareham et al., 2014).

It is in the interest of the OLP to control gig workers and requesters, as well as to coordinate the interdependencies among all ecosystem actors, as this ultimately increases the revenues accruing to the OLP (i.e. corporation logic). Specifically, it is in the platform firms' interests to ensure liquidity in transactions, so that gig workers and requesters continue to transact, and so the OLP can charge a monetary fee based on such transactions. To ensure ongoing transactions, both gig workers and requesters should derive benefits from transacting with one another and the OLP, as this ensures their willingness to transact via the online platform.

Although we have illustrated these points with reference to Deliveroo, and the ecosystem it has created, which adopts a market aligned institutional logic to manage its relationship with freelance workers, the need to ensure ongoing and smooth transactions between all actors in the ecosystem holds also for platform ecosystems with strong corporation-logic alignments for workers, such as Foodora, who employ their riders. This is because the benefits of platform ecosystems depend, at least partly, on the ability of the OLP to create so-called network effects (Katz & Shapiro, 1994), as explained below.

Network effects in platform ecosystems

Network effects occur when the "the value of membership to one user is positively affected when another user joins and enlarges the network" (Katz & Shapiro, 1994: p. 94). Network effects occur in OLPs where platforms grow the number of workers in the online marketplace in order to attract additional requesters and generate more demand for their intermediation services (from individuals and businesses) which leads to more workers as they are attracted by the work opportunities which enlarge with the addition of new requesters (for instance, individuals ordering food or hailing rides, or restaurants attached to the platform supplying work to meal deliverers). These network effects can bring great power and status to platforms who have gained such a large market share (as a legitimate goal under the corporation logic) that they can become almost too big to fail.

Platforms try to create network effects by ensuring that as requester numbers grow, sufficient numbers of workers sign up to service the growing number of clients. Platforms may therefore offer generous rates in early days as they grow the platform and scale up operations, which is legitimate under the corporation logic of growth (Frenken et al., 2020). The balancing of network effects, and in effect the interdependencies among platform ecosystem actors, is however difficult. Oversupply of workers compared to demand from requesters will likely damage worker motivation to join the platform due to worries about insufficient work and competition for work. If this happens, the value of platform participation by workers drops, and this can lead in turn to less value for clients (individual clients but also business, such as restaurants) from their participation in the platform. Too many requesters compared to workers may lead to delays in deliveries (for food delivery platforms like Doordash in New York), rides (for ride hailing firms like Ola in India or Didi in China), shelf stocking (for incidental shiftwork platforms like Wonolo), or pet care (for dog walking platforms like WAG!) leading to lower motivation on the part of requesters which in turn leads to less value of participation for workers. As shown by Meijerink et al. (in press), the balancing of supply/demand that OLPs try to achieve is difficult, particularly before a platform has achieved a core or monopoly position, and while it is still competing with other platforms for the same workers/requesters who are also navigating the tensions of balancing supply and demand. In this respect, and particularly in the early phases of their existence, OLPs are strongly rooted in the corporation logic under which growth is seen as a legitimate goal achieved by means of control and coordination. These forms of control and coordination are needed to manage the interdependenices among platform ecosystem actors and to create network effects. Therefore, as discussed below, both gig workers and requesters are subject to HRM activities that afford control and coordination (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019).

