



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Independent Professionals in Contemporary Work: Evidence from Ireland

By

Yue Sun

Supervisors: Professors Na Fu and Andrew Burke

Trinity Business School

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN

*A Thesis Submitted to the University of Dublin
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy*

May 2026

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

I further confirm that I was responsible for the conception and design of the research, data collection, data analysis, and the writing of all chapters presented in this thesis. My supervisors provided academic guidance and feedback throughout the research process, including advice on the development of research questions, theoretical framing, methodological approach, and interpretation of findings, as well as comments on draft versions of the thesis. All final decisions regarding the content and presentation of the thesis were made by me.

I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.

Signed: Yue Sun (print name) ID No. 20307980

Date: 29 May 2026

Acknowledgments

I received a lot of kind help, guidance, and support from many people throughout my PhD journey. When I reflect on the years spent on this research project, I am filled with gratitude and warm memories of the individuals who accompanied and supported me during different stages of my academic life. Without their encouragement and assistance, I cannot imagine how I could have completed this dissertation.

First of all, I would like to express my deepest and most sincere gratitude to my supervisors Professors Na Fu and Andrew Burke for their outstanding academic guidance and continuous support in my work and life. Since the first day we met at Trinity, they have patiently guided me step by step in learning how to conduct rigorous academic research. Their professionalism and intellectual insight have had a profound influence on my current research and future academic development. Throughout my PhD journey, they consistently encouraged my ideas and provided constructive and critical feedback. I have benefited greatly from their extensive knowledge, thoughtful advice, and high academic standards. I am very happy to have been working with both of them, and I truly enjoyed each meeting and every opportunity to reflect on my research with them. As I reach the end of this amazing PhD journey, I feel deeply appreciative to have worked under their supervision and sincerely appreciate the time, effort, and care you devoted to my development as a researcher.

In addition, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the members of my doctoral committee, Professors Wladislaw Rivkin and Eimear Nolan, for reviewing my work at various stages of the PhD process. I am deeply grateful for their insightful comments, thoughtful questions, and constructive suggestions, which significantly strengthened the quality of this dissertation. I also extend my thanks to the internal examiner, Professor Steven Kilroy, and the external examiner, Professor David Cross, for the time and care they devoted

to reading my thesis and for their valuable feedback. My sincere thanks also go to Xiaoning for chairing my viva and ensuring that the process ran smoothly.

I am equally grateful to my colleagues and friends at Trinity College Dublin and beyond. I feel fortunate to have been part of such a supportive and inspiring academic community. Many formal and informal conversations helped shape my thinking and made the PhD journey more enriching and enjoyable. I would like to especially thank my friends Dr. Xianwu Zhang, Dr. Shawn Ji, Dr. Sherry Luo, and Mr. Tianxi Gao for their encouragement, support, and companionship throughout this journey. I am particularly appreciative of those who stood by me during challenging moments and shared laughter along the way.

Finally, I am also deeply thankful to my families. I would like to thank my parents for their unconditional love, endless patience, and unwavering belief in me. Their constant support has been my strongest source of motivation and strength. I am also thankful for their understanding and encouragement during this long journey. Without their love and support, this achievement would not have been possible.

Being together with all of you has kept me energized and positive every single day.
Thank you so much!

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Abstract.....	1
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	3
1.1 Research Context	3
1.2 Research Gaps and Objectives	5
1.3 Overview of Three Studies	7
1.3.1 Study 1 - <i>Beyond Traditional Employment: A Systematic Review of Independent Professionals</i>	8
1.3.2 Study 2 - <i>Being Professional or Organisational? Exploring the Identity Paradox of Independent Professionals</i>	11
1.3.3 Study 3 - <i>Sustainable Careers of Independent Professionals (IPros): The Role of Inclusive HRM and Client Commitment in Career Development</i>	12
1.3.4 <i>Synthesis of Three Studies</i>	13
1.4 Structure of the Thesis	14
Chapter 2 Literature Review	16
2.1 Introduction.....	16
2.2 Research Context	16
2.2.1 Research on the Contingent Workers.....	17
2.2.2 Research on Gig Workers	19
2.2.3 Research on Freelancers.....	20
2.2.4 Research on IPros	21
2.2.5 Summary: Conceptual Boundaries and Positioning of IPros	22
2.3 Theoretical Frameworks	24
2.3.1 Paradox Theory: Analysing and Exploring IPros' Autonomy-precarity Mega Paradox.....	24

2.3.2 Social Identity Theory: Exploring and Understanding IPros' Identity Construction.....	26
2.3.3 Inclusive HRM: Understanding HRM Practices in IPros' Work Context.....	28
2.4 Research Gaps and Three Studies.....	30
2.4.1 Research Gap 1: Lack of a Systematic Investigation of Current Research Status of IPros.....	31
2.4.2 Research Gap 2: Research Gap on How IPros' Dual Identity Shapes Their Work Outcomes.....	32
2.4.3 Research Gap 3: Research Gap on How Inclusive HRM Influences IPros' Sustainable Career Outcomes.....	33
2.5 Summary.....	34
Chapter 3 Study 1 Beyond Traditional Employment: A Systematic Review of Independent Professionals	35
3.1 Abstract.....	35
3.2 Introduction.....	35
3.3 Methodology	41
3.3.1 Data Collection	41
3.3.2 Data Coding and Analysis.....	44
3.4 Findings	46
3.4.1 Descriptive Analysis of IPros Research.....	46
3.4.2 Main Themes and Paradoxes	53
3.5 Discussion.....	67
3.5.1 The Paradox-based Framework	69
3.5.2 Implications and Future Research Directions.....	77
3.6 Conclusion	84
Chapter 4 Study 2 Being Professional or Organisational? Exploring the Identity Paradox of Independent Professionals	87
4.1 Abstract.....	87
4.2 Introduction.....	87
4.3 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development	92
4.3.1 IPros' Professional Identity.....	92
4.3.2 IPros' Organisational Identity.....	95
4.3.3 The Identity Paradox: Professional vs. Organisational Identity of IPros	97
4.4 Methodology.....	100

4.4.1 Sample and Procedure	100
4.4.2 Measurements	101
4.5 Results.....	103
4.5.1 Descriptive Statistic.....	103
4.5.2 Linear Regression Analysis	103
4.5.3 Polynomial Regression Analysis.....	105
4.6 Discussion	113
4.6.1 Theoretical Implications.....	114
4.6.2 Practical Implications	117
4.6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions	119
4.7 Conclusion	121
Chapter 5 Study 3 Sustainable Careers of Independent Professionals: The Role of Inclusive HRM and Client Commitment in Career Development	122
5.1 Abstract.....	122
5.2 Introduction.....	123
5.3 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development.....	126
5.3.1 Research Context: IPros and Inclusive HRM.....	126
5.3.2 Inclusive HRM and Sustainable Career Outcomes	129
5.3.3 Inclusive HRM and Client Commitment	132
5.3.4 Client Commitment and Sustainable Career Outcomes	134
5.4 Methodology	136
5.4.1 Sample and Procedure	136
5.4.2 Measurements	137
5.4.3 Measurement Model.....	140
5.5 Results.....	142
5.5.1 Descriptive Statistics	143
5.5.2 Direct Regression Analysis.....	143
5.5.3 Mediating Hypothesis Testing.....	145
5.6 Discussion	147
5.6.1 Theoretical Implications.....	148
5.6.2 Practical Implications	151
5.6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions	153
5.7 Conclusion	156
Chapter 6 Discussion	157

6.1 Summary of Three Studies	157
6.2 Theoretical Contributions	159
6.2.1 Contributions to HRM Research	159
6.2.2 Contributions to IPros Research	161
6.2.3 Enriching Research Context	162
6.3 Practical Implications	166
6.4 Limitations and Future Research	168
6.5 Summary	169
Chapter 7 Conclusion	170
References	173
Appendix 1 Selected articles in Study 1 (Sorted by author names)	225
Appendix 2 Key Variables and Measurement in Study 2	234
Appendix 3 Key Variables and Measurement in Study 3	235

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Summary of the Three Studies.....	10
Table 3.1 Data Structure of Coding and Thematic Aggregation	48
Table 3.2 Top 5 Journals with the Selected	50
Table 3.3 ABS Ranking Journals	50
Table 3.4 Industry Distribution.....	51
Table 3.5 Items Used in the Selected Articles	52
Table 3.6 Overview of Key Terms, Definitions and Features	54
Table 3.7 Examples of Future Research Avenues for IPros Research.....	86
Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics.....	104
Table 4.2 Linear Regression Analysis Results.....	104
Table 4.3 Frequencies of OID Levels Over, Under and In-agreement with PID Levels	106
Table 4.4 Polynomial Regression Results.....	108
Table 5.1 Validity and Reliability Index Values.....	141
Table 5.2 Fit Statistics from Measurement Model Comparison	142
Table 5.3 Descriptive Statistics.....	146
Table 5.4 Hierarchical Linear Regression Results.....	146

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Overview of the thesis with three studies.....	34
Figure 3.1 Literature Search, Screening and Selection.....	42
Figure 3.2 IPros articles published by year.....	50
Figure 3.3 Paradox-Based framework of IPros' work and career experiences	68
Figure 4.1 Two-by-two matrix juxtaposing the IPros' (in)congruence in identity.	106
Figure 4.2 Response surface relating professional identity and organisational identity with job satisfaction	110
Figure 4.3 Congruence and incongruence between professional identification and organisational identification with job satisfaction	110
Figure 4.4 Response surface relating professional identity and organisational identity with subjective career success	112
Figure 4.5 Congruence and incongruence between professional identification and organisational identification with subjective career success	113

List of Abbreviations

IPros: Independent Professionals

HRM: Human Resource Management

PID: Professional Identity

OID: Organisational Identity

JS: Job Satisfaction

SCS: Subjective Career Success

ACT: Average Contract Length

IHRM: Inclusive Human Resource Management

AEARN: Annual Earning

BURN: Burnout

CM: Client Commitment

Abstract

Independent professionals (IPros) are a rapidly growing segment of the contemporary workforce, providing high-skill, knowledge-intensive services to client organisations without entering formal employment relationships. Operating through project-based and contract arrangements, IPros play an important role in organisational performance, innovation and flexibility. Despite their growing prevalence and importance attracting scholarly attention, research on IPros remains limited. This is especially in the human resource management area, which has largely focused on either permanent employees or lower-skilled forms of non-standard work. Existing frameworks developed for permanent employees, gig or low-skilled contingent work inadequately capture the complex work status, identity dynamics, and career development that characterise IPros' work. Thus, there is limited theoretical and empirical understanding of how IPros experience work, manage identities, and perceive organisational supports in contemporary labour markets. A deeper understanding of IPros' work and career experiences is therefore important for HRM literature and practices in increasingly flexible labour markets. It enables the development of more context-sensitive theory frameworks and organisational management approaches that better reflect the realities of this emerging workforce segment. To address this gap, the thesis integrates paradox theory, social identity theory and inclusive HRM literature to explore IPros' work and career experiences in order to answer the following questions: (1) What key themes emerge in the literature on IPros' work and career experiences? (2) How do IPros' professional and organisational identities shape their work outcomes? (3) How does inclusive HRM influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes?

The aim of this thesis is to investigate IPros' work and career experiences. To so do, this thesis is organized into three logically interconnected studies which address the above research questions. In particular, Study 1 answers the first question and presents a systematic

review of 143 studies published in the past thirty years (1993-2025). Study 1 serves as the conceptual foundation of this thesis by systematically reviewing existing research on IPros and identifying the autonomy-precarity mega paradox that characterizes IPros' work and career experiences. It establishes the overarching theoretical context of this thesis and highlights critical gaps in existing research. Study 2 and Study 3 are conducted in parallel and both focus on IPros' work experiences and career outcomes, but examine these issues from distinct yet complementary perspectives. Therefore, based on the findings from Study 1, Study 2 focuses on the professional–organisational identity paradox identified in Study 1 and adopts an individual-level perspective to examine how IPros' dual identity shape their work outcomes. Therefore, Study 2 explores the IPros' identity paradox via a quantitative time lagged survey (N=280). Study 3 focuses on the same theme as Study 2, but adopts an organisational-level perspective and deepens our understanding of IPros' work outcomes by exploring the influence of inclusive HRM practices on IPros' sustainable career outcomes. Therefore, Study 3 draws on the inclusive HRM literature and the sustainable career framework, and conducts a quantitative cross-sectional study (N=681) to test how inclusive HRM predicts IPros' sustainable career outcomes.

Overall, the thesis reveals the reality of IPros' work and career experience. It contributes to the HRM literature and IPros research, advances the paradox theory and social identity theory by offering novel insights on non-traditional work arrangements. This thesis also provides practical suggestions to client organisations, human resource practitioners, policymakers and IPros.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Context

The emergence and increasing prevalence of independent professionals (IPros), who are also referred to as high-skilled freelancers, independent workers or contingent workers, reveals a significant and complex transformation in the global labour market (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; McKeown, 2015; Pichault et al., 2020). For example, in North America and Europe, a growing body of studies and industry reports documents the rapid expansion of IPros and the increasing appeal of this career path. For example, the *State of Independence in America* report notes that the number of full-time independent workers grew from 13.6 million in 2020 to 27.7 million in 2024, with the 2025 edition highlighting a record that the number of high earners increased by 19% to 5.6 million ([MBO Partners](#), 2025). The United Kingdom reflects a comparable trend, where the reports showed that there are over four million self-employed workers in 2023, representing roughly 13% of the workforce and contributing approximately £331 billion annually to the national economy ([IPSE, 2023; ONS EMP14](#), 2025).

This global phenomenon is also increasing in the Irish context. The *Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Ireland Labour Force Survey* shows that the number of self-employed rose by 11,000 (+3.2%) to 352,300 in Q4 2024 compared with the same quarter of 2023 (Central Statistics Office, 2024). On the one hand, Ireland's economic structure is heavily reliant on large multinational corporations (MNCs) in the technology and life sciences sectors (Annan-Diab & Filippaios, 2017; Collison et al., 2017). The tax relief policy in Ireland is one of the main reasons and has attracted a large number of MNCs such as Google and Meta to settle in (Stewart, 2018). These MNCs created an intense and sustained demand for flexible talent. On the other hand, hiring IPros can also meet the strategic needs of small and medium enterprises (SME) to achieve flexible and rapid expansion. The industry report of *Ireland's*

Project Economy Barometer profiled IPros, contractors, and solo self-employed workers, including their demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, and sectoral distribution), occupational roles, skill specializations, income levels, and average contract length. This is a time lagged survey of high-skill contractors conducted from 2021 to 2025, exploring IPros' role in delivering time-bounded projects, relatively high qualification levels and their wellbeing.

IPros are typically distinguished from other forms of gig or temporary workers due to their high level of expertise and professional autonomy involved (Burke et al., 2020; Duggan et al., 2020). They are characterized by individuals offering specialised, project-based or contract-based services to multiple clients without being an employee of any single organisation (Burke et al., 2022; D'Amours & Legault, 2013; McKeown, 2016). They often possess skills in areas such as IT, consulting, engineering or finance, and their relationship with the client is mostly contractual (Apitzsch et al., 2023; David, 2009). Examples include IT contractors, management consultants, financial specialists and other self-employed experts. During the fixed contract period, they have autonomy to the approaches and methods of their work and deliver a specific outcome on time.

Overall, the evidence presented above indicates that the growth of IPros is not a temporary labour market development but a sustained structural shift. Globally, the rise of IPros is driven by several interconnected forces. Technological advancements, particularly the widespread adoption of digital platforms and communication tools, have made it easier for highly skilled individuals to connect with clients across geographical boundaries and manage contract-based work autonomously (Ballas et al., 2024; Kost et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2018). Simultaneously, businesses are seeking greater flexibility and agility to respond to dynamic market conditions (Kalleberg, 2001; Teece et al., 2016). These businesses often choose to access specialised expertise on demand rather than maintaining a fixed internal labour force (Kalleberg, 2003). The rise of IPros reflects a structural transformation in how

organisations access expertise and how skilled professionals engage with work. However, the growth of IPros is challenging traditional employment structures and the research on IPros' work experience is still limited.

1.2 Research Gaps and Objectives

Despite the fast growth of IPros in the global labour market, academic research on IPros is still fragmented and limited. Much of the existing literature has focused on macro-level analyses of labour market change, regulatory frameworks and employment classification (Cross & Swart, 2021; Leighton, 2015), or on broad examinations of self-employment and contingent work (McKeown, 2015), neglecting the complex challenges in IPros' work and career experience. These studies often explore IPros with other forms of self-employment or contingent work, thereby overlooking their distinct position as highly skilled and autonomous professionals (Knapp et al., 2021; Syrett, 2016). While some studies have explored individual motivations and career trajectories within independent work (McKeown, 2015), there remains a lack of in-depth understanding of how IPros experience their work on a day-to-day basis. Particularly, there is still less attention understanding how these individuals construct their professional and organisational identities, interact and experience inclusion in client organisations.

Additionally, theoretical frameworks in employment relations and human resource management (HRM) typically focus on permanent employees where the external professionals who contribute strategically to organisational performance have been neglected (Burgess & Connell, 2006; Cross & Swart, 2022). Core HRM models focus on stable employment relationships, hierarchical control, and long-term organisational membership, which limits their applicability to workers who operate outside formal employment boundaries (Leisink & Boxall, 2021; Lepak & Snell, 1999). IPros are often conceptualised as peripheral labour or outsiders, positioned outside the core HRM system and excluded from formal HR practices such as career development, performance

management, and organisational support (Bidwell, 2013; Kunda et al., 2002). It overlooks the fact that IPros frequently perform critical skill work, contribute high-value expertise, and have influence on organisational performance, innovation, and knowledge transfer (Cross & Swart, 2022; Petriglieri et al., 2019). To address these limitations, emerging perspectives such as inclusive HRM provide a relevant lens for understanding how organisations can better engage and support non-traditional workers (Shore et al., 2018; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Inclusive HRM emphasises fair treatment, access to resources, and supportive practices for all workers regardless of employment status, and therefore offers a useful management approach for shaping IPros' work experiences and enabling positive career outcomes (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). However, empirical research examining how inclusive HRM practices influence IPros remains limited. These limitations leave research gaps in understanding the work and career experience of IPros in contemporary project-based economies. The present research aims to address these significant research gaps by examining how IPros experience their work and career, and how these experiences are shaped by organisational practices, particularly inclusive HRM, within the Irish context.

Based on the above review, there is relatively limited research on IPros, especially in the field of HRM. Particularly, with the rapid development of digital platforms, an increasing number of people are choosing flexible work, which poses challenges to traditional HRM theory and practices (Gandini, 2019; Pichault & McKeown, 2019; Sutherland et al., 2020). These limitations leave research gaps in understanding the work and career experience of IPros in contemporary project-based economies. At present, research on IPros deserves more scholarly attention. The present research aims to address these significant research gaps by focusing on how IPros experience their work, construct their identities, and perceive organisational support through inclusive HRM within the Irish context. Therefore, in the context of pursuing flexible work arrangements, especially with the stable and increasing number of IPros. It is essential and urgent to systematically review

the relevant literature on IPros and rethink HRM practices. Specifically, this research examines how IPros experience their work, how they construct and manage their identities, and how inclusive HRM practices shape their work and career outcomes. Particularly, this research will explore how IPros experience their work, their identities, and perceive organisational supports via inclusive HRM shape their work and career outcomes. This thesis consists of three studies on the following research questions:

- 1) What key themes emerge in the literature on IPros' work and career experiences?
- 2) How do IPros' professional and organisational identities shape their work outcomes?
- 3) How does inclusive HRM influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes?

1.3 Overview of Three Studies

In order to answer the above research questions, this thesis is organized into three studies. All three studies share the same research focus on the IPros. Each of them has separate aims and methodologies. In particular, Study 1 aims to systematically review existing literature on IPros to understand the key themes emerge in the literature on IPros. It finds four main research themes of IPros' research and discusses the autonomy-precarity mega paradox in IPros' work and life. Following the findings of Study 1, Study 2 aims to explore IPros identity paradox via a quantitative survey method. It draws on social identity theory to understand how IPros balance their strong professional identity which is based on autonomy and specialised expertise, and the necessary organisational identity which is alignment with client goals and project integration. Following the Study 1, Study 3 aims to explore the relationship between IHRM practices and IPros' sustainable career outcomes. Specifically, Study 3 explores how IHRM practices influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes, including annual earning, subjective career success and burnout. Table 1.1 provides an outline of the three studies, including research aims, methodology, data collection and main findings.

1.3.1 Study 1 - Beyond Traditional Employment: A Systematic Review of Independent Professionals

The rise of IPros who are highly skilled individuals and sell their expertise on a contract basis rather than through standard employment, has transformed contemporary labour markets (Barley & Kunda, 2006; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). Organisations across sectors increasingly adopt project-based and flexible work arrangements. IPros have emerged as a significant component of the knowledge economy, offering specialised skills, agility, and innovation capacity (Burke & Cowling, 2020; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). However, despite the fast growth of IPros attracting scholars' attention, the interdisciplinary research on IPros is still limited and fragmented. Existing studies suggested that IPros' work combines a high degree of autonomy and professional freedom with persistent forms of precarity linked to income instability, client dependence, and limited access to employment protections (Leighton, 2015; Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Syrett, 2016). While these dimensions have been examined separately, there is a lack of integrative work that systematically explores how IPros experience their work and career in this context. It led to a research gap with a lack of systematic reviews to advance our understanding and guide future research. In order to address this issue, Study 1 sets to systematically search and collect the peer-review papers regarding IPros in four primary databases in Social Science (Web of Science, EBSCO, Wiley and Sage). By applying the selection criteria and deleting the duplication and less relevant papers, 143 studies (including 20 cross-study papers and 2 highly relevant industry reports) were included in the full-text review.

The included studies that were published over a duration of thirty years (1993-2025). By identifying and summarizing themes based on these studies, this study reveals four themes and corresponding paradoxes of IPros research. They are: 1) Work experiences and challenges: work conditions paradox which highlights the tension between control of work

and the reality; 2) Work-life balance, wellbeing and health: wellbeing paradox which reveals how the pursuit of work-life balance and jobless stress; 3) Career development, support and success: which exposes the inherent contradiction between IPros' self-management independence and social net interdependence; 4) Identity and management: identity paradox which reveals the tension between IPros' professional and organisational identity.

Overall, this research synthesizes and advances the current research of IPros by providing a systematic review of IPros' research. This research contributes to IPros' research by exploring and understanding IPros' work and career experiences. This research also contributes to HRM theory by underscoring the necessity of adapted, multi-level management approaches for contingent workforces.

Table 1.1 Summary of the Three Studies

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Research title	Beyond traditional employment: A systematic review of independent professionals	Being professional or organisational? Exploring the identity paradox of independent professionals	Sustainable careers of independent professionals: The role of inclusive HRM and client commitment in career development
Research focus/aim	To systematically review literature on IPros by focusing on IPros' work and career experiences.	To better understand how IPros' professional identity and organisational identity shapes their work outcomes.	To better understanding how inclusive HRM influences IPros' sustainable career outcomes.
Methodology	Systematic review	Quantitative survey	Quantitative survey
Data collection	143 studies on IPros across multiple disciplines.	A web-based self-report survey questionnaire via email (N=280)	A web-based self-report survey questionnaire via email (N=681)
Findings	This study identifies and elaborates an autonomy-precarity mega paradox that characterizes the IPros' work and career experiences. It offers an agenda for future research.	The study finds that both IPros' job satisfaction and subjective career success are higher when professional and organisational identity converge at high rather than low levels.	The study finds that inclusive HRM has a significant impact on IPros' client commitment and sustainable career outcomes. Client commitment has a significant impact on IPros' subjective career success and burnout. The client commitment mediates the inclusive HRM and on IPros' subjective career success and burnout.

1.3.2 Study 2 - Being Professional or Organisational? Exploring the Identity Paradox of Independent Professionals

IPros are highly skilled experts who operate outside traditional employment relationships but rely on client organisations (Kunda et al., 2002; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). Their dual identity of professional and organisational generates a tension in their working lives, which is the identity paradox between being professional and being organisational. Unlike employees who are socialised into organisational cultures, IPros need to continually engage in positioning themselves as both insiders as trusted collaborators and outsiders as autonomous experts (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Bryant & McKeown, 2016). On one hand, IPros derive their work autonomy and sense of self from their professional identity, which is grounded in their specialised knowledge and independence (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; Burke et al., 2020; Kunda et al., 2002). On the other hand, they often develop organisational identity because of working closely with client teams, adopting corporate norms, and contributing to organisational goals (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; Pichault et al., 2020). Despite the fact that it may blur the boundaries between IPros and regular employees, this paradox raises critical questions about how IPros' professional and organisational identities shape their work outcomes.

Current studies suggest that maintaining this balance is essential for credibility and employability (Hekman et al., 2009; Mao & Shen, 2020). This is because excessive identification with the client may threaten perceived independence, while excessive independence can influence trust and integration (Barley & Kunda, 2006; Yunus & Mostafa, 2022). Although exploring identity dynamics is important, most existing studies treat professional identity and organisational identity as separate constructs rather than intertwined processes (Brown, 2015; Ostermeier et al., 2023). Therefore, Study 2 aims to explore the IPros' organisational-professional identity paradox. It adopts social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Turner et al., 1979) and explores the impact of their identities

(organisational and professional identities) on their career outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction and subjective career success). A quantitative research approach was adopted for this time lagged study, using polynomial regression and response surface analysis. The results reveal that both IPros' job satisfaction and subjective career success are higher when professional and organisational identity converge at high rather than low levels. This study contributes to HRM literature and extends social identity theory in non-traditional work arrangements by showing and expanding how IPros' professional and organisational identities influence their work outcomes. This study also has practical implications and provides significant future research directions for the study of IPros. As such, this study answers how IPros' professional and organisational identities shapes their work outcomes.

1.3.3 Study 3 - Sustainable Careers of Independent Professionals (IPros): The Role of Inclusive HRM and Client Commitment in Career Development

In traditional employment settings, HRM practices contribute to employees' career sustainability by providing developmental opportunities, inclusion, and psychological support (De Vos et al., 2020; Ren et al., 2023). In contrast, IPros typically fall outside HRM systems, being treated as external service providers rather than internal employees of the organisation (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). This exclusion limits their access to training, feedback, and organisational support, which are critical components of a sustainable career (Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Kraimer et al., 2011). Recent research on inclusive HRM suggests that organisations can extend inclusive HRM practices beyond formal employees to encompass diverse employment forms, including contractors and freelancers (Shore et al., 2018; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). These practices such as transparent communication and participatory decision-making can strengthen IPros' sense of respect, engagement, and commitment, ultimately enhancing their performance and career development. However, research on how inclusive HRM influences IPros' sustainable career is still limited.

In order to fill the above gap, Study 3 adopts the perspective of inclusive HRM and sustainable career framework to explore the impact of inclusive HRM practices on IPros' sustainable career outcomes (i.e., annual earning, subjective career success and burnout). A quantitative research method was applied in this cross-sectional study. The results revealed that inclusive HRM has a significant impact on IPros' client commitment and sustainable career outcomes. Client commitment has a significant impact on IPros' subjective career success and burnout. Furthermore, the client commitment mediates the inclusive HRM and on IPros' subjective career success and burnout. Theoretically, this study extends the HRM literature to non-traditional work arrangements by exploring the career experiences of IPros and highlighting the role of inclusive HRM practices in shaping their sustainable career outcomes. Furthermore, the findings provide valuable insights for IPros, HRM practitioners and policymakers by emphasising the importance of access to external resources, inclusive workforce management, and supportive institutional frameworks. As such, this studies answers how inclusive HRM practices influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes?

1.3.4 Synthesis of Three Studies

Overall, the three studies collectively explore IPros' work and career experiences. Study 1 explores the autonomy-precarity mega paradox for IPros based on explaining the main themes of current research on IPros via a systematic review of 143 studies on IPros published in the past 30 years (1993-2025). Study 2 follows the findings of study 1 to explore IPros' professional and organisational paradox by executing a time lagged study (N=280). Following the findings of Study 1, Study 3 conducts a cross-section study to explore whether, how, and why inclusive HRM influences IPros' sustainable career outcomes. These two empirical studies address the research question on how do IPros' professional and organisational identities shapes their work outcomes and how does inclusive HRM influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes.

The three studies, Study 1 builds a foundation that draws a whole picture of the existing literature on IPros. It establishes the overarching theoretical context of this thesis and highlights critical gaps in existing research, specifically identifying the recurring themes, the autonomy-precarity mega paradox and future research directions. Based on this foundation, Study 2 and Study 3 are in parallel and both focus on IPros' work experiences and career outcomes, but examine these issues from distinct yet complementary perspectives. Study 2 (quantitative time lagged study) adopts an individual-level perspective and provides an understanding of the IPros professional and organisational identity paradox. It focuses on Ireland's context to answer how IPros' professional and organisational identities shape their work outcomes. Then, Study 3 (quantitative cross-sectional study) adopts an organisational-level perspective and deepens our understanding by exploring the influence of inclusive HRM on IPros' sustainable career outcomes. It presents a management view to explore the impact of inclusive HRM practices and client commitment on IPros' sustainable career outcomes. Although they differ in theoretical emphasis and methodological approach, both studies address a shared thematic concern: understanding IPros' work and career experience and how these experiences translate into their work and career outcomes.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One first introduces the research context of the IPros. It then presents the research gaps, objectives, and questions. Following that, it provides a brief introduction of each study and then presents the synthesis of the three studies. Finally, the thesis structure is presented to provide an outline of the following chapters.

Chapter Two firstly presents a review of the literature on contingent workers, gig workers and freelancers. Next, it introduces the fast growth IPros, including the definition of IPros and their distinctive characteristics that make them different from contingent workers, gig workers and freelancers. Thirdly, it reviews the varied models and frameworks

that are applied to study IPros, including paradox theory, social identity theory and inclusive HRM literature. Finally, based on the previous review of existing literature, the research gaps are identified, and the methods of how these gaps are addressed via three studies individually and collectively are presented.

Chapter Three presents the first study titled “*The Autonomy-Precarity Paradox: A Systematic Review of Independent Professionals*”. This study presents a review of the 143 studies published over the past three decades and offers a research agenda for future research on IPros. The findings of this study provide the direction for the subsequent two studies.

Chapter Four presents the second study titled “*Being Professional or Organisational? Exploring the Identity Paradox of Independent Professionals*”. This study further investigates the identity paradox of IPros via a time lagged study. Specially, this study explores impact of IPros’ identities (organisational and professional identities) on their career outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction and subjective career success).

Chapter Five presents the third study titled “*Sustainable Careers of Independent Professionals: The Role of Inclusive HRM and Client Commitment in Career Development*”. This study adopts a cross-section study to explores the impact of inclusive HRM practices and client commitment on IPros’ career outcomes (i.e., annual earning, subjective career success and burnout).

Chapter Six discusses the theoretical and practical implications of this thesis. It also presents the limitations and suggestions for future research on the IPros. Lastly, Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by briefly summarising the three studies and their collective contribution.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will present a review of the literature on contingent workers, gig workers, freelancers, and IPros to illustrate their differences. It then reviews the theoretical frameworks commonly applied to study IPros, namely paradox theory, social identity theory, and inclusive HRM. These perspectives support the understanding of how IPros experience their work, construct their professional identities, and sustain their careers within hybrid organisational systems. Finally, based on the review, research gaps are identified, and how these gaps are addressed via three studies individually and collectively is described.

2.2 Research Context

This research is situated IPros within the broader context of non-standard employment, which has expanded significantly as organisations increasingly rely on flexible labour arrangements. Existing research on non-standard work has applied a range of overlapping terminologies and labels to describe workers operating outside standard employment relationships. These categories are often used interchangeably, despite important differences in work arrangements, skill levels, and employment relations. Prominent among these labels are contingent workers (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Kalleberg, 2000), gig workers (Duggan et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2018), and freelancers (Burke et al., 2020; McKeown, 2015).

IPros are distinctive from these forms in many ways. IPros are typically characterized by high levels of expertise, strong professional identities, greater autonomy over work processes, and sustained project-based relationships with organisational clients (Apitzsch et al., 2023; Pichault et al., 2020). This section presents the review of these terminologies to provide conceptual clarity for IPros in terms of their overlaps and distinctiveness from other concepts. This review of related terminologies is important for establishing conceptual

clarity around IPros by identifying both their overlaps with and distinctions from other non-standard work categories. Clarifying these conceptual boundaries enables a more precise empirical investigation of IPros and avoids conflating diverse forms of independent work that differ significantly in terms of skills, autonomy, and employment relations.

Therefore, this study first introduces the umbrella term, i.e., contingent workers of which IPros are part. Research on contingent workers provides a foundational framework for understanding the context of flexible labour arrangements and employment insecurity associated with non-standard work arrangement (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Kalleberg, 2000). Furthermore, the rise of the gig economy represents a significant change which is driven by digital platforms and characterised by task-based work and new forms of labour coordination (Duggan et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2018). The discussion of freelancers introduces a group characterized by greater skill specificity and professional autonomy, while still often being treated as a homogeneous category within non-standard employment research (Burke et al., 2020; McKeown, 2015). Finally, the review focuses on IPros, positioning them as a distinct subgroup of independent workers who combine high levels of expertise, autonomy and project-based client relationships (Apitzsch et al., 2023; Pichault et al., 2020). Based on this broader research context on non-standard work arrangement, this thesis provides a clearer differentiation of non-standard work and clarifies their distinctive characteristics and significance for empirical investigation.

2.2.1 Research on the Contingent Workers

Research on contingent work has its roots in the broader study of non-standard employment relationships, defined by their deviation from full-time, permanent contracts (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Kalleberg, 2000). The early research on contingent workers can be traced back 40 years. Polivka and Nardone (1989) defined contingent work as *“any job in which the individual does not have an explicit or implicit contract for long-term employment or one in which the minimum hours of work can vary in the non-systematic way”*

(p 11). While such arrangements provide organisations with adaptability and cost efficiency, they can also generate employment insecurity, limited career progression, and weakened organisational attachment for workers (Cameron, 2000; Cappelli & Keller, 2013). In the past few decades, research on contingent workers has generally been associated with characteristics such as instability (Rousseau & Libuser, 1997; Wilkin, 2013), temporary job and low performance (Polivka, 1996), short-term employment (Polivka & Nardone, 1989).

The exploration research on contingent workers has become more extensive due to the number of “non-standard” workers growing fast in recent years (Johnson & Lake, 2019). Taking the US as an example, contingent work arrangements already make up 30-40% of the US labour force and are expected to grow further (PeopleScout, 2018). With the fast growth of contingent workers, Connelly and Gallagher (2004) proposed that contingent work includes four forms: temporary agency workers, independent contractors, directly hired workers, and seasonal workers. Building on this distinction, Johnson and Lake (2019) further clarified that contingent workers can be classified into independent contractors, on-call workers, temporary agency workers, and workers provided by contract firms. This classification aligns with the categories adopted by the *U.S. Bureau of labour Statistics* (BLS, 2018). Accordingly, this research conceptualise contingent workers as a broad category, within which IPros constitute a specific and more specialised subset.

Contingent employment reflects both an economic and psychological phenomenon. From an economic perspective, it reflects the post-industrial shift toward flexible labour markets driven by globalisation and technological advancement (Beck, 2014). Psychologically, scholars have highlighted how contingent workers often experience reduced organisational identification, role ambiguity, and lower access to developmental resources (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007). However, much of this research has focused on low-skill or peripheral contingent work and has underrepresented the experiences of highly skilled professionals who voluntarily choose independent careers (Beard & Edwards, 1995;

Kunda et al., 2002). These research limitations provide a conceptual bridge toward the study of IPros, who operate under contingent arrangements but with distinct motivations and professional identities.

2.2.2 Research on Gig Workers

In the context of neoliberalism, the development of the gig economy has provided numerous opportunities for flexible employment and entrepreneurship (Friedman, 2014; Lehdonvirta, 2018). The development of digital labour platforms has given rise to extensive research on gig workers, defined as individuals who perform short-term, task-based work mediated through online platforms such as Uber, Upwork, and Fiverr (Pulignano, Grimshaw, et al., 2024; Wood et al., 2019). Gig work has proliferated and accounts for a large proportion of the overall non-standard labour force, with about a quarter of non-standard labour engaged in gig work (Gig Economy Data Hub, 2025; Wood et al., 2019). Especially due to the impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, gig work and other non-standard work arrangements have become important alternatives to traditional permanent employment (Watson et al., 2021). Specifically, layoffs and flexible work arrangements due to the impact of the COVID-19 are the main reasons for most workers choosing gig work (Spurk & Straub, 2020; Watson et al., 2021).

The current research on gig workers generally focuses on those low-skilled workers, such as Uber drivers and Deliveroo riders who work on short-term assignments (Duggan et al., 2020a). Furthermore, the gig work literature has largely focused on precarity, algorithmic control, and the erosion of traditional employment protections (Ravenelle, 2019; Vallas & Schor, 2020). Scholars have debated whether gig work represents empowerment through flexibility or exploitation through digital surveillance and income instability (Stewart & Stanford, 2017). Moreover, although both gig workers and IPros are self-employed, their experiences are different. Gig work is typically characterised by low autonomy and low skill discretion, with workers constrained by platform algorithms and limited opportunities for

skill development (Duggan et al., 2023; Wiener et al., 2023). By contrast, IPros' work is about completing well-defined projects for clients, usually running over weeks or months (Bryant & McKeown, 2016). IPros generally operate in knowledge-intensive sectors such as consulting, ICT, design, and engineering, where expertise and autonomy are central to value creation (Leighton, 2015). Consequently, while gig work research provides insights into the precarity dimension of self-employment, it fails to capture the professional identity, autonomy, and client relationships that define IPros' work.

2.2.3 Research on Freelancers

Freelance work is a different form of work from traditional full-time work arrangements (Burke & Cowling, 2020). Freelancers are self-employed individuals who provide creative, technical, or professional services to multiple clients, often on a project basis (Nemkova et al., 2019). Studies on freelancers have traditionally emphasised freedom, flexibility, and self-realisation as primary motivators for independent work (Burke et al., 2021; Kitching & Smallbone, 2012). Client organisations typically employ freelancers and cope with fewer formal rights and more significant job uncertainty (Kitching & Smallbone, 2012; Lo Presti et al., 2018). Compared to traditional full-time employees, freelancers enjoy higher autonomy, flexibility, and personal choices in their work (Burke & Cowling, 2020; Burke et al., 2021). Therefore, the freelance work is a short-term transactional nature that deviates from traditional employee-employer relationships. However, this literature also recognises the vulnerabilities of freelance careers, including uncertain income, lack of social protection, and limited access to training or collective representation (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; McKeown, 2015).

Recent research has conceptualised freelancers as boundaryless professionals who move fluidly across organisational contexts. For example, Kitching and Smallbone (2012) defined freelancers as *“those genuinely in business on their own account, working alone or with co-owning partners or co-directors, responsible for generating their work and income,*

but who do not employ others” (p. 76). This perspective positions freelancing as a legitimate and strategic career path rather than a fallback option. Thus, freelancers differ from employees, own-account workers, and small business owners. Lo Presti et al.'s (2018) research confirmed this opinion that freelancers is a hybrid position between employees and entrepreneurs. While freelancers often work closely with client organisations and perform roles similar to those of employees, they remain contractually independent and outside formal employment relationships. At the same time, freelancers have entrepreneurial characteristics in that they are responsible for securing work, managing their own income and careers, and bearing the financial risks associated with independent work.

Moreover, much of the freelancer literature remains focused on creative industries and lacks the distinction between artistic freelancers and the IPros who function as consultants or contractors in corporate and technical environments (Schwartz, 2018). Based on the current research, freelancers are a broader concept compared with gig workers and contingent workers, and controversial opinions still exist in the academic field.

2.2.4 Research on IPros

Emerging scholarship on IPros seeks to address this conceptual gap by defining IPros as highly skilled, self-employed individuals without employees who provide knowledge-based services to clients (Burke et al., 2021; Leighton, 2015; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). IPros are highly educated and skilled who are self-directed professionals and deliver specialised expertise to engage their clients under a commercial contract (McKeown, 2015). This group includes project managers (Bidwell, 2009), engineers (Peel & Inkson, 2004), IT technicians (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009; Süß & Kleiner, 2010), creative workers (Nemkova et al., 2019) and other experts whose work is project-based and professionalised.

Based on the current research, the features of IPros include operating their own business (Fragoso & Kleiner, 2005), taking more significant risks (Bryant & McKeown, 2016), having no access to benefits and legal rights provided by the employers (Chadwick

& Flinchbaugh, 2016), as well as enjoying flexibility and high-level autonomy work arrangements (Pichault et al., 2020). Therefore, IPros combine entrepreneurial autonomy with professional skills and client collaboration, occupying a hybrid space between employment and entrepreneurship (Barley & Kunda, 2006; McKeown, 2015). So far, there are still no consistent descriptions and examinations of IPros in different disciplinary fields. For example, economic scholars discuss IPros from an individual perspective based on personal experiences, such as driving factors (Burke & Cowling, 2020). HRM scholars examine IPros at the organisational level, such as employee-employer relationships (D'Amours & Legault, 2013; Lo Presti et al., 2018), and HRM practices (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023).

Furthermore, current research show that while autonomy enables flexibility, self-expression, and work-life balance, unstable client relationships, income volatility, and institutional exclusion could lead to career insecurity (Kitching & Smallbone, 2012; Sutherland et al., 2020). Moreover, scholars also explored how IPros construct professional identities that reconcile independence with belonging, particularly when working within client organisations (Barley & Kunda, 2006; Petriglieri et al., 2019). Despite growing interest, the research on IPros in the HRM field is still limited. The current literature remains fragmented and lacks integrative theoretical models that explain how IPros manage paradoxical demands and sustain their careers.

2.2.5 Summary: Conceptual Boundaries and Positioning of IPros

This section reviewed four interconnected terminologies of literature, which are contingent workers, gig workers, freelancers, and IPros to clarify the differences of these non-standard work arrangements. A key similarity across these groups is their contractual independence from employing organisations, which is commonly associated with income volatility and limited institutional support (Kitching & Smallbone, 2012; Sutherland et al., 2020). Although these categories all describe forms of work that depart from standard,

permanent employment relationships, existing research demonstrates essential differences in work arrangements, skill requirements, autonomy, and employment relations across these groups (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Kalleberg, 2000).

Contingent work serves as a broad umbrella concept encompassing a wide range of non-standard employment forms, including temporary, on-call, agency, and contract-based work (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Polivka & Nardone, 1989). Research on contingent workers often treat them as a heterogeneous category and mainly focus on low-skilled or peripheral workers, providing limited insight into the experiences of highly skilled professionals who voluntarily engage in independent work arrangements (Beard & Edwards, 1995; Kunda et al., 2002). Gig workers are typically mediated by digital platforms and organised around short-term, task-based assignments (Duggan et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2018). While both gig workers and IPros have contractual independence and the absence of traditional employment protections, the gig economy literature primarily emphasises algorithmic management, precarity, and limited autonomy (Ravenelle, 2019; Vallas & Schor, 2020). Therefore, gig workers are generally associated with heightened precarity and constrained opportunities for professional development (Ravenelle, 2019).

Freelancers overlap more closely with IPros, particularly in terms of self-employment, client-based work, and autonomy (Burke & Cowling, 2020; Burke et al., 2021). The freelance literature recognises boundaryless careers and hybrid positioning between employment and entrepreneurship (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016). Freelancers are commonly described as self-employed individuals who provide services to multiple clients on a project basis and are often associated with autonomy, flexibility, and boundaryless careers (Burke et al., 2021; Kitching & Smallbone, 2012). However, the empirical research on freelancers concentrates heavily on creative industries and underrepresents highly skilled professionals operating in technical, managerial, or corporate contexts (McKeown, 2015; Schwartz, 2018). This broad categorisation risks obscuring important distinctions in

professional identity, market positioning, and client relationships. IPros are distinguished from these groups by their high levels of expertise, strong professional identities, and sustained project-based relationships with organisational clients (Apitzsch et al., 2023; Pichault et al., 2020). IPros typically operate in knowledge-intensive sectors and strategically pursue independent careers rather than entering non-standard work as a response to labour market exclusion (Burke et al., 2021; McKeown & Pichault, 2021).

Overall, while these non-standard work categories have common features related to flexibility and employment insecurity, they differ in terms of autonomy, skill level, and client relationships. Recognising both the common features and distinctions among contingent workers, gig workers, freelancers, and IPros is essential for conceptual clarity and for avoiding the conflation of diverse forms of independent work in empirical research.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

This thesis draws on multiple theoretical perspectives to capture the complexity and distinctiveness of IPros' work and career experiences. IPros generally operate across organisational boundaries and face to work challenges related to identity, inclusion and career sustainability. Accordingly, this research adopts a theoretical framework comprising paradox theory, social identity theory and inclusive HRM. Together, these perspectives provide a more comprehensive understanding of IPros' work experience by exploring current research status of IPros, identity paradox in their work arrangements, and how they perceive supports. By integrating these theories, the thesis extends the understanding of non-standard and independent work, particularly for highly skilled professionals whose careers do not follow traditional organisational trajectories.