HRM practices for workers that institute the corporation logic

OLPs use HRM practices to control gig workers such that gig workers co-create value with requesters and network effects are created (Cassady, Fisher, & Olsen, 2018; Ellmer & Reichel, 2018; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). For instance, they need to attract workers to their platform (recruitment and selection), and they need to design their jobs (job design) so that the worker behaves (discipline, incentives) in a way that allows for platform growth which is linked with client/requester satisfaction to continue to transact (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). They need to manage worker performance (performance management, discipline, appraisal) in line with platform growth aspirations and to meet requesters' needs. They need to reward and discipline workers to ensure platforms can continue to grow by giving clients the service quality they expect in line with what platforms promise them (Rosenblat, 2018; Veen et al., 2019). The promises made differ from platform to platform, but include promises that, for instance, taxi drivers will be trustworthy and prompt, that cleaners will be competent and respectful of client privacy, and that there are enough workers to meet client demand for prompt service so that rides, dog walks and shelf-stocking occur promptly and correctly. Appraisal schemes may also ensure a sufficient supply of gig workers. The main form of performance appraisal in OLPs is the system of online performance ratings. Lack of portability of ratings can provide a disincentive for workers to move platforms, particularly when working on platforms like Mturk, Deliveroo and Upwork where ratings are coupled with opportunities to acquire work and even access better paid gigs (Jarrahi & Sutherland, 2019; Kellogg et al., in press). Having a high rating serves as a signal when seeking work and staying with the platform and working continuously or regularly are heavily incentivised by the performance appraisal processes used. To attract clients or requesters to platforms, it is common for OLPs to design payment schemes that include gig workers working “on spec” and producing work for clients which remains unpaid until the client approves the work, which they sometimes fail to do (Jarrahi & Sutherland, 2019). Moreover, OLPs may determine the compensation of gig workers to ensure requesters’ are willing to transact with a gig worker (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). As gig workers get locked-in by means of online rating schemes, OLPs may decide to further lower gig worker income to attract additional requesters to the platform (Rosenblat, 2018).

HRM practices for requesters that institute the corporation logic

Given the interdependent nature of activities in platform ecosystems, requesters are also subject to HRM activities. In line with the corporation logic of control, OLPs use HRM activities to steer requesters’ behaviours (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). In cases like Foodora, the use of HRM activities will be similar to those used in non-platform companies which like Foodora, have an employment relationship with workers. However, even for platforms that do not formally employ workers, using standard employment contracts, we also find HRM activities for requesters. For example, Uber requires taxi drivers to rate the performance of requesters in order to create trust and build perceptions of personal safety on the part of drivers during ride-hailing services (Rosenblat, Levy, Barocas, & Hwang, 2017). These ratings can be used by Uber to deactivate ride-hailers for inappropriate behaviour that is reported by Uber drivers through the online app. OLPs may use complex algorithms that consider requesters’ ratings by the worker. In the case of Deliveroo, the algorithm can be programmed with feedback on whether restaurants have orders ready on time to ensure that riders are not wasting time waiting on orders to be prepared (Meijerink et al., in press). In case restaurants do not comply with Deliveroo’s standards, an algorithm implements sanctions that restrict the likelihood that consumers will order at the selected restaurant. This enables the conditions for ongoing engagement on both the labour supply and labour demand side (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). In line with this, requesters that frequently outsource a high number of activities via the online labour platform may be rewarded for this with discounts and reduced commission fees. At the same time, requesters may be subject to stringent selection activities. For instance, to ensure a balanced representation of cuisines, Deliveroo may decide not to admit (for example) additional fast-food restaurants when these are likely to dominate the platform (Meijerink et al., in press). OLPs may recruit additional requesters by offering temporary price reductions to entice them in order to ensure that as platforms are growing, and gig workers are not put off by pressure on their "wages" coming from requesters looking for better deals. These subsidies are designed to ensure both sides perceive they get enough value from transacting in the early stages of platform growth, even if such incentives prove unsustainable over time. By the time platforms have dominated and driven competitors out, becoming "too big to fail", subsidies to requesters may disappear and payment terms for gig workers are prone to oftentimes multiple, sequential disadvantageous changes (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019).

CONSEQUENCES OF INSTITUTIONAL COMPLEXITY FOR ECOSYSTEM ACTORS

The use of HRM activities by most OLPs for managing gig workers and requesters creates tensions between the market logic and corporation logic since most OLPs do not employ workers using standard employment relationships (Frenken et al., 2020; Meijerink et al., in press). Specifically, the implementation of autonomy practices reinforces the market logic in that they offer, at least in theory, the possibility for gig workers to decide where, when, how, for how and against which price they want to work for maximising profit. This is offset however by HRM activities such as performance appraisal, selection, pre-set compensation and algorithmic control that align with the corporation logic. Alignment with this logic implies growing the platform ecosystem to increase the OLP's market share and revenue by steering gig worker (and requester) behaviour which ultimately limits the freedom that freelancers should have under the market logic.

The tensions between the market and corporation logic manifest as institutional complexity. Institutional complexity is defined as the incompatibility of prescriptions, in terms of what are seen to be legitimate goals and actions, that come from different institutional logics (Greenwood et al., 2011; Vermeulen et al., 2014). Clearly, the contradictions between the market and corporation logic create incompatibilities that have consequences for OLPs, gig workers and requesters.

Consequences of institutional complexity for online labour platforms

Due to the institutional complexity associated with their use of HRM activities, OLPs run the risk of losing their legitimacy in the eyes of other (societal) stakeholders. OLPs and their platform ecosystems are embedded within broader institutional contexts, or if you will, institutional ecosystems. These broader contexts comprise other actors including unions, labour regulators, politicians, journalists, etc. One or more platform ecosystems may encounter similar broader institutional contexts. For example, Uber and Lyft in the US likely have similar broader contexts to confront in terms of journalists covering the gig economy from a taxi or ride-hailing perspective. It is precisely the tension between the use of control-enhancing HRM activities (i.e. corporation logic) for gig workers that are supposed to be independent (i.e. market logic) which made journalists write critical reports about OLPs like Uber and Deliveroo (Lieman, 2018). Ultimately, this may result in OLPs losing their legitimacy among requesters, which may stifle the growth of OLPs' online marketplaces. We write 'may' for two reasons. The first is that following Vermeulen et al. (2014), fragmented fields like OLPs may allow actors (such as platform firms) more freedom to decide how to align with different logics or use different logics flexibly, much like a toolkit. This may be a temporary issue, with such flexibility fading as the institutional context becomes less fragmented. Second, in the case of OLPs, the majority of consumers may not experience institutional complexity associated with HRM for freelancers or if they do, may not perceive it as problematic. Consumers are likely to be strongly rooted in a market logic as research has shown that consumers make use of OLPs and gig workers on the basis of price (Möhlmann, 2015). Consumers are likely to be sheltered from the corporation logic of control that gig workers are subject to, because the use of HRM activities is opaque to consumers. Consumers will be unlikely to challenge the legitimacy of

OLPs as long as the prices for gig worker services and intermediation services that are charged to them remain below a certain threshold. This situation may however change in the future. One reason is that a single OLP may come to dominate a selected market and increase intermediation service fees to requesters (and gig workers). Another reason that consumers may become aware of tensions linked with OLP approaches to managing workers if tensions between autonomy and control of workers become salient at a broader societal level, or if the risks that the marketplace approach to work poses for gig workers is exposed to consumers. The onset of the COVID-19 crisis has arguably drawn greater attention to the precarious work conditions of many essential though low paid workers and exposed work practices that are institutionally complex to greater scrutiny by the media, and the public.

In the meantime, other societal stakeholders do use the institutional complexity of HRM for freelancers to challenge the legitimacy of OLPs. These include, but are not excluded to, labour unions and politicians who have a basis to challenge OLPs on their tension-filled employment models where they claim not to employ people, but at the same time manage workers in ways consistent with employment. This has resulted in an increasing number of high-profile court cases around the world that centre the question whether gig workers are falsely self-employed and should be reclassified as employees (Aloisi, 2016; Frenken et al., 2020; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019; Dubal, 2018). In fact, in countries such as the Netherlands, Spain, the UK and USA, court rulings have explicated that the use of HRM activities for freelance gig workers implies the presence of an employment contract meaning that OLPs are employers to their workers. As an example, Deliveroo offers favourable access to shifts to those who work at peak times, thus undermining the "freedom" of riders to choose when to work by incentivising particular platform favoured shifts (Meijerink et al., in press; Veen et al., 2019). It was because of this that a Dutch judge ruled that Deliveroo riders should be reclassified as employees. Such verdicts may have serious consequences for OLPs since they potentially lead to increased labour costs making OLPs' business models less viable.

Particularly in online markets where profit margins are small, increases in labour costs will mean that OLPs may go out of business.

Consequences of institutional complexity for workers

When HRM practices become a focal point for some of the growing tensions surrounding OLPs, these tensions may spill over to, and have consequences for, actors within platform ecosystems, most notably gig workers and requesters.