2.3.1 Paradox Theory: Analysing and Exploring IPros' Autonomy-precarity Mega Paradox

Paradox theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the contradictory yet interdependent autonomy and precarity reality shaping IPros' work experiences. The

paradox is defined as “*the simultaneous existence of competing demands that are persistent and interrelated*” (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382). A paradox exists when two seemingly opposing elements are both valid, interrelated, and persistent over time (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Unlike traditional problem-solving approaches that seek to eliminate tensions, paradox theory emphasises that tensions can coexist and that managing this coexistence productively is essential for long-term adaptability (Poole & van de Ven, 1989; Schad et al., 2016). Paradoxes are therefore not problems that should be resolved, but tensions that require continuous balancing to develop adaptability and innovation (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Paradoxes are increasingly prevalent in work because of the growing complexity, flexibility, and boundary fluidity of modern employment (Lewis, 2000). Individuals and firms frequently encounter tensions between stability and change, autonomy and control, or independence and interdependence (Smith & Tracey, 2016; Smith et al., 2017). For workers outside traditional employment structures such as IPros, these tensions are particularly intense as their careers are built upon balancing contradictory needs for autonomy and security.

The systematic literature review conducted in Study 1 uncovered a set of recurring tensions within IPros’ work and revealed a central and persistent tension between autonomy and precarity. Based on this empirical synthesis, the study conceptualises the autonomy–precarity mega paradox as a defining feature of independent professional work. This paradox captures the central tension of IPros’ work experience (Muehlberger & Bertolini, 2008). On one hand, autonomy is the primary motivation for IPros who enjoy freedom of choice, self-direction, and control of work (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy allows IPros to select clients and projects aligned with their professional interests and sustain a sense of self-determination that traditional employment generally restricts (Pichault et al., 2020). However, this autonomy is simultaneously causing precarity which refers to the insecurity, instability, and lack of institutional protection inherent in independent work (Kalleberg,

2000). IPros typically face irregular work and unstable income, limited access to social benefits such as pensions or sick leave, and the absence of organisational support structures (Kitching & Smallbone, 2012). Furthermore, their professional autonomy often depends on maintaining good relationships with clients, creating a paradoxical form of dependent-independence (Barley & Kunda, 2006). Thus, while autonomy provides autonomy and flexibility, it simultaneously exposes IPros to precarity that threatens their economic and job security.

Paradox theory conceptualises this coexistence not as a contradiction to be eliminated, but as an enduring condition of independent professional work. According to Smith and Lewis (2011), paradoxical tensions persist because they are rooted in complex systems. For IPros, this tension originates from the non-standard labourers' dual demands for flexibility and stability. Therefore, applying paradox theory to IPros contributes to a more holistic understanding of non-standard work. Study 1 establishes the autonomy–precarity mega paradox and identifies four interrelated sub-paradoxes that structure IPros' work experiences. Paradox theory provides the theoretical foundation for Study 1 in this thesis, which systematically reviews the IPros' work experience and based on the findings identify the autonomy–precarity mega paradox, alongside four interrelated sub-paradoxes that collectively capture the key tensions characterising IPros' work and careers. Based on Study 1, the theory also provides a support to Study 2 explores how IPros navigate paradoxical identity tensions, particularly between professional and organisational identities.

2.3.2 Social Identity Theory: Exploring and Understanding IPros' Identity Construction

Social identity theory developed by Tajfel and Turner (2004), provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals define themselves in relation to social groups and organisational contexts. According to social identity theory, individual self-concept is composed of personal identity which is the unique attributes and experiences

that distinguish one individual from another, and social identity which derives from perceived membership in social groups and categories (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Individuals being a group membership by obtaining meaning, self-esteem, and belonging from the groups to which they belong (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This process of categorisation and identification helps individuals make sense of their roles within social and organisational systems.

In traditional employment relationships, social identity is closely linked to organisational membership. Employees tend to internalise the values, norms, and goals of their organisation, leading to a strong sense of organisational identification and loyalty (Albert & Whetten, 1985; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). However, in the context of contemporary non-standard work such as IPros, who operate outside the conventional boundaries of the organisation and often work with multiple clients. For IPros, they need to maintain a coherent professional identity grounded in expertise and independence, while simultaneously engaging in the temporary organisational identities that emerge through client relationships. This structural independence challenges the assumption that organisational identity is long-term and stable (Barley & Kunda, 2006; Cloutier & Ravasi, 2020). This tension gives rise to IPros' professional–organisational identity paradox, which is a unique psychological and relational feature of their working lives. Their professional identity is developed by autonomy and specialised expertise, which emphasises independence from hierarchical control and commitment to professional standards rather than organisational goals (Evetts, 2011; Hotho, 2008). However, IPros also develop organisational identity by performing roles that align with organisational expectations, such as collaboration, conformity to organisational culture, and commitment to project objectives (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). This dual positioning creates IPros' identity paradox .

Therefore, applying social identity theory to IPros contributes to a better understanding of non-standard professional work. Traditional identity theories assume individuals develop a stable identity in an organisation or profession (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). IPros' experiences reveal that identity is fluid, unstable and relationally constructed across boundaries (Beech et al., 2016). This insight challenges the traditional identity theory and suggests that identification in non-standard work may be better understood as a continuum rather than an absolute state. On one hand, IPros' professional identity emphasises autonomy, specialised knowledge, and independence from hierarchical control (Evetts, 2011). On the other hand, their work requires them to align with organisational norms, collaborate with teams, and commit to project goals (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Social identity theory is well-suited to capturing this dynamic because it conceptualises identity as multiple, context-dependent, and relational rather than fixed (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

2.3.3 Inclusive HRM: Understanding HRM Practices in IPros' Work Context

The emergence of inclusive HRM challenge the traditional HRM approaches that are primarily designed for permanent employees within stable organisational boundaries. Traditional HRM frameworks largely categorize non-standard workers as peripheral labour and therefore justify limited investment in their development and long-term employability (Van den Groenendaal et al., 2023). The concept of inclusive HRM was initially developed within the diversity, equity, and inclusion (EDI) literature, where it focused on addressing inequality and exclusion related to characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, and disability (Meacham et al., 2011; Triana et al., 2021). Within these research, inclusive HRM emphasises fairness, participation, recognition, and access to development opportunities for underrepresented or marginalised groups within organisations. Borghouts-van de Pas and Freese (2017) conceptualised inclusive HRM as an approach that invests in participation, development, and sustainable employability not only for core employees but also for workers

at the margins of organisational boundaries. This perspective aligns closely with sustainable careers, emphasizing long-term labour market participation rather than short-term organisational attachment (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). Inclusive HRM reflects a shift away from exclusive, employment-status-based HRM towards recognizing the value of workers who are temporarily or externally engaged with organisations.

In recent research, scholars have extended the concept of inclusive HRM beyond EDI-focused discussions to encompass non-standard workers, recognising their marginal position within organisational systems and their inclusion in inclusive HRM practices. These research has begun to explore what inclusive HRM entails in the context of freelance and independent work. In this study, inclusive HRM was adopted from Van den Groenendaal et al. (2023), who provide one of the most comprehensive examinations of inclusive HRM in freelancers' employment relationships, highlighting the ambiguous position of freelancers who are simultaneously core knowledge workers and peripheral flexible labour. Their study highlights the ambiguous position of freelancers who are simultaneously treated as core knowledge contributors and peripheral flexible labour. Importantly, although Van den Groenendaal et al. (2023) use the term freelancers, their empirical sample primarily consists of highly skilled independent professionals operating in knowledge-intensive roles, including consultants, senior managers, and chief executive officers. These individuals typically engage in complex, project-based work, exercise substantial professional autonomy, and collaborate closely with client organisations over extended periods. This also reflects a broader conceptual challenge identified earlier, where terms such as freelancers and independent contractors are often used interchangeably in the literature, despite encompassing workers with diverse skill levels and work characteristics.

Their findings explain that inclusive HRM for freelancers encompasses a combination of transactional and relational HRM activities, including role clarity, onboarding, information sharing, compliance with contractual agreements, autonomy, and

clarity about future work opportunities. Importantly, the study shows that freelancers' psychological contracts differ from those of permanent employees and that unmet expectations may lead to negative attitudes and behaviours, underscoring the relevance of psychological contracts in inclusive HRM for freelancers. Inclusive HRM practices should align organisational needs with external workers' psychological contracts and enable both parties to benefit from the employment relationship. Based on the above review, inclusive HRM emphasises participation, fairness, and investment in the development and sustainable employability of workers who are temporarily or externally connected to organisations, rather than restricting HRM responsibilities to formally employed staff. Therefore, inclusive HRM expands the scope of HRM responsibility beyond organisational boundaries, positioning organisations as key actors in providing supports to IPros in flexible labour markets.

In this thesis, inclusive HRM is adopted as the theoretical framework for Study 3 to examine how inclusive HRM practices influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes. Based on the inclusive HRM literature, Study 3 explores how inclusive HRM practices are associated with IPros' career outcomes and explores the mediating role of client commitment. This study extends inclusive HRM to the context of high-skill independent professional work and advances understanding of how HRM can operate effectively beyond traditional employment relationships.

2.4 Research Gaps and Three Studies

Over the past three decades, research on non-standard work and IPros has increased which reflect their growing importance in the global labour markets. Current research explored the rise of IPros as part of broader transformations in the nature of work, which is characterized by project-based collaboration and flexible employment models (Barley & Kunda, 2006; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). While existing research has made valuable contributions by exploring various dimensions of IPros' work, including motivations for

independence (Barley & Kunda, 2006), autonomy and control (Ravenelle, 2019), identity and belonging (Bellesia et al., 2019), and institutional contexts of self-employment (Leighton & McKeown, 2015), research on IPros' work and career experiences remains limited and underexplored.

Accordingly, this thesis addresses an overarching gap in understanding IPros' work and career experiences in contemporary labour markets. To address this gap, the thesis is structured around three interrelated studies that collectively advance understanding of IPros' work and career experiences. Overall, the three studies form the thesis in which Study 1 establishes the conceptual foundation, and Studies 2 and 3 provide complementary empirical examinations of shaping IPros' work and career experiences. These three separate but coherence studies enables the thesis integrate fragmented research and insights, contributes a more systematic and comprehensive understanding of independent professional work in contemporary labour markets.

2.4.1 Research Gap 1: Lack of a Systematic Investigation of Current Research Status of IPros

Despite the growing prevalence of IPros in contemporary labour markets, there remains a lack of systematic investigation into the current research status of this group. Existing studies on IPros are dispersed across multiple themes and employ a wide range of terms such as freelancers, independent contractors, self-employed professionals, and contingent knowledge workers (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Duggan et al., 2020; McKeown, 2015; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). Moreover, much of the existing research on IPros focus specifically on single issues, such as autonomy (Pichault et al., 2020), insecurity (Sutherland et al., 2020), motivation (McKeown & Pichault, 2021), or performance (Cross & Swart, 2021), thereby overlooking the interconnected and paradoxical nature of these dimensions in shaping IPros' work experiences.

Although these studies examine diverse aspects of IPros' work and careers across a wide range of topics and perspectives, they remain fragmented and are rarely integrated into a coherent understanding of IPros' work and career experiences. Therefore, Study 1 of this thesis addresses this gap by conducting a systematic literature review of research on IPros published over the past three decades. Study 1 of this thesis addresses this gap by conducting a systematic literature review of research on IPros published over the past three decades. Applying paradox theory, Study 1 seeks to provide greater clarity on the fragmented literature by systematically integrating existing research on IPros, through which the autonomy–precarity mega paradox is developed as a central framework for understanding their work and career experiences. This study also develops a conceptual framework that explains the sources and management architecture of this mega paradox. Therefore, Study 1 provides an overall understanding of the current research status of IPros, and further provides a research foundation for the following two empirical studies.

2.4.2 Research Gap 2: Research Gap on How IPros' Dual Identity Shapes Their Work Outcomes

The second gap is the identity paradox faced by IPros who simultaneously operate as autonomous professionals and as temporary members of client organisations. Social identity theory emphasises that individuals develop the sense of self from their group memberships and their identity is continuously construct through social interactions (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). For IPros, although they construct their identity primarily around professional expertise, they also engage with organisational cultures and hierarchies within client organisations (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). This creates an identity paradox, reflecting the tension between maintaining a professional identity to preserve autonomy and aligning with organisational expectations to enable effective collaboration. Despite growing attentions of this issue,

empirical evidence on how IPros experience and manage this paradox is still limited. Particularly within the Irish context where project-based work is expanding rapidly.

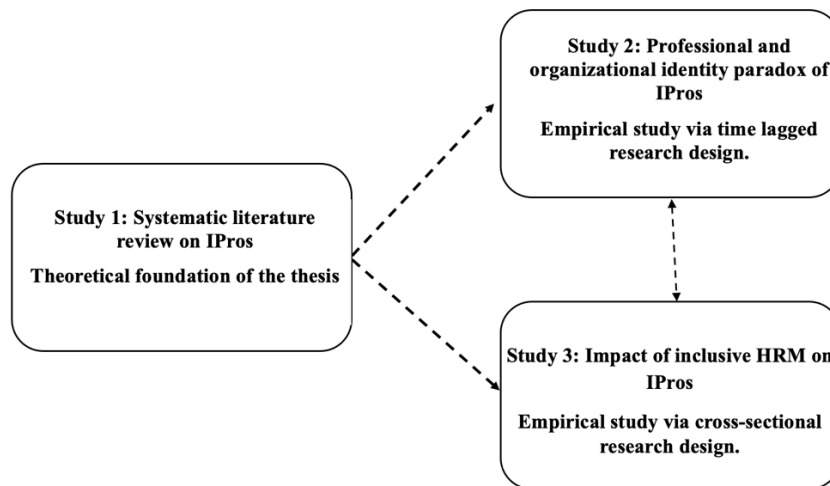
Therefore, Study 2 addresses this gap through a quantitative survey investigation of how IPros' professional and organisational identities shape their work outcomes. Drawing on social identity theory, the study explores the impact of their identities on their career outcomes including job satisfaction and subjective career success. By exploring these identity processes, the study enriches the social identity theory in the non-standard work arrangement context and extends theoretical understanding of how professional and organisational identities coexist in independent work.

2.4.3 Research Gap 3: Research Gap on How Inclusive HRM Influences IPros' Sustainable Career Outcomes

The third research gap is about the limited exploration of how inclusive HRM practices affect the IPros' sustainable career outcomes. Existing HRM literature mainly focuses on formal employees, neglecting the external professionals who contribute strategically to organisations but remain outside formal employment systems (Jackson & Schuler, 1995; Lepak et al., 2006). Little empirical study explores how inclusive HRM practices influence the experiences and outcomes of IPros, particularly in terms of their sustainable career experiences.

To fill this research gap, Study 3 adopts inclusive HRM perspective and develops a research model to explore how inclusive HRM practices influence IPros' career outcomes via the mediating role of client commitment. By empirically testing this model within the IPros context, the study contributes to HRM literature and IPros research, and provides practical insights into how organisations can build inclusive and mutually beneficial relationships with external professionals. Figure 2.1 shows the overview of the three theses.

Figure 2.1 Overview of the thesis with three studies



2.5 Summary

This chapter first provided the research context surrounding IPros, highlighting their rapid growth globally and positioning them within broader discussions of contingent, gig, and freelance work. It then reviewed the key theoretical frameworks, including paradox theory, social identity theory, and inclusive HRM. These theories and literature provided a deeper understanding of autonomy, identity, and organisational support in independent professional work. The review identified three major research gaps. First, although much research explores IPros, the literature lacks a systematic and integrative analysis of the current research status of IPros. Second, limited research on how IPros' professional identity and organisational identity shape their work outcomes. Third, empirical evidence remains limited on how IPros perceive organisational support and how inclusive HRM practices influence their sustainable career outcomes. These research gaps were discussed, and three studies were proposed to address these gaps. These three studies will be presented in subsequent Chapter 3 to 5.

Chapter 3 Study 1 Beyond Traditional Employment: A Systematic Review of Independent Professionals

3.1 Abstract

This systematic literature review integrates the extant literature on independent professionals (IPros), a workforce segment distinct from traditional employees but an important component of the contemporary labour force. Drawing upon a comprehensive analysis of diverse disciplinary perspectives, this research summarizes findings from 143 studies to understand the IPros' work and career experiences. This review separately identifies and discuss four themes and corresponding paradoxes that characterize the IPros' autonomy-precarity mega paradox, which include: 1) Work experiences and challenges: work conditions paradox which highlights the tension between control of work and the reality; 2) Work-life balance, wellbeing and health: wellbeing paradox which reveals how the pursuit of work-life balance and jobless stress; 3) Career development, support and success: career management paradox which exposes the inherent contradiction between IPros' self-management independence and social net interdependence; 4) Identity and management: identity paradox which reveals IPros' professional and organisational identities. This research synthesizes and advances the current research of IPros by providing a systematic review of IPros research. In particular, this research applies paradox theory and develops a multi-dimensional autonomy-precarity framework for understanding IPros' work and career experience. This research also contributes to HRM theory by underscoring the necessity of adapted, multi-level management approaches for contingent workforces.

3.2 Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed a profound transformation in the global labour market, characterized by increasing flexibility, technological advancements, and shifting preferences among both organisations and individuals (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Kalleberg,

2009; Sutherland et al., 2020). Within this dynamic environment, the rise of independent professionals (IPros) has emerged as a significant and growing phenomenon (Burke et al., 2022; Cross & Swart, 2022; Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Pichault et al., 2020). IPros, who are self-employed, also called freelancers, contingent workers, independent contractors, are highly skilled self-employment and manage own micro-business (Duggan et al., 2020; McKeown, 2015). McKeown (2015) defined IPros as *“Those individuals who do not fit easily or comfortably into traditional notions of employment are always described as ‘self-employed,’ ‘sole traders,’ ‘own account workers,’ ‘freelancers,’ ‘independent contractors,’ or more accurately, as independent professionals (IPros), they operate essentially as a nano-business”* (p. 103). Examples of IPros include IT technicians (Apitzsch et al., 2023; Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009), creative professionals (Nemkova et al., 2019; Osnowitz & Henson, 2016), and consultants (Donnelly, 2009) among others. They are different from gig workers or contingent workers in that they engage in knowledge-intensive, project-based work requiring specialised expertise and exercise greater control over client selection, pricing, and work processes (Hundley, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000). They also tend to build longer-term, collaborative client relationships rather than performing short-term, standardised tasks often governed by platform or organisational control (Pichault et al., 2020).

With the growth of a large number of digital platforms (Gandini, 2019; Sutherland et al., 2020), eager for greater flexibility and autonomy in work (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Pichault & McKeown, 2019), an increasing number of people choose to engage in contract work. IPros as a part of blended workforces are particularly growing fast (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Pichault et al., 2020). For example, in America, the number of full-time independent workers (e.g., independent contractors, freelancers) continues to grow, increasing by a substantial 14% in 2023 compared to 2022 (MBO Partners, 2023). Self-employment in the UK has grown fast, from a low of just 3.2 million in December 2000 to 4.4 million in March 2025 ([Statista](#)). The increasing prominence of IPros has spurred a

growing body of academic inquiry. This is because scholars intend to explore how the growth of IPros reshapes the social contract of work and the structure of the labour market (Garrett et al., 2017; Leighton, 2015).

Current research on this group spans various disciplines across management, sociology, economics and psychology etc, investigating their motivations, challenges, performance, and contributions to the economy (e.g., Cross & Swart, 2022; Mallon & Duberley, 2000). On the one hand, the growth of IPros challenges traditional sociological and organisational models (Leighton, 2015). The shift away from lifelong employment within a single organisation fundamentally alters the social contract of work (Ghosh et al., 2024; Kunda et al., 2002). Researchers therefore invest in understanding how IPros construct professional identity (Bryant & McKeown, 2016), manage career development (Horton et al., 2014), and navigate the social and psychological demands of independent work (Annink, 2017; McKeown & Cochrane, 2017). On the other hand, IPros is a key component of the changing labour market whose rapid growth has contributed to the rise of the project economy (Burke, 2012). Economists and management scholars investigate the efficiency and productivity implications of employing IPros, particularly whether they enhance organisational performance (Burke & Cowling, 2020; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Additionally, the rise of IPros presents significant challenges for public policy and legal frameworks (Leighton, 2015). The lack of a clear employer-employee relationship raises complex questions such as worker protections and legal classification (D'Amours & Legault, 2013; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). This drives research in law and public policy to understand the implications for tax systems, social security, and labour rights (Leighton, 2015; McKeown & Pichault, 2021).

Despite this increasing interest, the understanding of how IPros experience their work and career within such work models is still limited. Specifically, the decision to embark on an independent professional career is often driven by the eagerness for work autonomy

and control and the pursuit of a more personalized work-life balance (Evans et al., 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Generally, IPros operate independently, are not affiliated with any organisation or institution, and enjoy great work autonomy and flexibility (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009; Hoque & Kirkpatrick, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, such non-standard employment relations lead to the marginalization of IPros in the organisation, such as unequal pay, lack of training and career opportunities (Hoque & Kirkpatrick, 2003) and being regarded as outsiders (Bryant & McKeown, 2016). IPros generally cope with more significant risks and uncertainty compared with standard employees (D'Amours & Legault, 2013; Lo Presti et al., 2018), such as fewer benefits from the government and organisations (Kunda et al., 2002), pressure to find the next client (Leighton & McKeown, 2015), and exclusion from the employee-employment relationship (D'Amours & Legault, 2013; Lo Presti et al., 2018). Based on these observations, this study employs a systematic literature review to explore existing research on IPros' work and career experiences. Through this process, four research themes and a recurring tension between autonomy and precarity is identified from which the autonomy–precarity mega paradox emerges as a central framework for understanding IPros' work and career. Drawing on paradox theory, the study further develops a conceptual framework that explains the sources and management architecture of this mega paradox.

Paradox theory is a framework in organisational and management studies that helps to understand the inherent, enduring contradictions present in individuals, groups, and organisations (Poole & van de Ven, 1989; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Unlike dilemmas which can be resolved through choice or dialectics, paradoxes are enduring and dynamic tensions where two seemingly contradictory yet interdependent elements exist simultaneously (Lewis, 2000; Waldman et al., 2019). Paradox theory provides a framework for analysing the IPros' context. In the area of independent professional work, the central paradox emerges from the inherent friction between the strong desire for self-control, flexibility, and freedom,

a core driver for individuals choosing this path, and the natural characteristics of independent work arrangements, which often entail exclusivity, instability, and a lack of traditional safeguards (Spreitzer et al., 2017). This inherent tension, i.e. the simultaneous experience of newfound freedom and heightened insecurity, forms the central paradox of independent professional work (Florin & Pichault, 2020; Spreitzer et al., 2017). While individual studies have touched upon aspects of this duality (e.g., Saloniemi & Zeytinoglu, 2007), the academic literature lacks an overall review.

This study not only distinguishes IPros from other non-standard employment forms but also provides an understanding of how IPros experience their work and career. Much of the existing research on IPros focus specific single issues, such as autonomy (Pichault et al., 2020), insecurity (Sutherland et al., 2020), motivation (McKeown & Pichault, 2021), or performance (Cross & Swart, 2021). Although these studies examine diverse aspects of IPros' work and careers across a wide range of topics and perspectives, they remain fragmented and rarely integrated into a coherent understanding of how IPros experience their work and career. Therefore, this systematic review is necessary to consolidate fragmented knowledge and provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in this distinctive work model. Thus, based on the identified gaps and the critical need for a refined understanding, this systematic review sets three specific research aims: 1) To distinguish IPros from other forms of non-standard employment by synthesizing their unique characteristics and operational models as presented in the academic literature; 2) To identify and synthesise the key themes emerging from the literature on IPros, with particular emphasis on their work and career experiences; 3) To develop and create a conceptual framework that explains the autonomy–precarity tension emerging from the literature as a central feature of IPros' work and career experiences.

To achieve these aims, this study systematically searched existing peer-reviewed papers published up to 2025 through four primary databases in the social sciences, including

Web of Science, EBSCO, Wiley and Sage. The selection criteria required that the articles be peer-reviewed in the English language academical journal and limited to the social science field. To avoid the risk of missing influential and academically grounded studies of IPros, there are 20 relevant studies and 2 highly relevant to IPros industry reports have been added for review. Totally 143 studies were included in this review. Ultimately, this review will present three key findings: first, a detailed descriptive analysis of the existing research landscape on IPros, highlighting patterns in inconsistent concepts, key characteristics and motivations; second, a comprehensive summary of four themes and corresponding paradoxes that discourse on independent professional work, ranging from work experience to identity and management; and finally, the introduction of a novel framework designed to comprehensively illustrate the dynamic and inherent tension between autonomy and precarity as experienced by IPros. Therefore, this reviews intends to make significant contributions. It strengthens the understanding of IPros, providing clarity on their unique position within the labour market. More importantly, this study proposes a novel framework that bridges the often-dichotomous concepts of autonomy and precarity, leading to a new theoretical framework that capture the complexities of this specific work form.

This study is structured to systematically address the outlined research aims and questions. Due to the current scattered and inconsistent research on IPros, adopting systematic review can help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current research status of IPros in all disciplinary fields. Section 2 details the research methodology used for this study, encompassing the search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the approach to data extraction. Due to the current scattered and inconsistent research on IPros, adopting a systematic review can help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current research status of IPros in all disciplinary fields. Section 3 presents the key findings of the review, starting with a descriptive analysis of the IPros research landscape, followed by a summary of the main thematic areas emerging from the literature (such as

work-life balance and work experiences). Section 4 offers a discussion of these findings, acknowledging the limitations of this review, and proposing concrete directions for future research. Importantly, this section detailed the novel framework specifically developed to advance our understanding of the inherent tension between autonomy and precarity as experienced by IPros. Finally, Section 5 concludes the paper by summarizing the main contributions and offering a concise, final perspective on the complex and evolving reality of independent professional work.

3.3 Methodology

Due to the current scattered and inconsistent research on IPros, which spans multiple disciplines and often focuses on specific aspects such as autonomy, identity, or performance, adopting systematic literature review can help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of IPros' work and career experiences in all disciplinary fields (Busch, 2024; Joseph et al., 2025). This is because systematic review can synthesize findings from disparate disciplinary, thereby promoting a more holistic and integrated comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation (Kunisch et al., 2023; Post et al., 2020). This will involve the integration of insights collected from a multitude of disciplinary and theoretical traditions (Narayanan et al., 2011; Post et al., 2020). Therefore, based on above consideration, a systematic literature review was used to explore IPros' work and career experience.

3.3.1 Data Collection

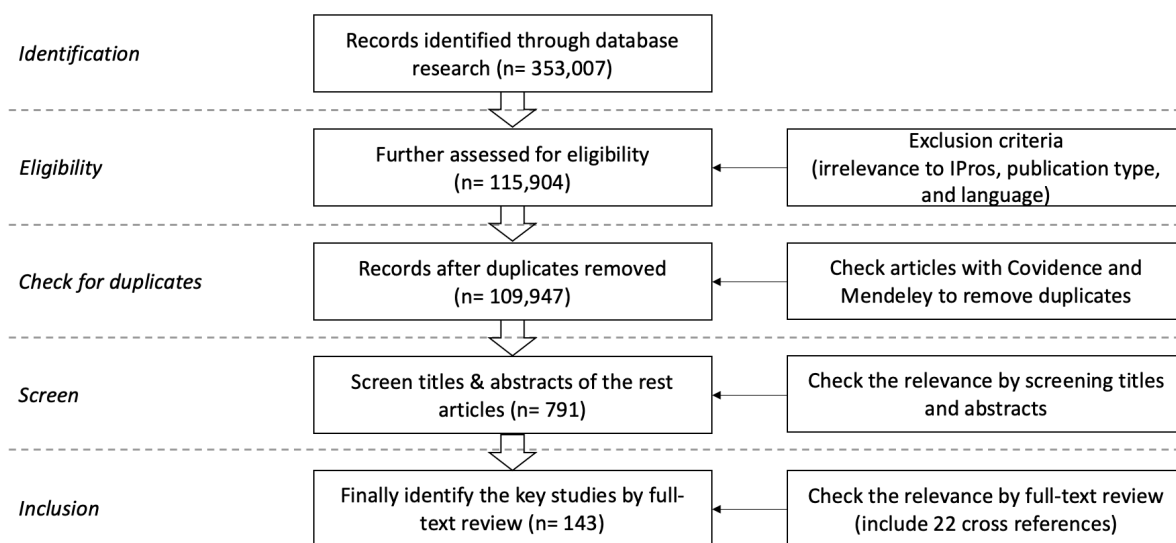
The systematic search was used to collect and screening existing literature on IPros. Figure 3.1 present the process of identification, screening, and inclusion of systematic search process.

3.3.1.1 Article search and inclusion criteria

This study searched for and included articles that were relevant to IPros. Firstly, based on the current research on IPros, they are also called self-employed, freelancers, independent contractors, contingent worker, gig workers et al (McKeown, 2016, 2015b;

Sutherland et al., 2020). Therefore, the following keywords were used to identify and select articles for inclusion: “independent contractor*” OR “independent professional*” OR “contingent worker*” OR “gig worker*” OR “platform worker*” OR “freelancer*” OR “high skilled freelancer*” OR “highly skill freelancer*” OR “independent professional contractor*” OR “IPros” OR “contingency worker*” OR “self-employed worker*” OR “contract worker*” OR “contracted employee*” OR “self-employment”. The “*” can work as any letter and any group of letters in search engines.

Figure 3.1 Literature Search, Screening and Selection



Secondly, because of the inconsistent definitions of IPros, some articles also categorize IPros into professionals (Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2018; Yang et al., 2023), highly skilled contractors (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; Grey & Healy, 2004), and temporary workers (Augustsson, 2016). Thus, the group of keywords chosen to present the IPros include “high skilled contractor*” OR “high skilled professional*” OR “highly skill contractor*” OR “highly skill professional*” OR “high skilled worker*” OR “highly skill worker*” OR “temporary worker*” OR “temporary employment”. Thirdly, due to the characteristics of IPros, e.g. delivering their services or skills for on-demand organisations on a fix-term contract, they are different from standard full-time workers (Burke et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2023). In order to comprehensively screen articles related to IPros, the following

keywords also included: “seasonal worker*” OR “nonstandard employment” OR “nonstandard employee*” OR “alternative employment” OR “fixed-term work” OR “fixed-term contractor*” OR “fixed-term employee*” OR “non-standard employment” OR “non-standard employee*” OR “gig economy” OR “project economy”.

In addition, this study focus on academic English journal articles for this review study. The journal articles were screened using three selection and inclusion criteria. First, following the common practice in systematic review type studies, research team only include published peer-reviewed journal articles. Second, these articles must be published in academic journals only. In this study, research team excluded the books, magazine articles, newspaper articles, and reports that addressed IPros. Third, research team only adopt articles in the English language. Research team excluded the non-English articles as well.

In order to collect comprehensive information over the past decades, this study has not limited the publication time. The study systematically searched existing peer-reviewed papers published up to 2025 through four primary databases in the Social Sciences which were commonly used by social scientists. They included the Web of Science, EBSCO, Wiley and Sage. Research team searched articles by typing the previous mentioned keywords into search engine in those primary databases. During this process, research team limited to “English” as language choice, “articles” as publication type and “peer-reviewed” as paper type if these databases have the options for users.

3.3.1.2 Screening and selection

To avoid miss out of research on IPros, we adopted many keyworks for initial searching in database. Thus, the initial literature search yielding 353,007 articles. The selection criteria required that the articles need to be peer-reviewed in the English language academical journal and limited to the social science field. Then research team deleted 237,103 articles and got 115,904 articles. And next step was to check for duplicates. Research team used Mendeley and Covidence to remove the duplicated articles which led to

the removal of 5,957 articles in this step. Next, research team applied the inclusion criteria for screening article titles and abstracts: focusing on the IPros. Research team found that around 90% percent papers are irrelevant to IPros, which mentioned self-employed or freelancers but not the IPros. While these groups may share some similarities with IPros, they often encompass a wider range of skill levels and work arrangements, and were therefore excluded to maintain conceptual clarity and consistency in the review. This step led to the removal of 109,156 articles. The next step was to screen full articles. During this step, research team reviewed the full papers and prioritised the papers that were directly and explicitly related to the research focus on IPros. Research team deleted those articles which are not focussing on IPros. In this step, research team removed 670 articles and include 121 articles for the review. To avoid the risk of missing influential and academical grounded studies of IPros, Google Scholar was used to conduct a further search to identify research on IPros but not yet included in our sample. Simultaneously, research team also added relevant research (20 articles) research team did not find in the search but based on the authors' knowledge. Furthermore, based on the research context in Ireland, the research team decided to include two highly relevant industry reports on IPros following team discussion. Ultimately, the team included 143 studies for the review.

3.3.2 Data Coding and Analysis

Given the purpose of this review was to explore the phenomenon and research status of existing literature regarding IPros, research team conducted a three-step coding process for data analysis in the systematic review (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Williams & Moser, 2019). Coding data is an effective method for managing and organizing the collected data (Williams & Moser, 2019). Such a method enabled us to summarize studies that address similar themes and allowed us to better understand and explore the current research focuses of IPros.

Firstly, each article underwent a thorough examination and was summarized across twelve specific categories within an Excel spreadsheet. These categories included key information such as the study's title, publication year, research questions, methodologies, and findings. Secondly, the research team engaged in first-level coding by identifying the primary research questions, findings, and potential sub-themes. To begin, all 143 studies were read to familiarise and acquire a high-level understanding of these studies. The research team openly coded the data to explore potential themes related to IPros' work and career experiences. Through multiple team meetings, the team reached an agreement on the codes to be generated that were most appropriate for the underlying different aspects of the IPros work experience. Then the research team generated initial codes based on keywords, research questions, and findings related to the autonomy and precarity experiences of IPros. The process then advanced to second-level coding process, where similar or identical first-level codes were integrated to form preliminary research topics. At this stage, the analysis moved beyond descriptive coding toward identifying patterns and relationships between codes, particularly those reflecting recurring tensions in IPros' experiences. To refine the coding scheme and generate new codes, multiple team meetings were held to define the codes more precisely.

Finally, the third-level codes were established by further organizing and merging the second-level codes to form the final research themes. These themes were then systematically examined to identify underlying contradictions and interdependencies, which led to the inductive development of four core paradoxes. Specifically, the paradoxes emerged from observing that certain themes consistently coexisted in tension rather than as independent or opposing outcomes. At this stage the identified themes were reinterpreted through a paradox lens to explain the persistent and interrelated tensions shaping IPros' work and career experiences. Table 3.1 below presents the data structure illustrating how first-order concepts were aggregated into second-order themes and ultimately into four higher-order thematic

dimensions. During the coding process, the research team focused on the key content of the selected articles and ensured their relevance to IPros. This entire process was iterative and flexible, with multiple group meetings ensuring the final themes of IPros' research through continuous refinement of the coding plan.

3.4 Findings

Through the three-step coding process of theme extraction, theme coding, and theme integration, the review first provided the descriptive findings and identified main themes emerging within the IPros' literature. The findings reveal that research on IPros has grown over the past three decades, reflecting increasing academic and practical interest in this expanding workforce segment. By reviewing the literature, this study also finds that the terminology and definitions used to describe IPros are still inconsistent. Despite these definitional differences, this study summarized several core characteristics of IPros, such as high levels of skill, being highly educated, and autonomy.

Beyond the descriptive analysis, the review identified four overarching research themes that collectively capture the multifaceted nature of IPros' work and career experiences. These themes relate to: (1) work experiences and challenges, (2) work-life balance, wellbeing and health, (3) career development, support and success, and (4) identity and management. Importantly, the analysis revealed that each theme is characterized by a persistent paradoxical tension between autonomy and precarity. Specifically, the findings highlight four paradoxes: flexibility versus insecurity, balance versus job stress, independence versus interdependence, and professional versus organisational identity. These findings reveal that the benefits associated with independent professional work are closely related to vulnerabilities and uncertainties. Overall, the findings provide an overview of the IPros' work and career experience while also providing an understanding of the complex and interrelated tensions shaping independent professional work.

3.4.1 Descriptive Analysis of IPros Research

3.4.1.1 Increasing attention on IPros

In terms of journal distribution, the articles identified through the literature search present 96 distinct academic journals, indicating that current research on IPros has received attention from journals and scholars. Table 3.2 below lists 5 journals with the greatest frequency of articles that research team identified. To avoid missing research about IPros, this review did not limit the ranking of the journal and summarized it to ensure the quality of the selected articles (see Table 3.3). In terms of the year of publication, the earliest articles on IPros can be traced back to 1993. Between 1993 and 2025, the number of articles published on IPros presented a linear upward trend. It indicates that the IPros research has attracted increasing attention from scholars. Figure 3.2 below outlines the increase of IPros research from 1993 to 2025 which shows steady growing research on IPros.

Table 3.1 Data Structure of Coding and Thematic Aggregation

First-order concepts	Second-order themes	Aggregate dimensions
Flexible schedules	Work autonomy and flexibility	Work experiences and challenges (Flexibility vs. insecurity - work condition paradox)
Job control		
Job autonomy		
Project-based work	Nature of independent work	
Independent work arrangements		
Income instability	Financial and employment insecurity	
Employment risk		
Work precarity	Precarious work conditions	
Lack of organisational protection		
Work challenges	Work challenges and adaptation	
Uncertainty		
Work-life balance	Work-life balance	Work - life balance, wellbeing and health (Work-life balance vs. job stress - wellbeing paradox)
Work-life boundaries		
Personal freedom		
Job stress	Work-related stress and coping	
Burnout		
Pressure to find clients	Job-search stress and uncertainty	
Irregular workload		
Mental wellbeing	Wellbeing outcomes	
Quality of life		
Health		
Career autonomy	Career independence	Career development, support and success (Independence vs. interdependence - career management paradox)
Self-directed career decisions		
Employability	Career mobility and employability	

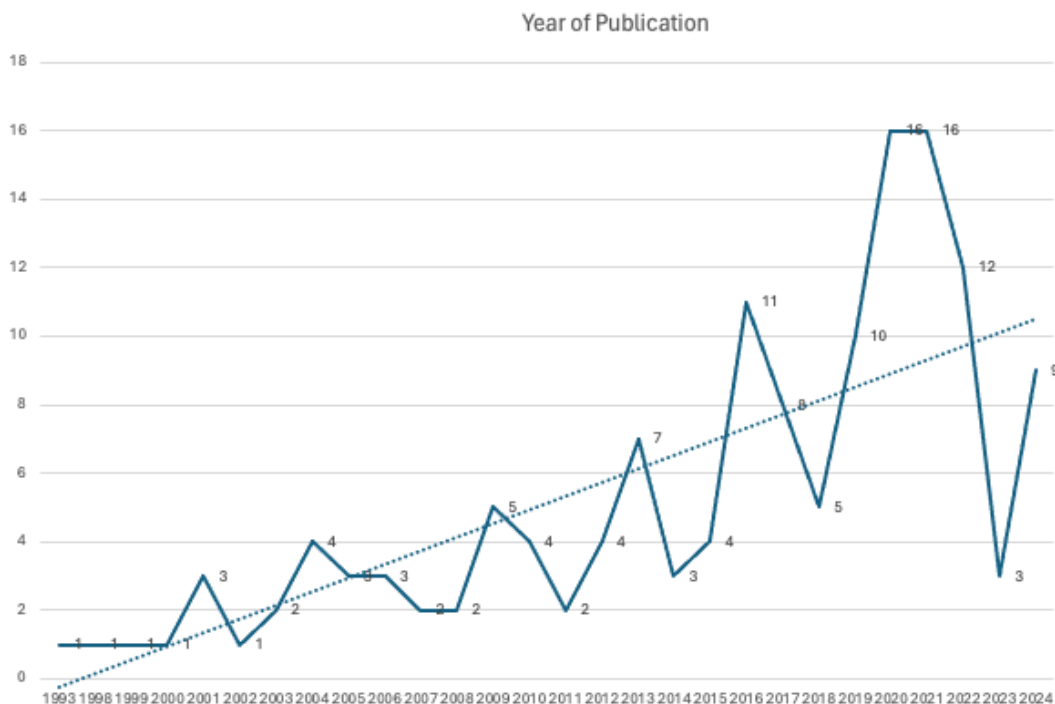
Mobility		
Career support	External career support	
Social support		
Skill development	Career development processes	
Professional growth		
Career success	Career success outcomes	
Earnings		
Professional identity	Professional identity formation	
Occupational belonging		
Organisational identification	Organisational identity formation	
Client relationships		
Identity negotiation	Identity construction processes	Identity and management (Professional vs. organisational identity - identity paradox)
Self-positioning		
Psychological contract	Work relationships and expectations	
Commitment		
Employment differentiation	Identity differentiation	

Table 3.2 Top 5 Journals with the Selected

Journal title	No. of articles
<i>New Technology, Work and Employment</i>	8
<i>Personnel Review</i>	8
<i>Small Business Economics</i>	5
<i>Human Resource Management Journal</i>	5
<i>European Management Journal</i>	4

Table 3.3 ABS Ranking Journals

ABS ranking	No. of articles
<i>ABS 4/4*</i>	26
<i>ABS 3</i>	30
<i>ABS 2</i>	38
<i>ABS 1</i>	14

Figure 3.2 IPros articles published by year

In relation to the industries covered, research team found that existing research covered diverse industries, including IT and technology, medicine and health care, insurance and creative jobs see Table 3.4). The percentage of IT and technology industries is over 50%,

accounting for the majority of the entire industry distribution. Other industries, such as medicine (38%), creative industries (37%), and engineering (36%), are mostly focused on knowledge-intensive work. All of these research results demonstrate that existing research on IPros and the occupational scope of IPros distribution are concentrated in industries with high skills and knowledge needs.

3.4.1.2 Inconsistent definitions and key features of IPros

Despite the popularity of research on IPros in recent years, scholars and professionals have not yet provided a unified definition of IPros. In this review, research team also found that scholars have used different terms to describe IPros, freelancers (21% in total) being the most frequently used (19% in total), followed by independent contractors (19%) and self-employed (15%). Table 3.4 below summarized the items used in the selected articles.

Table 3.4 Industry Distribution

Industry	Percentage of articles
IT and technology	57
Medicine/health care	38
Creative jobs (e.g., designer, writer)	37
Engineering	36
Law	35
Accounting	34
Other (e.g., talent agencies, scientists)	47

Although these scholars have used different terms to describe the same group of IPros, these explanations can be seen as further interpretations of the concept. These descriptions highlight key characteristics of IPros, such as being highly skilled and operating independently. Research team therefore suggest that, when using alternative terms such as freelancers or self-employed workers, scholars and practitioners should adopt a cautious and rigorous approach. While these terms are frequently employed in existing research to denote individuals who align with the IPros profile (McKeown, 2015; McKeown & Lindorff, 2011),

they often encompass a broader range of workers with varying skill levels and work arrangements, which may lead to conceptual ambiguity. However, a meticulous analysis reveals their inherent limitations in fully capturing this highly skilled and professionally oriented segment of the contemporary workforce (Barley & Kunda, 2006). This necessitates a more precise academic discourse to avoid conceptual conflation and to accurately map the nuances of independent professional work.

Overall, it is evident that there are several inconsistencies between how scholars view, label and define IPros. Together, however, they agree on several key characteristics to help better explain what IPros is. In this review, research team are not eager to provide a clear and consistent definition of IPros. However, research team attempt to summarize and explain the key features that IPros possess (see Table 3.5). Therefore, based on the above research findings, research team summarize the following seven key features of IPros: 1) highly educated or skilled; 2) highly paid; 3) hired for a fixed-term duration by project or contract-based relationship; 4) having more right to control their own work, such as work location or time; 5) independent business with no employees; 6) contracting with one or many firms; and 7) receiving less formal support.

Table 3.5 Items Used in the Selected Articles

Items	Percentage of articles
Freelancers	21%
Independent contractors (ICs)	19%
Independent professionals (IPros)	15%
Self-employed	15%
Gig workers	7%
Contingent workers	6%
Other (e.g., independent workers, contractor workers)	17%
Total	100%

3.4.2 Main Themes and Paradoxes

After multiple coding processes and team meetings, research team identified four themes and corresponding paradoxes in the IPros research. They were: 1) Work experiences and challenges: flexibility versus insecurity (work condition paradox); 2) Work-life balance, wellbeing and health: balance versus jobless stress (wellbeing paradox); 3) Career development, support and success: independence versus interdependence (career management paradox); 4) Identity and management: professional versus organisational identity (identity paradox). The research team firstly conducted a systematic synthesis of the reviewed studies by extracting and analysing key dimensions, including research questions, methods, findings, and theoretical contributions. This stage revealed recurring issues and tensions that emerging in IPros' work and career experience. Based on these descriptive patterns, research team grouped these similar tensions and findings, and progressively summarized into themes. Through iterative comparison and team discussion, these patterns were refined into four overarching themes and paradoxes. These themes reflect the multifaceted nature of independent professional work, ranging from individual motivations and work experiences to broader organisational and institutional contexts. As our research focuses on the current research status and future research tendency of IPros, this study present a detailed analysis of these four themes and paradoxes.