The alignment of platforms with the corporation logic can be seen in their orientation towards growth, scale, and the creation of network effects. Because of network effects, platform growth is self-reinforcing as the value of a platform increases with the number of workers and requesters (Frenken et al., 2020). Workers on platforms could also be seen as operating in line with a corporation logic. After all, they are (according to platform firms) self-employed, independent, and the smallest of small businesses. However, these independent workers cannot collaborate with each other to set prices or counter the power of the platform because this is not permitted under competition law (i.e. market logic) (Daskalova, 2018). As 'corporations', platform workers also cannot grow and expand their "business" due to the constraints of having only their own hours of labour to sell with little possibility to expand that or hire others (Frenken et al., 2020). The ratings systems of OLPs allow gig workers to build a reputation online. However, these online reputations are tied to the individual and not portable to other platforms or workers. As such, as platforms grow, they may effectively trap workers despite their freelance status. In effect, the corporation and market logic are misaligned for gig workers (Frenken et al., 2020) with the result being that gig workers cannot compete freely and only increase profit to the extent that they are capable of working longer hours that come at the expense of their physical, social and emotional well-being.

Another key result of the institutional complexity associated with platform-enabled gig work, is that power is not distributed equally in the platform due to the access each party has to information about the interactions. In line with the corporation logic of coordination, platforms see all transactions and can try to manipulate the other parties, in real-time, to control how clients and workers interact with each other (Kellogg et al., in press; Rosenblat, 2018; Schmidt, 2017; Veen et al., 2019). Workers and requesters (for instance, individuals or businesses) have little access to information on all interactions, pricing decisions and other information they might use to manage their own interests more effectively. This limits them in their entrepreneurial activities, which ultimately goes against the market logic of free competition. Again, the only way workers can increase earnings is by working longer hours rather than competing on the basis of price or service offerings.

The severity of such consequences will differ based on the dependence of workers on platforms, a condition that varies a great deal (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). Workers who are heavily dependent on platforms, and earn most of the income through platform work, react more to perceived injustices when platforms change conditions and disadvantage workers through new HRM practices that further reinforce tensions among institutional logics. Rate changes, or changes to how income is determined, are responded to more vigorously when gig work via platforms is more significant to someone's living standards (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017; Rosenblat, 2018). This variation explains the tendency of workers to respond differently to opportunities and constraints presented by the institutional context of OLPs and the tensions in the logics that these platforms create by having HRM without employment relationships.

SOLUTIONS TO INSTITUTIONAL COMPLEXITY OF HRM FOR GIG WORKERS

There are several solutions to the institutional complexity associated with HRM for controlling freelance gig workers. These reside at the level of the OLP / platform ecosystem as well as at the wider institutional level in which platform ecosystems are embedded.

Response strategies by online labour platforms and within platform ecosystems

The most straightforward solution to institutional complexity involves OLPs opting to align with one institutional logic, and ceding the other. Oliver (1991) refers, for example, to the response strategy of acquiescence, including examples such as rule obeying and norm acceptance. This would mean either retaining HRM activities and offering an employment contract to workers to align with the corporation logic (as in the case of Foodora or following the thrust of California Assemby Bill 5, 2019), or doing away with the majority of HRM activities, reinforcing the freelance status of gig workers, and aligning fully with the market logic including allowing freelance workers all of the autonomy a pure alignment with market logics implies. As simple as this solution is, it is unlikely that OLPs will adopt it as for most platform firms, this undermines their business model (Meijerink et al., in press). OLPs will likely resist an either/or response to institutional complexity as this would result in increased labour costs (ceding the markt logic) or the inability to coordinate platform ecosystems to create network effects (ceding the corporation logic). We see the opposite occurring in many cases where OLPs, despite controlling gig workers and aligning with corporation logic, also simultaneosuly propagate the market logic by holding that gig workers value the freedom and flexibility that is associated with their 'independent' status.