Table 3.6 Overview of Key Terms, Definitions and Features

Terms	Definitions	Key features	Study
Independent professionals (IPros)	Skilled workers with various statuses (self-employed, employee, contractor, etc.), associated with innovation, economic growth and future prosperity.	Highly skilled Independently	Pichault, Diochon, and Nizet (2020)
Independent professionals (IPros)	Someone who earns his or her income through the commercial or civil contract and not the employment contract. They cannot easily be subsumed under the headings of small business or even entrepreneur, as they rarely employ others – but they just as clearly, are not employees either. They are variously described as ‘self-employed’, ‘sole traders’, ‘own account workers’, ‘freelancers’ and ‘independent contractors’ – or more accurately, as independent professionals (IPros).	Contracting with one or many clients Highly skilled Services or skills seller	McKeown (2016)
Independent professionals (IPros)	A more precise term and captures individuals engaged in providing professional, scientific, and technical services, who specialise in particular areas and sell their expertise and knowledge. A distinct subset within freelancing and contracting: They are professionals who operate as independent contractors.	Highly skilled Independently Services or skills seller	McKeown & Pichault (2021)
Independent professionals (IPros)	Operate their own business and who contract to perform services for others without having the legal status of an employee, that is, they are engaged by a client under a commercial contract, rather than an employee under an employment contract.	Highly skilled Independently Commercial contract Services or skills seller	McKeown (2015)
Independent contractors (ICs)	Those individuals hired on a job-by-job basis, and who are not afforded the employment benefits and rights allotted to core workers.	Commercial contract Less benefits	Lemmon, Wilson, Posig, & Glibkowski (2016)
Independent contractors (ICs)	Refer to those individuals who work as independent business owner-operators and consultants.	Independently	Bush (2009)
Freelancers	Who is self-employed and not committed to a particular employer long-term	Independently Fixed-term or project-based	Sultana, Im, & Im (2019)

Freelancers	Refers to a type of employment that is carried out independently and without any other employees	Independently Services or skills seller Fixed-term or project-based	Süß & Becker (2013)
Freelancers	People who perform in a personal, autonomous, and irrespective of the profession intellectually ideal way for their employer. The employer can be a company as well as other individuals.	Highly skilled Independently	Süß & Kleiner (2010)
Skilled contingent workers (SCWs)	Viewed as independent contractors or contract firm workers, who “differ from regular employees because they do not have explicit (i.e. formal, clearly defined, and communicated agreements) or implicit (i.e. an understanding between employees and employers but not formalized through a written agreement) contracts to stay with an organisation for an indefinite period of time”.	Independently Fixed-term or project-based	Sulbout & Pichault (2022)
Independent workers	Definition of IWs incorporates solo self-employed, freelancers, and independent contractors whose work relationships are governed by a market-based arrangement under contract rather than employment law. They are not employees and do not employ others in their provision of labour, skills, and knowledge.	Independently Fixed-term or project-based	Cross & Swart (2022)
Highly skilled contractors	Self-directed professionals who add value to client organisations.	Highly skilled Independently	Bryant & McKeown (2016)
Highly skilled professionals	Who work on projects that bring together short-lived teams rather than provide their services as part of a continuous-flow model.	Services or skills seller Fixed-term or project-based Less benefits Well paid	D’Amours & Legault (2013)

3.4.2.1 Work experience and challenges: Flexibility versus insecurity (work condition paradox)

Among the selected articles, a key theme emerged as discussing IPros' work experience and challenges. This theme reveals the IPro's general professional life, which is a dynamic, demanding, and often solitary entrepreneurial journey. IPros, they are not only contract workers also seen as archetypal entrepreneurs or micro-business owners who actively and strategically manage their own professional ventures (Burke et al., 2020; Bögenhold et al., 2014). Research in this area extensively examines the distinct entrepreneurial characteristics and behaviors exhibited by IPros. Highlighting their proactivity in identifying nascent market opportunities and their calculated propensity for both financial and career-related risk-taking (McKeown, 2015; Petriglieri et al., 2019). Unlike traditional employees, IPros are mostly engaged in building and sustaining a “personal firm” (Burke & Cowling, 2020). This entrepreneurial drive extends to active networking, reputation management, and continuous market analysis, which are critical for securing and diversifying their client base (Syrett, 2016; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2023). It is because of the unique nature of IPros, the contemporary legal landscape struggles to adequately categorize IPros, leaving a significant regulatory gap that fails to fully acknowledge their unique work arrangements and vulnerabilities (Gussek et al., 2023; McKeown, 2016). The core of this legal ambiguity lies in the pervasive worker classification debate that IPros are truly independent contractors, or belong to regular employees (Parker, 2010; Wolfe, 1996). Legal systems are hard and can't give precise criteria, leading to IPros always having less law protection and facing ongoing challenges (Gussek et al., 2023; Leighton, 2015).

This entrepreneurial work experience is associated with a series of challenges that consistently emerge in the literature. Market-related challenges include the pervasive income volatility and uncertainty, forcing IPros into continuous cycles of client acquisition and often

leading to unpredictable "feast or famine" cycles (Auer et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2004). Operationally, IPros frequently contend with substantial and uncompensated overhead, including administrative tasks, invoicing, legal compliance, and business development that are not directly billable (Gold & Fraser, 2002; Schwartz, 2018). Scope creep on projects further exacerbates this uncompensated labour burden, necessitating robust contractual clarity and negotiation skills to mitigate (Pulignano et al., 2024). Additionally, IPros always face less protection compared to traditional employees. This manifest precarity extends across multiple critical domains. For example, they are frequently excluded from fundamental labour rights such as minimum wage provisions, overtime pay and safeguards against unfair dismissal (Apitzsch et al., 2023; Parker, 2010). Moreover, IPros often lack access to essential social security and employer-sponsored benefits, such as the absence of unemployment insurance, paid sick leave, parental leave, comprehensive health insurance, and retirement schemes (Gerdenitsch et al., 2016; Sulbout et al., 2022). The entirety of business risk, including income volatility, periods of no work, and the cost of professional development and equipment, is entirely borne by the IPros (Borghi et al., 2016; Vincent, 2016).

Based on the above explanations of IPros' work experience and challenges, the inherent work condition paradox emerges. The *work condition paradox* reveals that the IPros enjoy greater flexibility in their work, but simultaneously face job uncertainty and insecurity. For example, the autonomy in client selection is often counterbalanced by income volatility and client dependence (Gopalakrishnan & Zhang, 2019). This tension centres on the IPros to choose clients and projects being destabilized by the unpredictable nature of market demand which influenced the stable income of IPros (Choi & Shepherd, 2004; Mowery & Rosenberg, 1979). Despite the choice of clients, IPros are susceptible to unpredictable revenue streams and the significant clients' choices due to the absence of a stable employer (Kinnie et al., 2008; Peel & Inkson, 2004). This makes their financial precarious, as their

livelihood hinges on a continuous, often uncertain, flow of projects, requiring constant self-marketing and negotiation (Retkowsky et al., 2023; Vallas & Christin, 2018). Furthermore, this paradox also emphasises a tension that direct control over pricing and income streams is linked to the full personal control of all market risks and the absence of a comprehensive social safety net (Borghi et al., 2016; Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Wolfe, 1996). The core tension is the substantial burden of individual risk-taking. IPros personally bear all market risks, are solely responsible for taxes, insurance, retirement planning, and lack access to standard employer-sponsored benefits like health coverage or paid leave (Burke et al., 2021; Florin & Pichault, 2020; Haapakorpi, 2020). Therefore, the absence of institutional protection and inherent income unpredictability creates long-term financial vulnerability, underscoring the precarious underside of financial independence.

Overall, the central paradox of IPros' work experience and challenges is the inherent tension between flexibility and insecurity. While the pursuit of greater work flexibility is a primary motivator for many individuals transitioning to independent professional work, this flexibility is linked to career insecurity (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2021, 2023). This paradox is not a temporary dilemma to be resolved, but rather a persistent and defining feature of the IPros' work condition.

3.4.2.2 Work-life balance, wellbeing and health: Balance versus jobless stress (wellbeing paradox)

Based on the selected articles, this theme critically examines the psychological implications inherent in the experience of independent professional work. This study summarized the relevant themes related to IPros' wellbeing mainly including research on their job satisfaction, work-life balance, and work-related stress. For many people, the decision to embark on an independent professional career is fundamentally driven by enhanced work-life balance and a greater sense of wellbeing, stemming directly from the promise of greater autonomy and flexibility (Hundley, 2001; Sayah, 2013). For example,

according to Hundley (2001), self-employed professionals are more satisfied with their jobs because of their greater job autonomy, task variety, more flexible work schedules, and are more likely to fully utilize their skills. The positive aspects of this model include: IPros frequently report a significant increase in control over their work rhythm (Hessels et al., 2017), the ability to choose projects that align with their interests and expertise (Flatøy, 2025), and enjoy locational flexibility that allows for a more personalized integration of professional and personal life (Van Der Zwan et al., 2020). This intrinsic control over work processes often cultivates a deeper sense of psychological empowerment and self-efficacy, leading to higher levels of intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Al Harbi et al., 2019; Li et al., 2015). These freedom choices and work style contribute positively to IPros' overall psychological wellbeing and sense of professional identity (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; Ghosh, McDonnell, et al., 2024).

Despite these factors that promise the benefits simultaneously create the conflict between IPros' work-life balance and job stress. For example, IPros enjoy the freedom to set their own hours and deadlines, frequently transmutes into the pressure of unbounded work hours and increasingly blurred work-life boundaries (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Osnowitz & Henson, 2016). What begins as freedom over IPros' schedule can quickly devolve into perpetual availability and self-exploitation, blurring the lines between work and personal life (Mackenzie & McKinlay, 2021). It means the flexibility to work anytime becomes a pressure to work all the time, leading to the erosion of clear boundaries between professional and personal life (Bloom, 2014). The perceived control over time becomes a source of imbalance as IPros feel compelled to work incessantly to secure future projects or meet client demands (Tremblay & Genin, 2010). These results leading to personal time occupied, the inability to "switch off" from work and transforming desired freedom into an omnipresent demand, impacting overall wellbeing (Kinowska & Sienkiewicz, 2023; Peeters et al., 2022). Therefore, Sayah (2013) proposed that in order to avoid the coming influences of calls or

emails on anytime and anywhere, IPros should use different boundary work tactics to avoid these influences and thus shape their work-life boundaries.

Furthermore, psychosocial pressure is a significant challenge for IPros. Despite the freedom to work from any location and for multiple clients, which contributes significantly to IPros' job satisfaction and wellbeing, it frequently leads to the precarity of social isolation (Auer et al., 2014; D'Oliveira & Persico, 2023; Vassiley et al., 2025). This is because many IPros experience social isolation and loneliness due to the absence of a traditional workplace community and formal peer support structures (Marshall et al., 2007). This can contribute to a significant psychological burden, stress, and burnout, compounded by the sole responsibility for their business's survival and growth (D'Oliveira & Persico, 2023; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). The central tension here leads to IPros' job stress and impacts their mental health. The absence of a traditional workplace community can result in loneliness, lack of informal support networks, and reduced opportunities for social interaction (Cui et al., 2018; Maanen & Barley, 1983). This social disconnection can have tangible negative effects on an IPros' psychological wellbeing, transforming spatial freedom into relational deprivation (McKeown & Pichault, 2021).

Overall, the autonomy initially pursued was intended to enjoy a more balanced and less stressful existence (Thompson & Prottas, 2006). However, it practically creates an "always-on" culture, where the boundary between professional obligations and personal life becomes indistinct (Barber et al., 2023). This blurring effect significantly influences IPros' work-life balance and wellbeing (Kinowska & Sienkiewicz, 2023). It is because the required for sustained independent operation leave minimal space for personal life and leisure. Thus, the positive aspects of pursuing greater wellbeing transform a desired improvement in work-life balance into a source of significant personal strain. These interwoven pressures culminate in significant negative impacts on IPros' wellbeing.

3.4.2.3 Career development, support and success: Independence versus interdependence (career management paradox)

This theme intricately explores the non-linear and highly individualized trajectories that define the professional growth of IPros. It emphasise how IPros proactively forge their careers, the critical forms of support they leverage, and how professional success is achieved within this independent context. Unlike the structured and hierarchical pathways found within traditional organisations, career development for IPros is a highly proactive, self-directed, and continuous process (Borghi et al., 2016; Horton et al., 2014). It is characterized by the imperative for perpetual skill acquisition, strategic upskilling, and continuous learning to maintain market relevance and avoid the rapid obsolescence of expertise in dynamic markets (van den Born & van Witteloostuijn, 2013). The cultivation of a strong personal brand, professional network, and excellent reputation are their primary career capital to attract new clients and secure a sustainable of future work (Panteli & Urquhart, 2022; Sutherland et al., 2020). Generally, compared to traditional full-time employees, IPros lack institutional support and protection but experience more career uncertainty and risks (D'Amours & Legault, 2013; Lo Presti et al., 2018).

Research within this theme also address the importance of various critical forms of support that enable IPros' development and significantly mitigate their precarity. This includes digital platforms, which are emerging as significant providers of support and offering features such as training modules, reputation management tools, and virtual community forums that facilitate learning and connection (Schwartz, 2018; Toth et al., 2020). Formal professional associations and industry bodies also play a vital role, such as offering specialised resources, advocacy for IPros' rights, and structured networking opportunities (Sulbout & Pichault, 2023; Sulbout et al., 2022). Furthermore, career success for IPros are not only purely financial metrics, bust also reflect on a broader pursuit of self-fulfilment (Nemkova et al., 2019; Wilkens & Nermerich, 2011). While financial viability is

undoubtedly a prerequisite, IPros frequently define success by their ability to realize a high degree of autonomy, achieve a meaningful integration of work and life or build a lasting, respected professional reputation (Dowie, 2001; Grey & Healy, 2004).

The modern career trajectory for IPros presents a unique paradox, challenging traditional models of professional development and advancement. While the discourse surrounding IPros often centres on themes of autonomy and self-determination (Fraser & Gold, 2001; Retkowsky et al., 2023). A closer examination reveals that this apparent independence is fundamentally reliant on a complex web of social and professional interdependence (Burke & Cowling, 2020; Granger et al., 2022). This career management paradox stemming from the inherent contradiction between the IPros' imperative for self-management and interdependence (Horton et al., 2014; King, 2004). The IPros' self-management needs to include developing all aspects of their professional trajectory, which conflicts with the linear career path characteristic of traditional organisational structures (Borghi et al., 2016; van den Born & van Witteloostuijn, 2013).

In traditional employment, career progression is often scaffolded by established organisational hierarchies, formal training programs, structured mentorship plans, and clear promotion ladders (Katz, 1995; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). The absence of a formal organisational structure support means IPros should totally take responsibility on their career development and management, highlighting the independent nature of their professional journey. For IPros, career development is an entirely self-directed (McKeown & Pichault, 2021). While this grants them great autonomy to layout their professional trajectory, it simultaneously imposes the substantial burden of entirely self-directing their professional evolution (Pichault & McKeown, 2019). For example, the autonomy in client selection, while desirable, is often counterbalanced by income volatility and client dependence (Gopalakrishnan & Zhang, 2019; Su et al., 2014). This tension canters on the IPros to choose clients and projects being destabilized by the unpredictable nature of market demand which

influenced the independently nature of IPros (Choi & Shepherd, 2004; Mowery & Rosenberg, 1979). Despite the choice of clients, IPros are susceptible to unpredictable revenue streams and the significant clients' choices due to the absence of a stable employer (Kinnie et al., 2008; Peel & Inkson, 2004). This makes their independence precarious, as their livelihood hinges on a continuous, often uncertain, flow of projects, requiring constant self-marketing and negotiation.

The paradox of IPro career management, therefore, lies in the essential tension between these two forces. The pursuit of career independence simultaneously requires clients and social net interdependence. To achieve autonomy, the IPro must paradoxically spend a significant amount of time and energy on interdependent activities that build and maintain their clients relationship (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023; Sydow et al., 2009). The act of managing their own career and free from the confines of a single employer places the professional in a constant state of relational obligation (Schärrer & Sender, 2023; Tóth et al., 2022). This forces the IPros to simultaneously act as an independent operator and also continually develop a broader professional network.

3.4.2.4 Identity management: Professional versus organisational identity (Identity paradox)

Among the selected articles, a key theme emerges as IPros' identity management. This theme explored complex interplay between IPros sense of self, their approaches to self-management, and the strategies employed by organisations to engage with and manage this distinct segment of the workforce. According to Stets and Burke (2000) explanation, identity refers to the meanings and understandings that individuals attach to themselves within a social structure. It is both personal and social, emerging from how people categorize themselves, adopt roles, and recognize their membership in groups (Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). IPros' identity is multifaceted and critically shapes their professional existence (Knapp et al., 2021). Unlike traditional employees whose identities

are often strongly tethered to organisational roles and structures, IPros navigate a more fluid and individually constructed sense of self (Brown, 2015; Brown & Humphreys, 2006). Their professional identity is frequently a dynamic composite which drawing from their specialised skills, personal values, and the intrinsic motivations that led them to independent work (Hekman et al., 2009; Slay & Smith, 2011). Mostly, the motivations for becoming an IPros or for organisations to use them are deeply linked to their professional identity (Flinchbaugh et al., 2020; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). On the one hand, the literature consistently highlights the importance of individual motivation in the decision to pursue and sustain the career, making it the most frequently addressed topic (Lent & Brown, 2020). Research in this area delves into the complex interplay of "pull" factors, such as the intrinsic desire for autonomy, flexibility, and challenging work that aligns with personal values (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). The "push" factors, which include dissatisfaction with traditional organisational structures, perceived lack of career progression, or even necessity due to limited employment opportunities (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Grey & Healy, 2004).

Additionally, from the individual perspectives, eagerness for work-life balance, and pursuit of higher salaries are also the driving factors for them to become IPros (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Tremblay & Genin, 2010). Peel and Inkson (2004) summarized that there are five key factors will influence a worker is consider whether contracting or employment, which are autonomy, income and security, personal development, change, and involvement. Based on more research on this arear, other factors could also include skill level and sense of family responsibility (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009). On the other hand, from the organisational perspectives, (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023) proposed that there are five reasons for organisations hiring freelancer, which include numerical flexibility, freelancers' rich experience, entrepreneurial attitude, external labor market and saving cost. Therefore,

whether from the perspective of IPros or the organisation, the professional skills possessed by professional identity are crucial for the career development of IPros.

Furthermore, in recent decades years, research on managing IPros and performance evaluation has continued. According to Cross and Swart (2021), the rapid increase of IPros poses challenges to organisational management, especially to HRM. This is because the current research is still based on traditional HRM theories and practices, but it does not apply to managing IPros (Cross & Swart, 2022; Signoretti et al., 2022). Additionally, scholars also examine the nature of IPros' commitment, which often diverges from the traditional organisational commitment found in standard employment (McKeown & Pichault, 2021). This commitment tends to be professional (loyalty to one's skills or industry), lifestyle-oriented (commitment to the independent way of life), or project-specific, rather than solely to a single client or organisation (Blatt, 2008; Bryant & McKeown, 2016; Gallagher & Parks, 2001).

A critical sub-theme involves the psychological contracts between IPros and their clients, which are often implicit and relational rather than purely transactional (Schärrer & Sender, 2023; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). The "psychology contract" for IPros is different and special, they often negotiate with multiple clients and are different from the implied long-term reciprocal obligations typically found in traditional employment (Gallagher & Parks, 2001; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). This unique psychology contract profoundly influences their commitment which is related to their craft, reputation, and personal brand, thereby reinforcing a distinct professional identity (Syrett, 2016; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2023). Studies also explore how the perceived fulfilment or violation of these unwritten agreements impacts IPros' trust, engagement, and willingness to continue working with specific clients, influencing both their professional satisfaction and their perception of precarity (Lo Presti et al., 2018; Rousseau, 1995). This theme frequently emphasises the IPros' active role in managing their own performance and navigating relational dynamics

without formal HR support (McKeown & Cochrane, 2017; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). And also emphasise that it is necessary to adjust HRM practices to achieve better personnel management due to IPros are outside the scope of traditional HRM (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Lo Presti et al., 2018; McKeown & Cochrane, 2017; Waldkirch et al., 2021).

Based on research related to this theme, it thus exposes the intricate struggle between the IPros' professional identity and the concept of organisational identity that they frequently encounter through their client engagements. IPros invest considerable effort in forging and maintaining their individual professional identity, which is typically rooted in their specialised expertise, unique skill sets, accumulated experience, and a distinct personal brand (Syrett, 2016; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2023). This self-definition extends beyond professional skills, often including ability of self-reliance, entrepreneurial spirit, and expert status, which serves as a crucial function in a fluid work environment (Kreiner et al., 2006; McKeown, 2015). However, while IPros forge and maintain a strong sense of professional identity, their work inherently involves temporary relationship with multiple client organisations (Evans et al., 2004). This creates a complex conflict where IPros' autonomy and self-defined professional identity need to coexist with the distinct cultures, operational norms, and strategic expectations of diverse client organisations (Ghosh, McDonnell, et al., 2024; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). The paradox is IPros need to continuous learning required to maintain their professional identity while simultaneously temporary integrating into varied organisational contexts. This tension can lead to a sense of liminality which positions IPros as neither fully "in" nor fully "out" of the organisations they serve and occupying a professional space that is both connected and detached (Bryant & McKeown, 2016). They are expected to contribute and integrate into the client's objectives, yet simultaneously retain their external, independent status to keep their engagement and specialised expertise (Hekman et al., 2009).

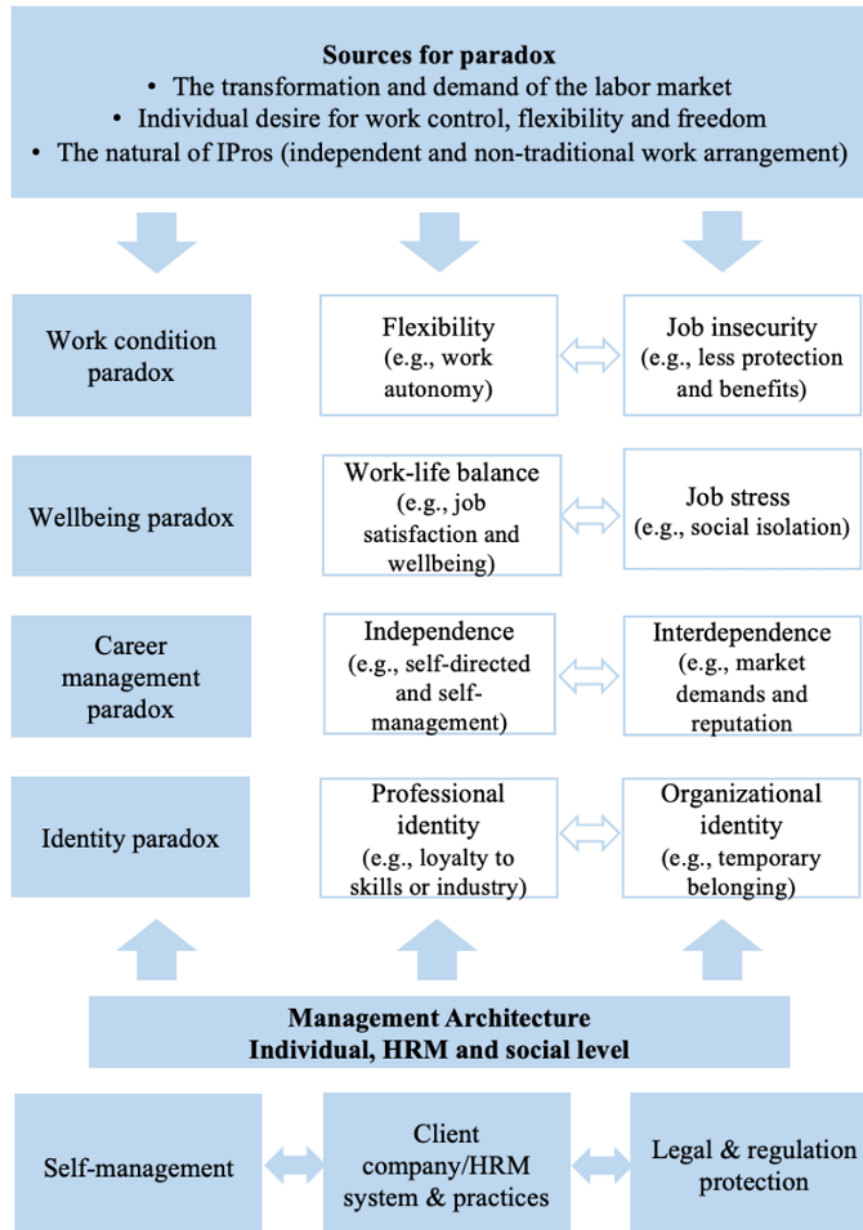
This intricate tension between an individual professional identity and temporary organisational affiliation highlights a central negotiation skill that IPros must master. It demands constant self-awareness, adaptive communication, and boundary management to ensure that their core professional identity remains intact and resilient amidst diverse external demands (Greco et al., 2022; Hall et al., 1970). The tension to maintaining personal independence while integrating into different organisations underscores the deep psychological complexities of IPros work arrangement.

3.5 Discussion

In the past three decades, research on IPros has continuously developed and made significant progress in various academic areas. In order to better understand the research related to IPros and the potential future of IPros research, this study comprehensively and critically evaluated peer-reviewed articles focusing on IPros published in professional academic journals. The systematic review of 143 studies on IPros summarize four main themes and reveals a tension of this increasing workforce segment: a series of paradoxes between autonomy and the reality of precarity. This inherent tension operates across work conditions, wellbeing, career management and identity aspects. These aspects are significant to understanding the work experience of IPros, and also emphasise the necessity to reconceptualise the functions of management frameworks to address their complex implications. While existing research has identified various challenges and benefits associated with IPros' work, paradox theory enables a deeper analytical understanding by conceptualising these conditions as persistent and interdependent tensions rather than isolated trade-offs. Specifically, paradox theory highlights that autonomy and precarity are not mutually exclusive outcomes but are coexisting and mutually reinforcing elements embedded within the structure of independent work. This perspective shifts the focus from identifying challenges to understanding how such tensions are sustained and managed over time.

The main finding of this study reveals four critical themes delineating the current research on IPros. Firstly, the theme of work experience, and challenges explained IPros as proactive micro-entrepreneurs who benefit from flexibility and autonomy but also face persistent operational and psychological challenges, such as income volatility, limited legal and organisational protection etc (Burke & Cowling, 2015; McKeown & Pichault, 2021).

Figure 3.3 Paradox-Based framework of IPros' work and career experiences



Secondly, the literature consistently highlights the dual nature of work-life balance, wellbeing, and health. While autonomy can enhance perceived control and flexibility, it is

also associated with blurred boundaries, long working hours, stress and social isolation (Granger et al., 2022; Ray et al., 2017; Sayah, 2013). The third theme introduced the career development, support, and success for IPros which theme emphasises the largely self-directed nature of IPros' careers (Horton et al., 2014; van den Born & van Witteloostuijn, 2013). Finally, the identity and management theme explore the intricate relationship between IPros' self-constructed professional identity and their demanding self-management practices (Beck, 2003; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). These themes provided an understanding of the current research on IPros, and based on these themes, this study created a framework to explain the IPros' work and career experiences (see Figure 3.3). Based on the given framework, this study explore the paradoxical nature of IPros and examine their origins, manifestations, and management.

3.5.1 The Paradox-based Framework

3.5.1.1 Sources of the paradox

The paradoxical nature of IPros does not emerge from a single cause but originates from the dynamic interplay between the evolving labor market, the individual's desire for autonomy, and the inherent nature of independent work. The transformation and demands of the labour market are key drivers. The shift from a Fordist industrial economy to a post-industrial and knowledge-based economy has fundamentally changed the relationship between organisations and their workforce (Harris, 2001; Vogt, 2016). Companies are no longer solely focused on building large, stable employee bases. Instead, they require agility and access to specialised and on-demand expertise to respond to rapid technological change and fluctuating market conditions (van Oosterhout et al., 2006). This has led to the rise of the "project economy," where firms combine traditional employees with high-skilled, independent contractors to drive innovation and growth (Burke & Cowling, 2020; Burke et al., 2025). The shift towards a knowledge-based economy and the increasing need for specialised, project-specific skills have led organisations to seek flexible and on-demand

talent (Burbach & Royle, 2010; Cappelli & Keller, 2013). This macro-level demand for flexibility and specialised skills creates a compelling opportunity for IPros. However, it simultaneously places them in a precarious position. While they are highly valued for their unique human capital, their relationship with the client is fundamentally transactional and project-based. This creates the tension between being a flexible high-skilled expert and having a non-permanent, non-employee status. The paradox is that the need for flexibility and specialised knowledge also leads IPros to face precarity from the lack of stability and social protections.

Additionally, the individual's desire for work control, flexibility, and freedom is a powerful motivation. Professionals are increasingly choosing independent work as a deliberate career choice (McKeown, 2018). Many professionals choose to become independent to escape the rigid hierarchies and constraints of traditional employment, seeking greater autonomy over their schedules, projects, and career paths. However, the desire for freedom and autonomy creates internal tensions. Exercising this autonomy requires a high degree of self-management, risk and financial management skills that are not typically required of traditional employees. The paradox is that the autonomy they seek to lead their freedom is often constrained by client demands, the pressure to constantly network, and the need to secure the next project. It is also because the nature of IPros as an independent and non-traditional work arrangement itself is intrinsically paradoxical. Unlike traditional employees who are integrated into a formal organisational structure with clear roles and social protections. IPros are engaged by clients, which distinguishes their relationship as a commercial rather than an employment contract (Knapp et al., 2021; McKeown, 2015). The paradox is that the structure allows them to be agile and responsive, but also leads them to be vulnerable. They bear a significant financial and personal risk, which is a key distinction from the relative stability of traditional employees (Burke &

Cowling, 2015). Thus, the individual's quest for liberation from corporate control can inadvertently lead to a series of precarities.

In sum, the sources of the IPros paradox are not isolated but are multiple complex factors co-constitutive. The macro-level demand for flexible labour, the micro-level desire for personal autonomy, and the inherent structural vulnerabilities of independent work converge to create a tension relationship. The desire for freedom and flexibility is constantly in conflict with the lack of traditional support and the realities of precarity.

3.5.1.2 Four paradoxes of IPros' work and career experiences

The autonomy-precarity mega paradox of IPros is a dynamic tension shaped by individual circumstances and the nature of their work. The paradoxes faced by IPros are not uniform experiences but are deeply influenced by the type of work they perform, their industry, and personal factors such as age. Therefore, based on current research on IPros, this study propose that the four core paradoxes manifest differently for various types of IPros and are influenced by factors like age and the broader labour market.

The work condition paradox captures the tension between enhanced flexibility and heightened job insecurity in independent professional work. IPros typically enjoy autonomy over how, when, and where work is performed, including discretion over work methods, schedules, and project selection (Pichault et al., 2020). This flexibility is often seen as a primary motivation for pursuing independent professional careers (Barley & Kunda, 2006; McKeown, 2015). However, this flexibility is accompanied by structural job insecurity, as IPros operate outside standard employment relationships and therefore lack access to employment protections, organisational benefits, and collective representation (Kalleberg, 2000; Lo Presti et al., 2018). Job insecurity for IPros is less about the risk of unemployment but more about income volatility, contract uncertainty, and gaps between projects (Sutherland et al., 2020). Therefore, work condition paradox emphasises that IPros benefit from flexibility over how, when, and where work is performed, yet face heightened job

insecurity due to limited access to employment protections, social security, and work-related benefits. From a paradox perspective, flexibility and insecurity should not be understood as opposing outcomes but as structurally intertwined, where increased autonomy simultaneously generates conditions of uncertainty.

Wellbeing paradox reflects the coexistence of positive work-life balance and heightened psychological strain. On the positive side, independent professional work can provide meaningful and engaging tasks and professional recognition, which contribute to job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation (Bellesia et al., 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2019). At the same time, the absence of organisational support structures, combined with irregular workloads and blurred work-life boundaries, can lead to job stress (Caza et al., 2022; Kitching & Smallbone, 2012). IPros often bear sole responsibility for managing workload which can lead to stress, exhaustion, and burnout over time (Sutherland et al., 2020). Paradox theory suggests that work-life balance and job stress are not contradictory states but coexisting outcomes of the same structural conditions, where autonomy enables meaningful work while simultaneously increasing pressures and boundary blurring. Thus, the work-life balance that enhances wellbeing can also generate job stress, emphasises another paradox of independent professional work.

Career management paradox highlights the tension between individual career agency and dependence on clients. IPros are formally responsible for managing their own careers, including securing work, developing skills, and maintaining employability (Leighton, 2015; McKeown, 2015). This self-directed career model emphasises independence and personal responsibility. However, career success is simultaneously shaped by interdependence with clients, reputation and professional networks (Knapp et al., 2021; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). Access to future work often depends on client evaluations, repeat contracts, and informal referrals, limiting the extent to which careers can be managed independently. Thus, IPros' careers are closely related to relational networks, emphasising

the paradox between individual independence and clients dependence. This paradox emphasises how independence is inherently relational, as career success depends on external networks and connections, demonstrating that autonomy is sustained through interdependence rather than achieved in isolation.

Identity paradox reflects the tension between maintaining an autonomous professional identity and developing a sense of organisational belonging during client engagements. IPros typically define themselves through their expertise and professional standards rather than through organisational membership (Barley & Kunda, 2006; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). This professional identity supports and provides their independence and market value. At the same time, effective project delivery often requires IPros to integrate into client organisations, align with organisational norms, and collaborate closely with internal teams (Petriglieri et al., 2019; Van den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Temporary organisational embeddedness can facilitate trust and coordination but may also blur identity boundaries and create tension between professional autonomy and organisational conformity. Consequently, from a paradox perspective, professional and organisational identities are not mutually exclusive but dynamically negotiated, requiring IPros to continuously balance and manage dual identities across different organisational contexts.

Additionally, this study suggest that the manifestation of these paradoxes differs significantly based on the IPros segment and industry. These paradoxes may experience differently distinctly by project-based contractors versus task-based contractors. For task-based contractors who often work on short-term and discrete projects, their flexibility is at the micro-level. While they have the freedom to accept or decline individual tasks, the need for a consistent income stream often compels them to be constantly available (Caza et al., 2022; Jabagi et al., 2019). It leads to fragmented workdays and an "always-on" culture. Thus, this can paradoxically result in less real flexibility and higher stress than a traditional job. In contrast, project-based contractors face a different challenge. For project-based contractors,

who typically undertake larger and more defined projects target over a longer duration (Burke et al., 2020). Their work offers periods of flexibility between projects during a project's lifecycle. But their flexibility is limited by clients deadlines, which can be more rigid than a traditional job. Their challenge isn't fragmentation but managing the peaks and valleys of workload, which requires a different form of self-management strategy and financial planning.

The job insecurity aspect of these paradoxes also need a more detailed discussion. Scholars have argued that IPros face heightened job insecurity, such as the irregularity of project-based work, benefits gap and the need for continuous client acquisition (Ghosh, McDonnell, et al., 2024; Lo Presti et al., 2018). But for many IPros, particularly those in high-demand fields, the concept of job insecurity as it is traditionally understood (i.e., the fear of unemployment) could have a different understanding. In the modern knowledge economy, organisations are increasingly seeking external talent for specialised skills that are filled the internal skill gap or needed for a specific period (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). IPros are in high demand and their expertise ensure the job security. The paradox, therefore, shifts from job insecurity to income insecurity or project insecurity. While they may be confident in their ability to find next new work, they may still face uncertainty about the size and duration of their next contract which can lead to fluctuating income. They don't fear being jobless, but rather being between projects for an unpredictable period. This distinction is critical and highlights a fundamental difference of precarious between IPros and other non-traditional work arrangement such as gig workers or contingent workers.

The perception of job insecurity is a powerful example of how industry segmentation matters. For example, a highly skilled IT consultant in the tech industry may feel minimal job insecurity due to high demand for their specialised skills. The industry's reliance on project-based work means they are valued as on-demand experts, and their security comes

from their reputation and expertise (Benson et al., 2020; Sutherland et al., 2020). For such these individual, the work condition paradox is not about a lack of flexibility, but rather about managing a constant stream of high-pressure and intensive projects (Benson et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2018). The wellbeing paradox for them is less about job stress and more about the risk of burnout from a continuous "feast" cycle of work. The boundaries between professional and personal life are blurred by project-based demands. The benefits gap is also less of a concern as their high income allows them to self-insure for health and retirement. Industries' rapid evolution of change and the needs of expertise make long-term, internal employment less desirable for both the company and the IPros. Companies would rather hire a project-based contractor with the most up-to-date skills than maintain a full-time employee who may become obsolete.

This is in contrast to IPros in oversaturated markets, where competition and a lack of specialised demand can lead to job insecurity. In creative industries, the market is often characterized by a high supply of talent, fragmented and short-term tasks (Arvidsson et al., 2010; Hotho & Champion, 2011). For example, the graphic designer in a highly saturated freelance market might experience greater income insecurity and feel more psychological pressure from constantly competing for tasks. They may have the freedom to accept or decline tasks, but the need to maintain a steady income compels them to take on numerous low-paying tasks. The lack of protection and benefits gap is an issue for these IPros, as their relevant lower and more volatile income makes it difficult to secure their own benefits. Therefore, this study suggest that the IPros' experience is not always the same. It is heavily shaped by the needs of the market and the value of their skills.

The influence of age on IPros' experience is significant, particularly with respect to financial security and personal choice. Industry reports show that for IPros, the salary and sense of security tend to increase with age and experience (Burke et al., 2022, 2025). This is a powerful counter-narrative to the ageism often found in traditional employment, where

older workers may face salary stagnation or redundancy (Gardiner et al., 2007; Tempest & Coupland, 2017). For IPros, their value appreciates over time due to their accumulated expertise, extensive professional network, and excellent reputation. This age-related increase in salary directly influences personal choice and how IPros navigate the paradoxes. Older IPros who have achieved a higher income and built a stronger reputation can afford to be more selective. They can choose projects that are more meaningful, better align with their values, or offer a better work-life balance to mitigate the negative effects of job insecurity and job stress. This is because they may no longer fear being jobless, but can focus on optimizing their portfolio of work for strategic growth and personal fulfilment. This allows them to manage the career management paradox by prioritizing long-term professional development over short-term financial gains.

3.5.1.3 Management architecture

The inherent tension between autonomy and precarity represents paradoxes of the IPros' experience. What initially attracts individuals to independent professional work such as the promise of self-direction and control, simultaneously exposes them to unique vulnerabilities and demands. Managing these tensions requires a multifaceted management architecture that operates across individual, organisational, and societal levels. This involves a flexible management approach, balancing the inherent contradictions of IPros' work by simultaneously fostering autonomy while building resilience against precarity (McKeown & Cochrane, 2017; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023).

At the individual level, IPros should engage in proactive self-HRM, developing critical HR tasks, skills, and roles (Auer et al., 2014; Redpath et al., 2008). This includes mastering time management to protect work-life balance (Gravador & Teng-Calleja, 2018), cultivating strong negotiation and contracting skills to manage uncompensated labour (Haapakorpi, 2020), developing continuous learning skills and client diversification strategies for financial stability (Connelly & Gallagher, 2006), actively seeking professional

and non-professional networks to combat isolation (Miller & Vanhove, 2024), and developing financial literacy for comprehensive risk management (Millán et al., 2021). This individual effort is crucial for their professionalization, enhancing their employability, reputation, and long-term sustainability (Kinsella et al., 2021; Süß & Becker, 2013).

Beyond the individual level, HRM systems and practices within client organisations and intermediary platforms are evolving to better support IPros (D'Amours & Legault, 2013; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). This involves client-side inclusive HRM policies such as transparent contracting, fair payment terms, respecting IPros' boundaries, and providing access to organisational resources or fostering a sense of psychological inclusion (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Platforms are increasingly offering HRM-like features such as payment processing, dispute resolution, reputation systems, and sometimes even access to aggregated benefits or training resources (Kaine & Josserand, 2019; Vallas & Christin, 2018). Finally, legal and regulation protection forms a crucial part of the management architecture, addressing systemic precarity (Baker & Kelan, 2018; Griep et al., 2025). This involves policy interventions aimed at providing social safety nets (e.g., portable benefits, accessible insurance, unemployment support) and clarifying the legal status of independent workers to ensure fair treatment and mitigate their comprehensive economic and benefit gaps. This multi-level approach to management architecture is essential for creating a more sustainable and equitable environment where the autonomy can be realized without precarity for IPros.

3.5.2 Implications and Future Research Directions

3.5.2.1 Implications

This study enhances our understanding of current research on IPros and creatively proposed a new framework to help us understand the paradox between the autonomy and precarity of IPros. On the one hand, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of IPros by providing clarity on their unique position within the labor market. The results shown that

IPros are highly skilled, specialised individuals who are fundamentally driven by greater work autonomy and flexibility. IPros generally have entrepreneurial spirit, characterized by proactivity, risk-taking, and active self-management of their "personal firms" (Burke & Cowling, 2015). However, the study also highlights that inherent to their character is a susceptibility to various forms of precarity, such as financial instability and social isolation, which are often direct consequences of the greater autonomy they seek (Evans et al., 2004; Gold & Fraser, 2002). Moreover, this review summarized and explained four main themes of current research on IPros. These themes provide a comprehensive map of the current academic landscape concerning IPros and explain the multifaceted inquiry into IPros' lived experiences, their unique professional identities, developmental trajectories, and the broader contextual forces shaping their work. These themes provide a structured framework for future research by clearly delineating established areas of inquiry and highlighting interdependencies, such as how definitional ambiguities impact legal protections or how individual motivations interact with work experiences to shape wellbeing.

Additionally, this study provided paradox framework makes a significant contribution to paradox theory within organisational studies. This framework provides a concrete, multi-faceted explanation of how allure (autonomy) and reality (precarity) are not merely co-existent but are mutually constituted within the IPros' work experience. By exploring four specific paradoxes of autonomy and explicitly linking them to their corresponding precarity realities, the framework proposes core tension between autonomy and precarity. This model offers a detailed, empirically testable framework for analysing how opposing forces interact and shape IPros' work. This challenges overly simplistic views of autonomy as uniformly positive and illuminates its complex, double-edged nature (Haas, 2010; Liu et al., 2024). This framework also enriches and extends non-standard work research. It explained how precarity manifests across multiple dimensions even within the highly skilled and ostensibly autonomous professional segment. The model broadens the

conceptual scope of precarity beyond its traditional association with low-wage, low-skill, or marginalized labour. It provides a valuable typology of precarity forms directly driven by the pursuit of professional autonomy, highlighting that insecurity is a pervasive feature of contemporary work and is irrespective of skill level (Alberti et al., 2018; Allan et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the review extends HRM theory by proposing and elaborating on management architecture specifically tailored for IPros. This architecture challenges the traditional assumption of a single, internal employer-employee HRM model (Budd & Bhawe, 2019; Kaufman et al., 2021). It advocates for a multi-level, adaptive HRM framework that explicitly addresses the unique challenges of managing contingent workforces. This framework also provides a multi-level approach to manage IPros' autonomy and precarity that integrates individual self-management, adapted organisational and HRM practices, and societal-level protections. This moves beyond traditional control-oriented HRM models to emphasise facilitating autonomy while actively mitigating precarity (Hauff et al., 2014; Shore et al., 2018). Thereby, this review advances discussions on inclusive HRM and the strategic management of external talent in increasingly blurred organisational boundaries. This proposed multi-stakeholder management approach offers a theoretical framework for how organisations and society can adapt to support effective knowledge work outside traditional employment.

3.5.2.2 The reality and future of IPros research

The current academic research on IPros is characterized by a foundational but often generalised understanding, primarily aimed at defining IPros and identifying their work and career experiences (Leighton, 2015; McKeown, 2015; Syrett, 2016). Existing studies have significantly contributed to conceptualising IPros and highlighting issues such as flexibility, job insecurity, income volatility, and the lack of formal organisational support (Knapp et al., 2021; Pichault et al., 2020). Much of this existing literature has established a foundational understanding of the IPros' paradoxes, such as the tension between flexibility

and stability, and autonomy versus client demands (Knapp et al., 2021; Leighton, 2015; Pichault et al., 2020). However, most of IPros' research has focused on a broad, descriptive analysis and often treats all independent workers as a single group. On the one hand, current research provides a high-level overview of the IPros' reality, often relying on large-scale surveys to quantify the workforce and its general motivations. For example, studies by organisations like the McKinsey Global Institute and MBO Partners have been instrumental in defining segments of independent workers, such as “free agents” who choose this path and “reluctant” who do so out of necessity. These studies have successfully established that many IPros particularly those who are “free agents” report higher levels of job satisfaction than their traditionally employed peers (Burke et al., 2022; MBO Partners, 2023). However, much of the literature remains descriptive and generalised, despite substantial differences across industries, age groups, career stages, and employment arrangements. Therefore, the future research should examine how the paradoxes identified in this review vary across industries, career stages, professional segments, and over time. The Table 3.7 outline future research directions corresponding to the four paradoxes identified in this study.

Work condition paradox. Existing research has largely framed the work condition paradox around the tension between flexibility and employment insecurity. While many studies highlight income instability, lack of organisational protection and precarious work arrangements (Annink, 2017; Burke et al., 2021), current research rarely differentiates between highly skilled project-based IPros and lower-skilled task-based workers. Future research should therefore adopt a comparative approach to examine how work conditions differ across IPros segments, industries, and career stages. Particular attention should be paid to how high-demand expertise influences perceptions of job insecurity. Current research often links independent work to a lack of job security due to the absence of a permanent employer and traditional benefits (Annink, 2017; McKeown & Pichault, 2021; Syrett, 2016).

While this opinion is true for many task-based workers, it fails to capture the reality of high-skilled, project-based contractors.

For an IT consultant specializing in cloud security, their security is not from a single employer but from their high-demand expertise and professional network. The current research does not sufficiently differentiate between a lack of job security and a professional model where security is based on human capital rather than a formal employment contract. The paradox for these IPros is not one of precarity, but of managing a continuous opportunity of high-value opportunities. Furthermore, a significant portion of the current literature focuses on the work conditions paradox by highlighting the lack of paid leave, healthcare, and retirement benefits (Burke et al., 2021; Florin & Pichault, 2020) . While this is a critical issue, the current research rarely explores how high-earning IPros manage this benefits gap. This study have limited knowledge of whether they simply self-insure with their higher income or if they feel a constant burden of having to manage a complex portfolio of personal finance and risk.