Rather than favouring one logic or another, OLPs use a variety of other response strategies to address the institutional complexity they create. Oliver (1991: p. 152) refers for example to a strategy such as avoidance involving examples like "concealing". We observe that OLPs follow such avoidance strategies by developing novel ("concealed") forms of HRM outsourcing and types of covert HRM implementation to achieve control over workers' activities but to try and avoid or obfuscate the existence of employment relationships (Meijerink et al., in press). Even as OLPs respond to rules governing employment and the designation of workers and try to avoid actions which constitute employment, they also deploy algorithmic control, gamification, obfuscation and distancing to enact control over workers while trying to avoid the semblance of an employment relationship. These strategies are enabled by information technologies and the marketplaces that OLPs create in what is the still emerging and thus somewhat fragmented field of gig work.

Vermeulen et al. (2014: p. 79) argue that "in fragmented fields, actors have more choice about which pressures they select for conformity (Quirke, 2013), and they may even be able to undermine dominant logics by drawing on alternative minority logics (Durand & Jourdan, 2012)". Frenken et al. (2020) observe both growing tensions between OLPs and other actors involved in the gig economy, such as unions, while recognising that OLPs are able to take advantage of the still nascent state of the gig economy and the lack of clarity currently existing about gig work, and the responsibilities of OLPs for workers. They see evidence of "rising tensions between gig-economy platforms, tax agencies, regulators and labour unions (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). These tensions have emerged as platforms have been able to partly neutralise the role of unions and state regulations due to unclear legal jurisdictions regarding labour rights and platform responsibilities". OLPs are able to take advantage of the emergent nature of gig work as well as weak efforts by regulators to force OLPs to align fully with corporate logics and responsibilities linked with traditional employment and employers. This aligns with Oliver's (1991) identification of the variation in organisational responses to institutional complexity which is dependent "on the institutional pressures toward conformity that are exerted on organisations" (Oliver 1991: p. 151).

Responses by OLPs to institutional complexity, in the form of novel HRM practices, appear to be emerging dynamically over time as platforms navigate the tensions of new ways of working involving no employment relationship while simultaneously involving forms of control, motivation and discipline imposed by platforms to govern transactions between ecosystem actors (Meijerink et al., in press). From the perspective of HRM scholarship, OLPs are a new phenomenon giving rise to familiar HRM practices which are mobilised by platforms in new ways. OLPs responses might best be seen in light of the currently weak level of "institutional pressures toward conformity" (Oliver, 1991) exerted by labour regulations, trade unions and other sources of institutional pressure in what is currently a fragmented field. The HRM practices evident in platform ecosystems are often attempts to reframe employment relationships and issues of control and power over workers through obfuscation. Oliver (1991) identifies an avoidance-based strategic response to institutional complexity, noting efforts by organisations to "conceal" their non-conformity to institutional norms in ways that call to mind the actions of OLPS in concealing their direction of workers which would normally lead to a designation of employee status. As a result of this avoidance strategy, the institutional complexity associated with HRM activities for gig workers, and the consequences this has for workers, will likely prevail until stronger institutional pressures to conform to traditional employment logics put pressure on platforms to change their approach to workers. Since it is in the interest of OLPs to exercise control over 'independent' gig workers, it is very unlikely that the majority of OLPs will pro-actively address the institutional complexity they create. Instead, changes in the institutional context, and growing pressure from institutions of labour regulation, seem a more likely way that tensions between the market and corporation logics will be alleviated by clearer alignment by OLPs to one or the other.

Institutional-level solutions to tensions between the market and corporation logic

While OLPs may be reluctant to favour one of the two institutional logics, recent changes on the institutional level lay the groundwork for a clearer divide between the market and corporation logics. In many jurisdictions where OLPs establish themselves, changes in the institutional context present opportunities for workers to seek clarification on their status as self-employed or employed in order to try to improve their living standards when platform-enabled gig work is a major part of their income. The legal context on California at the time of writing, with the recent introduction of Assembly Bill 5 (2019)[1], provides an institutional context for workers that promotes OLPs as employers, not as technology service providers, and which strengthens the corporation institutional logic within which OLP activities might be framed. California Assembly Bill 5 (2019) provides institutional support for gig workers seeking to clarify if platforms are their employers and if they can acquire rights and protection under that legislation including rights to minimum wages, rights to

[1] In November 2020, California Proposition 22 was approved, which classifies app-based workers as independent contractors. As a result, OLPs like Uber, Lyft, DoorDash and Instacart do not need to comply with Assembly Bill 5.

collectively bargain over wages and conditions, freedom from discrimination, and payment for vacation days and absence due to illness or injury. The more heavily dependent workers are on one online labour platform, the more likely it is they may use the enabling nature of the institutional context to seek reclassification as workers/employed. Workers who do not rely solely or mainly on their work with a platform for their livelihood are less likely to seek to use regulations available to them, and more likely to resist institutional pressures to be deemed employees rather than self-employed.