Wellbeing paradox. Current studies generally identify IPros with greater autonomy, flexibility, and improved work-life balance (Hundley, 2001; Sayah, 2013). However, these same conditions can generate stress, burnout, and blurred work-life boundaries. Existing research remains limited in understanding how these wellbeing tensions evolve across career stages and industries. Furthermore, the primary limitation in the current research is the inconsistent conceptualization of IPros. The existing literature often combines a diverse range of workers (e.g., high-skilled, project-based consultants or low-skilled, task-based gig workers) into the single categories of the gig economy (Friedman, 2014; Wood et al., 2019). This conceptual ambiguity creates a fundamental research gap because the paradoxes manifest differently for each group. For example, the wellbeing paradox for a high-earning interim CEO is not a lack of benefits or a fear of unemployment, but rather the psychological burden of managing high-stakes client relationships with no formal support. This is in

contrast to the work reality of a task-based designer for whom the paradox is a lack of paid leave and financial precarity. The current research often uses a single set of metrics to analyse these different groups, leading to a limited understanding of the IPros workforce.

Future research should examine how age, accumulated expertise, financial stability, and professional reputation influence IPros' wellbeing experiences. For example, a young freelance web developer may be more concerned with building a portfolio and gaining experience, making them vulnerable to the wellbeing paradox of constant stress and burnout from taking on any available work. An older and established management consultant, however, may have a strong network and excellent reputation built over decades. This financial and reputational security allows them to be more selective, thus mitigating the same paradoxes that affect their younger counterparts. The current research does not adequately explore these divergent realities or the unique challenges faced by IPros at different career stages.

Career management paradox. The current literature commonly describes IPros as highly autonomous and self-directed professionals responsible for managing their own careers (Leighton, 2015; McKeown, 2015). However, career success among IPros simultaneously depends heavily on professional networks, reputation, client relationships, and external support systems (Knapp et al., 2021; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). Current research has not sufficiently explored how these interdependent relationships evolve or differ across professional contexts. Despite these foundational works enriching the IPros research, they reveal the absence of detailed, comparative and time lagged research in the academic area. The current research suffers from a significant segmentation gap and a lack of intersectional analysis. Most studies provide a broad, static understanding of IPros without accounting for how key factors like age and industry shape their career experiences.

Particularly, there is a limited study of age and time lagged gap. Most existing research provides a cross-sectional understanding of IPros, failing to capture the dynamic

evolution of IPros' career. Given that industry reports indicate IPros' salaries tend to increase with age, there is a critical need to understand how this financial stability influences personal choice and their perception of the paradoxes. Current research lacks time lagged studies that follow IPros over a significant period to examine how they build and leverage social capital and expertise to transition from a survival-driven mindset to a place of strategic career management. Therefore, Future research should investigate how IPros build and leverage social capital throughout different stages of their careers. Longitudinal studies are particularly necessary to understand how IPros transition from survival-driven career management toward more strategic and opportunity-driven professional trajectories. Furthermore, future research should examine how digital platforms, professional connections, and informal networks contribute to career development and sustainability.

Identity paradox. Research on IPros' identity highlights the complex tension between maintaining a strong professional identity and adapting to multiple organisational contexts (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). Existing studies suggest that IPros generally develop a strong professional identity through their skills, simultaneously developing organisational identity by integrating into client organisations. However, current research rarely explores how these identity tensions vary across industries or career stages. For example, a graphic designer in the creative industry may face the identity paradox by constantly having to reconcile their artistic vision with client demands. Whereas an independent management consultant could face less identity paradox, because their identity is reinforced by their expertise and the satisfactory results they deliver. Current research does not adequately consider these industry-specific contexts, which are significant for understanding identity paradox. Therefore, future studies should explore how IPros construct and maintain professional identity across different organisational environments and over time. Additionally, future research should also explore how professional

communities, networks, and psychological contracts shape identity management among IPros.

Overall, while current research has successfully established a broad understanding of the IPros paradoxes, its generalised approach and inconsistent conceptualization created significant research gaps. The future of this academic field requires a more comprehensive approach that differentiates between IPros segments, industries, and ages, moving beyond descriptive analysis to provide a truly multifaceted understanding of this evolving workforce. Based on the proposed research gaps and the current reality of IPros, Table 3.7 outlines examples of future research directions for researchers. This agenda integrates the critical factors of age, industry, and segment, along with relevant theoretical lenses to move beyond a generalised understanding of the IPros paradoxes.

3.6 Conclusion

Ultimately, a comprehensive understanding of IPros is important for developing sustainable independent work models that maximize the benefits of autonomy while effectively mitigating the associated risks of precarity in the evolving landscape of global labour. This research, through a systematic review of the literature, demonstrates that the experience of IPros is defined by a fundamental and pervasive tension: the co-existence of sought-after autonomy with inherent precarity. The alluring promise of flexibility and control over work inevitably gives rise to challenges such as unbounded hours, income volatility, and social isolation. By applying paradox theory as a guiding framework, this review separately identifies and discuss four themes and corresponding paradoxes that characterize the IPros' autonomy-precarity mega paradox, which include: 1) Work experiences and challenges: work conditions paradox which highlights the tension between control of work and the reality; 2) Work-life balance, wellbeing and health: wellbeing paradox which reveals how the pursuit of work-life balance and jobless stress; 3) Career development, support and success: career management paradox which exposes the inherent

contradiction between IPros' self-management independence and social net interdependence;

4) Identity and management: identity paradox which reveals IPros' professional and organisational identities. Effectively navigating these paradoxes necessitates a multi-faceted approach, involving proactive individual strategies, adapted organisational HRM practices, and supportive societal-level legal and regulatory frameworks.

Table 3.7 Examples of Future Research Avenues for IPros Research

Paradox	Research focus	Examples of key questions	Theoretical lenses
Work condition paradox	Comparative analysis of work conditions across IPros segments, industries, and career stages	How do work conditions differ for older, project-based contractors versus younger, task-based contractors in the same industry? How does the industry's demand for expertise influence an IPros' perceived autonomy?	• Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory • Contingency Theory
Wellbeing paradox	The effect of age, income, and segment on IPros' health and wellbeing.	How do the psychological pressures of independent work vary for an IPro at different career stages? Does higher income and accumulated expertise (often correlated with age) reduce the stress of job insecurity and work-life balance?	• Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory • Self-Determination Theory (SDT)
Career management paradox	Exploration of career trajectories, reputation-building, and network effects across time.	At what career stage does an IPros in a high-demand industry transition from a survival-driven mindset to one of strategic choice? How do older IPros leverage their professional networks to secure better opportunities?	• Boundaryless Career Theory • Social Network Theory
Identity paradox	The construction of a coherent professional self across diverse contexts and career stages.	How do IPros in different industries (e.g., IT vs. creative) build and maintain a professional identity? How does a strong professional community or guild help IPros manage their identity?	• Social Identity Theory (SIT) • Psychological Contract Theory

Chapter 4 Study 2 Being Professional or Organisational?

Exploring the Identity Paradox of Independent Professionals

4.1 Abstract

The number of independent professionals (IPros) has increased significantly in the global labour market. IPros are highly autonomous workers who strongly identify with their professions rather than with employing organisations. However, while IPros maintain formal independence, they often work closely within client organisations, adopt organisational norms, and collaborate with organisational members to deliver project outcomes. This dual positioning creates an identity paradox in which IPros must simultaneously maintain a strong professional identity to preserve autonomy and credibility, while also developing a degree of organisational identification to function effectively within client organisations. However, how this identity paradox shapes IPros' career outcomes is still unknown. Therefore, this study draws on social identity theory and explores the impact of IPros' dual identities on their career outcomes. Specifically, the aim of this study is to examine how IPros' professional and organisational identity influence their career outcomes, including job satisfaction and subjective career success. A quantitative research method was applied in this time-lagged study ($N = 280$), employing polynomial regression and response surface analysis. The results revealed that when professional and organisational identities converge at high rather than low levels, both IPros' job satisfaction and subjective career success are higher. This study extends to the social identity theory in non-traditional work arrangements by showing and expanding how IPros' professional and organisational identities influence their work outcomes. This study has theoretical, practical implications and provides significant future research directions for IPros study.

4.2 Introduction

As boundaryless careers development, independent professionals (IPros) have become increasingly prominent, especially in fields such as IT, consulting, and creative services, where specialised skills are critical (D'Amours & Legault, 2013; McKeown & Pichault, 2021; Pichault et al., 2020). IPros, who often work on project-based or freelance arrangements, contribute valuable expertise while operating outside traditional employment structures (Burke, 2019; Burke & Cowling, 2020). IPros represent the workforce who are highly skilled and engage in providing professional and technical services, and they are contracted for the project-based commercial services rather than a traditional employee-employer relationship contract (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; Burke, 2012; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). IPros retain professional independence, derive income from multiple clients and manage their careers largely outside organisational boundaries (Bryant & McKeown, 2016), forming strong professional identity. Meantime, IPros generally need to work alongside permanent employees, contribute directly to organisational objectives and often remain embedded within client organisations for extended periods (Burke & Cowling, 2020; Ghosh, McDonnell, et al., 2024), developing organisational identity. This simultaneous status (being a professional and a member in the organisation) gives rise to the dual work-related identities, i.e. professional and organisational identity, which coexist within IPros and may generate tension.

Some research explores IPros' wellbeing (Hundley, 2001; Warr & Inceoglu, 2018), motivation (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023), performance (Cross & Swart, 2021; Petriglieri et al., 2019), and career development (Kost et al., 2020; Lo Presti et al., 2018), contributing to our understanding of IPros' lived experience. However, research on the dual identities of IPros is still limited. Therefore, this research is the first to consider IPros' identity paradox and adopts a time lagged design to explore how IPros' professional and organisational identities influence their job satisfaction and subjective career success.

Professional identity is important for IPros, who are usually regarded as experts in the industry and provide clients with specialised expertise or skills (Kunda et al., 2002.; Lee & Frenkel, 2004). IPros highly enjoy autonomy and being flexible in their work based on the nature of their work. Thus, based on their intendent contracting nature as well as their professional expertise, they have strong professional identity where they identify themselves as being professionals. IPros' professional identity aligns with the concept of deep structure identity described by Meyer et al. (2006), as it involves the incorporation of collective values and preferences into one's self-concept and tends to be enduring and less dependent on situational cues. Based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), stronger identification with one's profession enhances positive work attitudes and career evaluations, as professional identity provides meaning, competence, and continuity in independent work. Such strong professional identity is therefore expected to positively link with their job satisfaction and career success.

Simultaneously, working on the client's site and interacting with employees for a fixed term would also develop IPros' identity with the organisation, labelled the organisational identity. IPros often adapt to organisational norms, values, and behaviors for the duration of a specific project, which helps them integrate into teams and align with organisational goals (Pichault et al., 2020). IPros' organisational identity is consistent with the situated identity (Meyer et al., 2006; Rousseau, 1998), and which refers that "when situational cues signal that an individual shares interests with a collective" (Meyer et al., 2006, page 667). During the contract work, IPros may cultivate a degree of organisational identity for effective collaboration. Such organisational identity is expected to positively link with their job satisfaction and career success.

While both identities may be beneficial, the coexistence of professional and organisational identities gives rise to an identity paradox for IPros. For instance, both identities compete for limited personal resources such as time and energy. In a limited

personal resource context, strong professional identity may lead IPros to invest more time and energy in maintaining professional standards and enhancing transferable skills, potentially reducing their time and energy assigned to any single client organisation. In such cases, IPros' self-worth is derived from what one is as a professional rather than from who one works for. Conversely, strong organisational identity may require emotional commitment, loyalty, and behavioural conformity to a specific client organisation, which may constrain IPros' work autonomy and flexibility (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Thus, professional and organisational identities may pull IPros in different directions, creating tension over where to allocate effort, commitment, and emotional engagement. In addition, professional and organisational identities may conflict with each other due to their different motivation and mindsets. Professional identity emphasises autonomy, expertise, and professional values, whereas organisational identity prioritizes loyalty to the organisation, performance goals, and managerial expectations (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Meyer et al., 2006).

This identity paradox poses unique challenges and implications for self-management for IPros as well as for organisational management from the client side. Both IPros and client organisations need to support the development of IPros' professional autonomy with the organisation's need for alignment and cooperation (Evans et al., 2004; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). Exploring this paradox has implications for HRM policies aimed at fostering cohesion and productivity among both core employees and external contractors. When professional and organisational identities converge at high levels, the identity paradox becomes less salient because IPros are able to integrate professional values with client organisational expectations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt et al., 2006). This alignment allows IPros to allocate time, effort, and emotional engagement more fairly, which supports more positive work attitudes and work evaluations (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Meyer et al., 2006). Consequently, high-level identity convergence is likely to be associated with higher

job satisfaction and greater subjective career success compared to situations in which both identities are weak.

To test the impact of IPros' dual identity on job satisfaction and subjective career success, data were collected from IPros based in Ireland and hypotheses were tested via linear and polynomial regression analysis. The findings provided support for the hypothesised relationships. Examining identity congruence is particularly important, as IPros simultaneously develop professional and organisational identities. By doing so, this research advances IPro and HRM literature in three ways. First, this study contributes to IPros literature by showing that high convergence of these identities is associated with greater job satisfaction and subjective career success. Prior research on IPros mainly focused on their motivations, wellbeing, performance, and career development, typically emphasizing individual attributes or structural features of non-standard work arrangements (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009; Burke, 2019; Kost et al., 2020). This study extends the IPros literature by exploring dual identity tension, explicitly examining how the configuration of professional and organisational identities shapes job satisfaction and subjective career success. Second, this study contributes to HRM research by advancing theoretical understanding of identity management among IPros (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Pichault et al., 2020). Existing HRM research mainly examined identity processes among standard employees, providing limited insight into how professional and organisational identities operate among non-traditional workers such as IPros (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; McKeown & Cochrane, 2017). By examining how professional and organisational identities coexist and interact among IPros, this research extends HRM theories beyond traditional employment relationships and highlights that identity configuration is positive in shaping work-related outcomes in non-standard work arrangements. Thirdly, this study extends the current social identity theory from focus on traditional work arrangement to non-traditional work arrangement. Social identity theory traditionally examines how employees identify

with their organisation in standard, permanent employment setups (Hirst et al., 2009; Pichault et al., 2020). This study broadens the theory to include non-traditional work arrangements like freelance or contract work. By understanding this paradox, organisations can create environments where IPros feel empowered to maintain their professional autonomy while contributing meaningfully to organisational goals.

4.3 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

4.3.1 IPros' Professional Identity

The growth of IPros reflects broader changes in labor markets, with increasing reliance on flexible, project-based work in knowledge-intensive fields (Ashford et al., 2007; Burke & Cowling, 2020). IPros, also called freelancers, contingent workers, independent workers, independent contractors, and freelancers, are characterized by the provision of specialised professional or technical services to client organisations on a fixed-term or project basis (Cross & Swart, 2022; Duggan et al., 2020; Kinnie et al., 2008; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019; Spreitzer et al., 2017). Connelly and Gallagher (2004) proposed that “IPros refers to self-employed individuals who sell their services to client organisations on a fixed-term or a project basis” (page 961). Unlike traditional employees, IPros do not enter long-term employment relationships and instead remain work independent, responsible for maintaining employability and managing career risks (Burke & Cowling, 2020; Lo Presti et al., 2018). IPros generally operate independently of traditional employment relationships and offer organisations access to specialised skills without the commitments and costs associated with full-time employees (Kunda et al., 2002). This unique position places IPros in a liminal space between market and organisation, which make IPros developed both professional and organisational identity.

To understand IPro's professional identity, this study draw on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which is very relevant for understanding how individuals construct and manage multiple identities within changing organisational and work contexts. Social

identity theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that individuals define themselves through group memberships, which shape self-concept, belongingness, and behavior. Social identity theory is widely applied in the field of social psychology (Brown, 2000). According to social identity theory, the self has reflexivity and can classify, categorize, and name itself according to specific standards and methods. Stets and Burke (2000) emphasised the process of individuals strengthening and protecting their self-identity through self-definition, and ultimately achieving a collective, depersonalized identity based on group membership, full of positive perspectives. Individuals classify themselves into different groups based on various criteria and distinguish between individuals within and outside the group (Ashforth et al., 2008; Hogg et al., 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000), such as working in the same organisation or having the same interests and hobbies.

Although social identity theory traditionally applies to stable, long-term group memberships, recent studies have extended the theory to temporary work arrangements (Bartel et al., 2012). Applying social identity theory into IPros, professional identity refers to IPros' self-identifications with their professions (e.g. engineering, law, accounting, consulting etc.). Professional identity is highly salient for IPros as their economic value and work autonomy largely on being recognized as experts within a professional domain rather than as members of a particular organisation (Kunda et al., 2002; Lee & Frenkel, 2004). Professional identity provides continuity across projects and clients and serves as a critical resource and capability in managing career uncertainty and maintaining employability (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Ibarra, 1999).

Professional identity emphasises an individual's personal identity that is an individual's sense of identity towards a profession rather than a specific organisation (Johnson et al., 2006; Ostermeier et al., 2023). Therefore, professionals are more likely to define themselves in terms of their profession, which reflects what they do, whereas organisational identity refers to the organisation and workplace with which they are

associated (Hekman et al., 2009). Taking IPros as an example, IPros is a collective term for a group of types that typically define themselves based on the type of work they do rather than the specific organisation they serve. Research on professional identity has been relatively limited, and most studies focus on theoretical exploration and discussion of specific professions. For example, research involves the conceptual and comprehensive studies on professional identity (Fitzgerald, 2020; Johnson et al., 2012). Most studies focuses on the specific sectors including higher education (Clarke et al., 2013), and nursing in healthcare (Beijaard et al., 2004; Öhlén & Segesten, 1998; Sachs, 2001), with samples primarily drawn from full-time employees. Limited studies have explored the construction of professional identity (Clandinin et al., 1999; Cruess et al., 2019; Wiles, 2013), and research on the impact of professional identity on IPros' work outcomes remains scarce, particularly in the context of non-standard and independent work arrangements.

Identity is a key influencing factor for job satisfaction and career success (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Professional identity represents an internalised exchange relationship between individuals and their professional community. For individuals, professional identity, as a dynamic identity state, will increase or decrease with changes in work environment and individual work experience (Canrinus et al., 2012). When IPros strongly identify with their profession, they derive meaning, competence and validation from their work, which enhances intrinsic motivation and positive work attitudes such as job satisfaction (Pratt et al., 2006). Meantime, individual identification can help individuals understand “who they are” and “what their values are”, which helps them make effective career decisions, pursue career goals, and achieve career success (Harrington & Hall, 2007; Valcour & Ladge, 2008). For IPros, individuals with a robust professional identity often exhibit resilience, adaptability, and proactive career management, which are critical for employability in knowledge-intensive sectors (Pratt et al., 2006). In this regard, professional identity provides continuity and direction across projects and organisations, supporting

positive evaluations of career progress and subjective career success (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Valcour & Ladge, 2008). From a social identity perspective, individuals derive meaning, self-consistency, and a sense of belonging from salient identities, which in turn shape attitudes and evaluations of work outcomes. For IPros, a strong professional identity offers a stable source of self-definition across changing work contexts, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and perceptions of career success.

This study focuses on job satisfaction and subjective career success as key outcome variables, as they represent central indicators of work-related attitudes and career evaluation in both HRM and career research (Locke, 1969; Ng et al., 2005). Job satisfaction captures individuals' affective evaluation of their work experiences and is widely used to assess employee wellbeing and engagement within organisational and non-organisational contexts (Spector, 1985, 1997). Subjective career success reflects individuals' internal evaluation of their career progress (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2019), which is particularly relevant for IPros who operate outside traditional organisational career structures and rely on self-defined success criteria.

These outcomes are especially appropriate in the context of independent work, where career success is less determined by hierarchical advancement and more by personal fulfilment, professional recognition, and perceived progress across projects and clients (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; De Vos et al., 2020). By focusing on both job satisfaction and subjective career success, this study captures both immediate work experiences and longer-term career evaluations, providing a comprehensive understanding of IPros' work and career outcomes. Thus, this study anticipates a positive relationship between IPros' professional identity and their job satisfaction and subjective career success.

H1: IPros' professional identity is positively associated with job satisfaction (H1a); and subjective career success (H1b).

4.3.2 IPros' Organisational Identity

The effective complete of project-based work often requires IPros to integrate into client organisations, collaborate closely with permanent employees, and align their behaviours with organisational values and expectations (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Pichault et al., 2020). Through interact with employees and participation in organisational practices, IPros may develop a degree of organisational identity despite their external status (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; McKeown & Cochrane, 2017). Drawing on social identity theory (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), organisational identity emphasises a strong sense of belonging and oneness towards a specific organisation. Organisational identity has always been considered as an important part of organisational behavior research, which has a significant impact on individual behavior within the organisation (He & Brown, 2013; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Ostermeier et al. (2023) explained that when members of an organisation have a strong sense of identification and belonging to the organisation, they will speak in terms of “we” instead of “I”. According to social identity theory, people intend to identify themselves as members of specific group and distinguish themselves from members outside the group (He & Brown, 2013; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Ostermeier et al., 2023).

Organisational identity is approached from an in-group perspective, increasing the intimacy of relationships among group members within the same organisation (Hekman et al., 2009). Therefore, organisational identity can create a strong connection between organisational members and the organisation, encourage individuals to actively influence the organisation through personal investment Organisational identity is generally related to many important organisational behaviors and outcomes, such as turnover intention (Van Dick et al., 2004), job satisfaction (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015), employee creativity (Hirst et al., 2009), and performance (Van Knippenberg, 2000).

IPros’ organisational identity might be slightly different from full-time employees’ considering the time spent in the organisations. However, the strategic need to maintain effective working relationships is the same for both IPros and full-time employees. IPros’

organisational identity reflects an exchange relationship between individuals and client organisations. Identification with a client organisation signals perceived inclusion, recognition, and relational investment, which fosters feelings of obligation and reciprocity (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Much research provided evidence on the influence of organisational identity on job satisfaction for full time employees (Kabeel & Mosa Eisa, 2017; Karanika-Murray et al., 2015; Sabancıogullari & Dogan, 2015; van Dick et al., 2008). For IPros, organisational identity can enhance collaboration, role clarity, and perceived support, thereby increasing job satisfaction and reinforcing positive assessments of career advancement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Van Dick et al., 2008). Thus, this study propose a positive relationship between IPros' organisational identity and their job satisfaction and subjective career success.

H2: IPros' organisational identity is positively associated with job satisfaction (H2a); and subjective career success (H2b).