The drawback of this approach is that (representatives of) gig workers have to initiate court cases – and incur the costs that come along with that – in order to be reclassified as workers, while leaving OLPs with few incentives to balance institutional pressures. This follows from the fact that whether workers are freelancers or employees is a matter of law. It is possible, however, to imagine solutions that motivate OLPs to make clearer distinctions between the market and corporation logics. One example is that gig workers are, by default, employed by the OLP. It would then be up to the OLP to convince a judge that workers should be reclassified as independent contractors (Risak, 2017).

While the above solutions require choosing between the market or corporation logic, solutions that combine both competing logics may also be feasible. The introduction of a "third" legal status of "worker", as already exists in the UK, is one possibility. In such cases, gig workers remain independent (i.e. market logic) while simultaneously enjoying *some* of the benefits that employees enjoy such as a minimum wage, paid holidays, or paid parental leave, all of which are aligned with the corporation logic. Although this solution may benefit gig workers, it also has its drawbacks as those who are currently employed may be reluctantly 'drawn' into the 'worker' category and thus lose the rights attached to the employment contract.

A more viable 'hybrid' option is the one implemented by Hilfr in Denmark. Hilfr is an OLP where freelance gig workers can sell housekeeping services to private households. Hilfr signed a collective agreement which holds that freelancers are offered several benefits that employees are entitled to such as a minimum wage of nineteen euro per hour, contribution to pension savings, and paid holidays and sick leave. Those who work more than 100 hours per year via the Hilfr platform can opt-out[2] from these agreements. Similarly, the city of New York has instituted a rule to the effect that Uber more or less also combines the market and corporation logic. In principle, Uber drivers are seen as freelancers, under the condition that Uber ensures that its drivers earn a minimum hourly rate when active on the Uber platform. This will result in the institution of the corporation logic since Uber has to implement a system that controls drivers' access to the platform to avoid an oversupply of workers that come at a cost for Uber. Unless Uber manages to attract more requesters, and balance supply and demand for labour, this will result in a situation where gig workers will not have unlimited and free access to Uber's online marketplace which goes against the market logic of free and unregulated competition.

Finally, a solution can be conceived where contradictions between the corporation and market logics have fewer consequences for the social security of gig workers. In many jurisdictions, social security – such as paid holidays, pension planning, paid sick leave, etc. – are almost solely tied to the employment contract. As a result, independent contracts are not entitled to these benefits or have to pay for these themselves which often proves to be very costly. A solution therefore would be to require every worker – irrespective of the contract s/he has – to contribute to, and receive entitlements to, social security benefits. Although this does not alleviate the tensions between the corporation and market logic, it would nevertheless help to reduce some of the precarities currently associated with the institutional complexity of HRM activities that control and restrain gig workers while denying them employment rights.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

[2] Hilfr promised to pay minimum fees to workers that remain independent. In August 2020, the Danish Competition and Consumer Authority regards these minimum fees as breach of competition law and has ordered Hilfr to stop paying those fees. For an elaborate discussion on changes needed in competition law we refer to this volume's chapter by Daskalova, McCrystal and Wakui.

Since changes in labour laws require time, or may create new tensions between institutional logics, it remains opportune for researchers to study the institutional complexity associated with HRM for freelance workers. We see several avenues for future research that provide fertile ground for new HRM insights.

First, although the majority of OLPs that work with independent contractors, if not all, combine the competing logics of the corporation and the market, some have to ensure compliance with more than two logics. For instance, OLPs such as Care.com, DoctorOnDemand.com or GigNow work with gig workers whose activities and identities are strongly embedded (such as doctors, teachers, nurses, accountants, etc.) in the professional logic (that emphasises reputation as legitimate outcome through the accumulation of expertise). To ensure compliance with this logic, the provision of training is of utmost importance. OLPs that face institutional pressures associated with the professional logic may find it challenging to offer training services to professional gig workers as this may imply control that goes against the free-market logic that OLPs propagate. The same would count for OLPs such as SitterCity.com (i.e. families hiring a babysitter to care for children in the family home) which is likely to be strongly rooted in the family logic that legitimises loyalty. OLPs may institute performance criteria for appraising and rewarding gig workers that induce gig worker loyalty to families, but that again may go against the logic of the market. Given the likelihood that OLPs may have to comply with a variety of institutional logics, we call for future studies that examine how OLPs – through their use of HRM activities – combine more than two competing institutional logics, and how societal stakeholders respond to this, and the consequences for platform legitimacy.

Institutional complexity likely differs across OLPs. This may depend on the degree to which OLPs are able to rely on input control such as the selection of gig workers as well as the degree to which gig workers (can) set their own prices. OLPs such as Fiverr, Upwork and Toptal rely on algorithmic selection to decide which independent contractors are admitted access to the online marketplace. This form of input control, where gig workers are selected on the basis of their competences and work experience, increases trust and may lower the need for OLPs to rely on behavioural and bureaucratic controls associated with corporation logics. This would pertain particularly to OLPs that grant requesters the autonomy to select gig workers themselves, rather than being assigned a worker by the OLP, as this reinforces the logic of the market. By comparison, platforms such as Deliveroo and Uber are more likely to experience institutional complexity. Due to the relatively standardised nature of the gig work performed, relying on stringent input controls related to selection makes little sense. This, however, would require more behavioural control of freelancers by means of algorithms for performance appraisal that reinforce the competing logic of the corporation. Moreover, there is little time for Deliveroo riders or Uber drivers to negotiate a price with individual requesters due to the on-demand and on-the-spot nature of meal deliveries and taxi rides. This may explain why OLPs determine compensation schemes for 'independent' contractors, which clearly goes against the market logic of free, unregulated competition. As these examples show, the institutional complexity associated with HRM for freelance gig workers likely differs across OLPs. Therefore, we call for comparative studies that examine the use of HRM activities for different types of platform workers and how OLPs' and societal stakeholders' respond to the puzzles created by contradicting logics across different platforms.

Third, the saliency of institutional complexity likely differs across OLPs. Meijerink et al. (in press) showed that in the Netherlands, Deliveroo attracted more criticism from societal stakeholders for combining contradictory logics than Uber Eats. These difference were attributed to the fact that Uber Eats worked with independent contracts ever since it started its Dutch operations, while Deliveroo changed from an employee-model to a freelancer model for its meal deliverers (Meijerink et al., in press). This change made visible the shift from a corporate logic only (i.e. riders being employed by Deliveroo) to a mixture of the market logic and the corporation logic (i.e. use of control-enhancing HRM activities for freelance meal deliverers). Given these examples, we see a need for empirical studies that adopt a longitudinal perspective to examine dynamics in institutional complexity across the lifespan of OLPs.

Finally, an increasing number of incumbent organisations (and requesters) are setting up their own online labour markets. This includes temporary agencies that create online platforms where requesters can hire the temporary agency's employees. Unless these agencies continue to work with employees, there will be little institutional complexity at play while they remain fully rooted in the corporation logic (and, for example, only use the online platform as an e-commerce tool). There are examples of incumbent organisations that do establish online labour platforms where gig workers sell their services. For instance, Ernst & Young recently established the 'GigNow' platform where freelancers can join projects that Ernst & Young is performing at one of their client firms. A similar type of OLP is 'Talent Exchange' platform run by PriceWaterhouseCoopers. OLPs like GigNow and Talent Exchange are likely to be sheltered from the general public as they are part of a bigger organisation that offers services to corporate clients rather than private consumers. It is unclear which HRM activities these incumbent-run OLPs deploy and whether this creates tensions between contradictory institutional logics. Therefore, we call for research that explores the nature of these HRM activities and whether the corporations that these OLPs are embedded in create enabling affordances for addressing institutional complexity that stand-alone OLPs like Uber, Deliveroo or Upwork do not enjoy.

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