4.3.3 The Identity Paradox: Professional vs. Organisational Identity of IPros

While IPros' professional and organisational identities do contribute to their job satisfaction and career success as analyzed above, the coexistence of professional and organisational identities creates tensions and challenges, labelled as the identity paradox for IPros in this study. Psychology research has well established that individuals have multiple identities and have formed a set of identity systems highlighted by various roles and backgrounds (Ashforth et al., 2008; Meyer et al., 2006; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Due to individuals occupying multiple roles and possessing diverse characteristics across different groups or organisations, they often hold multiple identities that may conflict in specific situations (Kreiner et al., 2006; Ostermeier et al., 2023). The tension between professional and organisational identities is well established in the professions literature and related theoretical traditions. Research on professional–organisational conflict highlights how professionals often navigate competing demands between maintaining professional

autonomy and adhering to organisational structures and control mechanisms (Horton et al., 2014; Wallace, 1995). From an institutional logics perspective, individuals embedded in multiple institutional environments are exposed to different and sometimes conflicting value systems, such as professional norms versus organisational priorities (Thornton et al., 2012). Relatedly, research on “organisational professionals” demonstrates how professionals working within organisations must continuously balance these competing expectations and negotiate their identities accordingly (Evetts, 2011; Ostermeier et al., 2023).

In traditional employment contexts, social identity theory provides a foundation for understanding how employees align themselves with organisational values and derive identity from their roles (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory suggests that employees typically experience higher job satisfaction, commitment, and performance when they strongly identify with their employer (Haslam et al., 2004). However, compared to traditional employees and organisational professionals, IPros occupy a more fluid and boundary-spanning position, as they engage with multiple client organisations without long-term membership. This context introduces a more dynamic and temporary form of identity construction, which may intensify the tensions between professional and organisational identities. For IPros, professional identity, i.e. the sense of self tied to their specialised field, may conflict with the organisational identity that arises when embedded in client environments. Specifically, the pursuit of independent professional identity requires IPros to have a significant degree of independence and autonomy in their work, but in the process of providing services to client organisations. It is inevitable to collaborate with organisational members. When the autonomy of IPros cannot be fully exercised, they could face the conflict between their professional and organisational identities. This “identity paradox” places IPros in a unique position, where they must manage their professional self-concept as independent experts while adapting to organisational norms and expectations during engagements (Boussebaa & Morgan, 2008).

In addition, multiple identities may compete for limited personal resources such as time, energy, and attention (Ashforth et al., 2014; Pratt et al., 2006). Taking IPros for example, strong professional identity may encourage IPros to prioritize autonomy, professional standards, and develop professional skills, potentially limited their time and energy involvement in client organisations. Conversely, strong organisational identity may require loyalty and commitment to a client organisation, which may constrain independence and redirect resources away from IPros' professional development. Thus, IPros must continuously manage the tension between being autonomous professionals and members of client organisations. Therefore, based on this context, it is necessary to discuss IPros experience their independence and their temporary affiliation with client organisations, particularly in terms of their professional and organisational identities.

Research indicates that strong professional identity can positively influence career satisfaction and subjective career success, as it affirms the IPros' self-worth and professional competence (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). Conversely, weak or conflicting organisational identification may lead to loneliness and a sense of disconnection from client teams, as IPros may feel like “outsiders within” (Ashforth et al., 2000). At the same time, emerging research suggests that identity alignment, rather than conflict alone, may play a critical role in shaping positive outcomes (Ostermeier et al., 2023). When both professional and organisational identities are strong, individuals may experience greater coherence, reduced role ambiguity, and enhanced integration within their work context (Afshari et al., 2019; Weldon et al., 2023).

This point suggests that the identity paradox is not only about managing conflicting roles but also about balancing the emotional demands of a temporary organisational affiliation. IPros may possess both professional and organisational identities in their work, but it remains unclear whether tensions arise between these identities and how such configurations influence work outcomes. High–high alignment reflects a strong

identification with both professional and organisational roles, whereas low–low alignment reflects weak identification with both. By focusing on these identity configurations, this study moves beyond a conflict-based view of identity tensions and provides a more nuanced understanding of how identity alignment can enhance job satisfaction and subjective career success among IPros. This positions the study's contribution in extending the professional–organisational tension literature to non-traditional and boundary-spanning work contexts. Based on the above theoretical reasoning, this study focuses on how these configurations relate to work-related and career outcomes, specifically job satisfaction and subjective career success. Therefore, based on existing literature and research, our third hypothesis is:

H3: IPros' job satisfaction (H3a) and subjective career success (H3b) are higher when professional and organisational identity converge at high rather than at low levels.

4.4 Methodology

4.4.1 Sample and Procedure

Given there was no database for IPros, the research team contacted an accounting firm engaged in the field of IPros who focuses on professional contractors and engages with 3000 active contractors in varied industries. These individuals operate as IPros and work directly with client organisations rather than through intermediary agencies. Research team contacted these highly skilled professionals by sending a web-based self-report survey questionnaire via email and collected all survey data. Research team invited independent contract workers to participate in this survey through the company's colleague contact network and issuing questionnaire announcements.

Data were collected at two points in time 12 months apart. In January 2021, an online survey was sent to their active contractors with a few reminders. In total, 1324 responses were received (46%). After deleting invalid responses, the valid sample size was 1218 (41%). Time one respondents, 75% were male. The average (and also median) age was 46 years old (SD = 12), and the average contract length is 14 months (SD = 16). 30% of the

sample aged from 40 to 49 years old. Almost 70% of respondents were over 40 years old. Participants came from five main different industries, including the pharma, med device and life science (39%), finance (12%), technology (9%), and other industries (40%). The sample consisted of IPros where were well-educated with 95% of the participants having attained third level qualifications of 6 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications in Ireland; and 84% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Among the sample, 8% had one or more other professional qualifications beside their formal education.

In 2022, another online survey was sent to active contractors of the same accounting firm. After reminders and replacements, 752 (26%) surveys were returned at Time 2: the valid sample size was 711 (24%). Among the Time 2 respondents, 76% were male. The average (and also median) age was 49 years old ($SD = 12$), and the average contract length is 16 months ($SD = 16$). The median contract length is 12 months, with 44% of respondents reporting their contract length between 7-12 months.

The time lag between this study's assessments is one year. A one-year lag can reduce the risk of common method bias by temporally separating the measurement of predictors and outcomes, while remaining feasible for time lagged data collection in IPros (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Given the project-based nature of independent professional work, a one-year lag further allows respondents to experience changes in client engagements and organisational contexts, strengthening causal inference regarding the impact of identity on outcomes. After further screening, research team used email addresses for unique ID matched 280 respondents at both Time 1 and Time 2 to test the model. A series comparison analyses using analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed no difference ($p > .05$) between matched respondents at T1 and T2 on their age, gender, education, industry, and average contract length. Thus, this study used 280 matched responses for analysis.

4.4.2 Measurements

All variables were assessed based on established scales. The original scales were designed for traditional employees. To make these scales applicable to IPros, this study have adapted them via changing some words and removing some non-applicable items. Reliability and validity check was conducted for these adapted scales to IPros.

Professional identity. Assessed at Time 1, this study used the 3-item scale developed by Farmer and Van Dyne (2010), which evaluates the degree of the individual's professional identity (e.g., "Being a professional contractor is an important part of who I am"). Participants responded by using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach's α was .79.

Organisational identity. Assessed at Time 1, organisational identity were adapted from Smidts et al., (2001), which evaluates the degree of the individual's organisational identity. After rounds of discussions, research team decided to delete three items that were not applicable to IPros and retain another two applicable items. These two items include "I feel strong ties with this organisation" and "I feel glad to work for this organisation". Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach's α was .84.

Job satisfaction. Assessed at Time 2, 1 item was adapted from Cammann et al., (1979), which evaluates the degree of individuals' overall satisfaction with the organisation (e.g., "All in all, I am satisfied with my work"). In addition, several items were added to capture satisfaction with key aspects of independent professional work that are particularly important to IPros (e.g., "How satisfied are you with the following aspects? Rate of pay and location of job etc."). These items allowed for a more detailed assessment of job satisfaction that reflects the multifaceted nature of IPros' work experiences with multiple clients and projects. Participants responded by using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach's α was .79.

Subjective career success. Assessed at Time 2, 2-item were adapted from Abele and Spurk (2009), which are based on the original 5-item career satisfaction scale developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990). This scale evaluated the degree of satisfaction towards a wide array of career success facets, including: “The success I have achieved in my career” and “The progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals”. Participants responded by using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach's α was .88.

Control variables. This study controlled IPros' age, gender and industry at Time 1 because of their possible association with job satisfaction, subjective career success (T2). For example, IPros' age at Time 1 might affect job satisfaction at Time 2. Age at Time 1 was included as a control variable and operationalised using its natural log to account for potential non-linear effects. Gender was dummy-coded, with male coded as 0 and female coded as 1. Industry variable was represented using a set of dummy variables indicating whether respondents worked in pharma/medical devices/life sciences (Dummy 1), finance (Dummy 2), or technology (Dummy 3) and other as the baseline.

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Descriptive Statistic

Table 4.1 presented the descriptive statistics for the key studies variables about their means, standard deviations, and correlations.

4.5.2 Linear Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 1 proposed that IPros' professional identity would be positively associated with job satisfaction (H1a) and subjective career success (H1b). Table 4.2 presented the linear regression analysis results. The results in Model 1.2 show that professional identity was positively associated with job satisfaction ($\beta = .27, p < .01$). Results in Model 2.2 show that professional identity was positively related to subjective career success ($\beta = .24, p < .01$). Thus, Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. JS (T2)	4.12	.53						
2. SCS (T2)	4.12	.70	.52**					
3. PID (T1)	4.08	.79	.34**	.29**				
4. OID (T1)	3.84	.91	.30*	.20**	.23**			
5. Age (T1)	49.43	11.22	.13*	.21**	.09	.09		
6. Gender (T1)	1.23	.42	-.04	-.12*	-.03	-.07	-.04	
7. Industry (T1)	49.87	6.59	-.00	.07	-.02	.15*	.20**	.03

Note(s): PID, professional identity; OID, organisational identity; JS, job satisfaction; SCS, subjective career success; 280, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4.2 Linear Regression Analysis Results

Variables	JS (T2)		SCS (T2)	
	Model 1.1	Model 1.2	Model 2.1	Model 2.2
<i>Control</i>				
Age (T1)	.09	.05	.21**	.18**
Gender (Female = 1, T1)	-.04	-.02	-.12	-.10
Industry (Dummy 1, T1)	-.04	-.02	.07	.08
Industry (Dummy 2, T1)	.09	.10	.14*	.14
Industry (Dummy 3, T1)	.13*	.13	.09	.09
<i>Predictors</i>				
PID (T1)		.27**		.24**
OID (T1)		.24**		.14*
Adjusted R2	.03	.18	.06	.14
ΔR^2	.05	.16	.07	.09
ΔF	2.55*	26.58**	4.31**	14.46**

Note(s): Standardized coefficients were reported. Gender was dummy coded (0 = male, 1 = female); Industry was dummy coded (Dummy 1 = Pharma/Med device/Life science, Dummy 2 = Finance, Dummy 3 = Technology); PID, professional identity; OID, organisational identity; JS, job satisfaction; SCS, subjective career success; N=280, all tests were two-tailed, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that IPros' organisational identity is positively associated with job satisfaction (H2a) and subjective career success (H2b). Results in Model 2.1 show that organisational identity was positively associated with job satisfaction ($\beta = .24, p < .01$). In Model 2.2 shown that organisational identity was positively related to subjective career success ($\beta = .14, p < .05$). Thus, Hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported.

4.5.3 Polynomial Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 3 proposed that IPros job satisfaction (H3a) and subjective career success (3b) would be higher when professional and organisational identity converge at high rather than at low levels. To test Hypothesis 3, this study conducted polynomial regression analysis and surface response analysis. For polynomial regression, this study needed to identify how professional identity and organisational identity were distributed. Figure 4.1 presented the descriptive information for professional identity and organisational identity (in)congruence. It described the participant distribution in the four quadrants. They were including Quadrant 1: balance/low identity (low in both professional identity and organisational identity), Quadrant 3: balance/high identity (high in both professional identity and organisational identity), Quadrant 2: high organisational identity and Quadrant 4: high professional identity. Figure 4.1 presented a two-by-two matrix which juxtaposes the IPros' (in)congruence in identity. By exploring the impact of (in)congruence on IPros' identity, this study focused on job satisfaction, subjective career success and employability which are important factors to evaluate work outcomes of identification (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015; Hall & Chandler, 2005).

As shown in Figure 4.1, this study checked the participants distribution in the four quadrants. This study standardized score for each predictor variable (organisational identity and professional identity) and use half a standard deviation as the benchmarks (Shanock et al., 2010). For example, if the standardized score of professional identity was within half a standard deviation of the standardized organisational identity score (above or below), such

cases fell into balanced identity (Quadrants 1 and 3) or agreement. The results in Table 4.3 revealed that the 37% of respondents had different values of organisational identity and professional identity.

Figure 4.1 Two-by-two matrix juxtaposing the IPros' (in)congruence in identity

Organizational identity	High	2 High organizational identity (low professional identity and high organizational identity)	3 Balanced high identity (high organizational and professional identity)
	Low	1 Balanced low identity (Low organizational and professional identity)	4 High professional identity (low organizational identity and high professional identity)
		Low	High
		Professional identity	

Table 4.3 Frequencies of OID Levels Over, Under and In-agreement with PID Levels

	%	Mean OID (T1)	Mean PID (T1)
High OID low PID	15	4.28	3.23
Low OID and PID	16	2.86	3.08
High OID and PID	47	4.44	4.51
Low OID High PID	22	2.96	4.44

Note: PID, professional identity; OID, organisational identity.

According to the procedure proposed in Shanock et al (2010), this study adopted polynomial regression analysis by following procedures. Research team first used the grand mean centered approach to center the predictors (Edwards, 1994). This study subtracted three (3) from each score because professional identity and organisational identity were measured on 5-point Likert-type scale. Then this study calculated three new variables: (a) the square of the scale-centered professional identity variable (X^2); (b) the cross-product of

the centered professional identity and organisational identity variables (XY); (c) the square of the scale-centered organisational identity variable (Y^2). Lastly, research team based on the following regression (Equation 1) to run polynomial regression analysis. This study did this step by separate regressing the work outcomes variables (job satisfaction and subjective career success) on the predictor variables (professional identity X and organisational identity Y), the professional identity squared (X^2), the product of professional identity and organisational identity (XY), and the organisational identity squared (Y^2).

$$Z = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Y + b_3X^2 + b_4XY + b_5Y^2 + e \quad (\text{Equation 1})$$

Different from the common regression analysis to examine the regression coefficients, the results of the polynomial regression are evaluated with regard to four surface test values: a_1 , a_2 , a_3 and a_4 . Among these four values, a_1 is used to measure overall slope, indicates how changes in predictor variables affect the response, a_2 represents the curvature of the response surface, a_3 assesses the interaction effect between variables, and a_4 also reflect overall curvature characteristics or "peak/valley" behaviour of the surface (Shanock et al., 2010).

In this study, the slope of the perfect congruence (organisational identity = professional identity) as related to work outcomes was given by $a_1 = (b_1 + b_2)$, where b_1 is the unstandardized beta coefficient for the centered professional identity variable and b_2 is the unstandardized beta coefficient for the centered organisational identity variable. Curvature along the line of perfect congruence as related to work outcomes was assessed by calculating $a_2 = (b_3 + b_4 + b_5)$, where b_3 is the unstandardized beta coefficient for the centered professional identity squared, b_4 is the unstandardized beta coefficient for the cross-product of the centered professional identity and centered organisational identity, and b_5 is the beta coefficient for the centered organisational identity squared.

Additionally, this study also analyzed the results of incongruence between professional and organisational identities for readers' interest. The slope of the line of

incongruence as related to work outcomes, indicating the direction of the incongruence (professional identity higher than organisational identity or vice versa), is assessed by calculating $a_3 = (b_1 - b_2)$. The curvature of the line of incongruence as related to work outcomes, indicating the degree of discrepancy between professional identity, organisational identity, and work outcomes, was assessed by calculating $a_4 = (b_3 - b_4 + b_5)$. The results for our data are shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Polynomial Regression Results

	JS (T2)	SCS (T2)
Variables	Model 3.1	Model 3.2
Age (T1)	.00	.01**
Gender (T1)	-.03	-.19*
Industry (Dummy 1 T1)	-.01	.13
Industry (Dummy 2 T1)	.17	.29*
Industry (Dummy 3 T1)	.22*	.18
b_1 PID (T1)	.19**	.16*
b_2 OID (T1)	.24**	.17*
b_3 PID (T1) squared	.05	.08
b_4 PID (T1) * OID (T1)	-.10*	-.09
b_5 OID (T1) squared	.01	.03
Wald χ^2	78.41**	60.63**
Congruence Line:		
Slope a_1	.43**	.33**
Curvature a_2	-.05	.02
Incongruence Line:		
Slope a_3	-.05	-.00
Curvature a_4	.15*	.20*

Notes: Unstandardized regression coefficients were reported; Industry was dummy coded (Dummy 1 = Pharma/Med device/Life science, Dummy 2 = Finance, Dummy 3 = Technology); PID, professional identity; OID, organisational identity; JS, job satisfaction; SCS, subjective career success; N=275, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that IPro job satisfaction and subjective career success would be higher when professional and organisational identity converge at high rather than at low levels. In the Model 3.1 in Table 4.4, a_1 was positive and significant ($a_1 = .43, p < .01$) and a_2 was not significant ($a_2 = -.05, n.s.$), indicating that there was a linear (additive) relationship along the line of perfect congruence which was related to job satisfaction. This indicated that when organisational identity and professional identity were in agreement, job satisfaction increased as both organisational identity and professional identity increased. The response surface analysis allowed us to examine how agreement in the professional identity and organisational identity related to work outcomes.

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 present the 3-D response surface results. In Figure 4.2, the highest level of job satisfaction was at the back corner of the graph where organisational identity and professional identity are both high, and lowest at the front of the graph where organisational identity and professional identity were both low. Figure 4.3 (on the left-hand side) further supported this finding, showing a positive linear slope along the line of congruence ($Y = X$). This indicated that job satisfaction increases as both identities increase in alignment. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a, which predicted that job satisfaction was higher when professional and organisational identities converge at high rather than low levels, was supported.

Figure 4.2 Response surface relating professional identity and organisational identity with job satisfaction

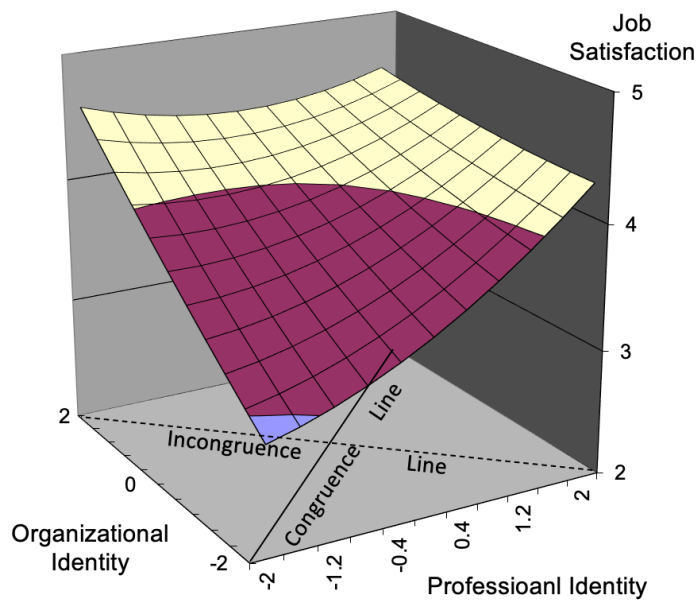
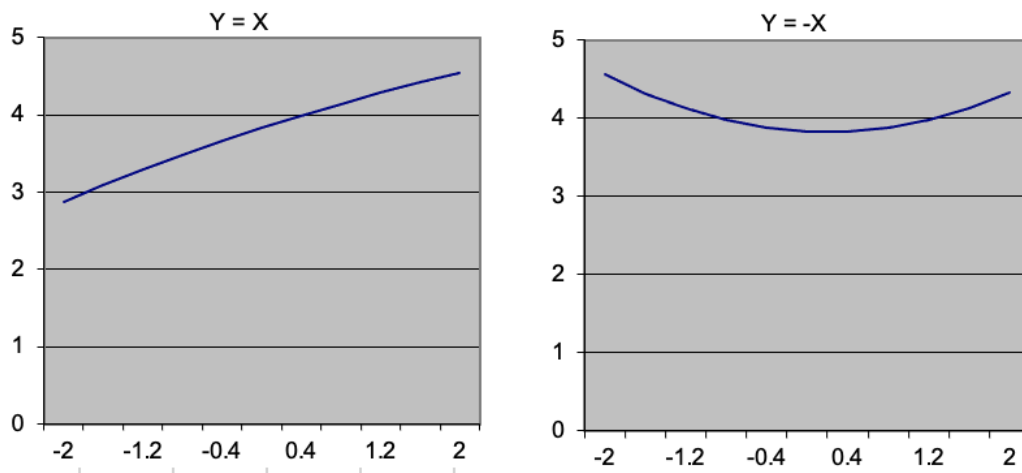


Figure 4.3 Congruence and incongruence between professional identification and organisational identification with job satisfaction



This study then interpreted how the degree of incongruence between organisational identity and professional identity related to the outcome variable relates to job satisfaction. In terms of how the direction of the incongruence was related to the job satisfaction, this study assessed with a_3 , the slope of the $Y = X$ line. The a_3 was negative but not significant ($a_3 = -.05, n.s.$), which indicated that the direction of incongruence did not significantly influence job satisfaction. In other words, whether professional identity is higher than

organisational identity, or vice versa, does not lead to significantly different levels of job satisfaction. However, the curvature along the line of incongruence ($Y = -X$), a_4 was positive and significant ($a_4 = .15, p < .05$). They indicated that job satisfaction is higher at greater levels of incongruence than at low levels of both identities.

In Figure 4.3 (on the right side), this result reflected there is a U-shaped bend in the 3D plot from left to right along the incongruence line. On the left side of incongruence line, the job satisfaction was higher when organisational identity was higher than professional identity. On the right side of the incongruence line, the impact of professional identity on job satisfaction was high, but the organisational identity impact was low. These results indicated that IPros' job satisfaction increases when either professional identity or organisational identity is high, even if the other is low, and is lowest when both identities are low. Overall, these results suggest that having a strong identity in at least one domain (professional or organisational) is associated with higher job satisfaction, whereas low identity in both domains is linked to lower job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3b suggested that subjective career success is higher when professional and organisational identity converge at high rather than at low levels. As shown in Model 3.2 in Table 4.1, the congruence line a_1 was positive and significant ($a_1 = .33, p < .01$) and a_2 was not significant ($a_2 = .02, n.s.$), indicating that the high/high alignment condition was associated with higher subjective career success than the low/low alignment condition in a linear way. Figures 4.3 and 4.4 present the 3D response surface results. In the Figure 4.3, this study found that the highest level of subjective career success was at the back corner of the graph where organisational identity and professional identity were both high, and lowest at the front of the graph where organisational identity and professional identity were both low. Figure 4.4 (on the left-hand side) confirmed our result, there was a linear slope was revealed along the line of congruence. Hypothesis 3b was supported that subjective career

success was higher when professional and organisational identity converge at high rather than at low levels.

This study also found that the slope of the incongruence line was negative but not significant ($a_3 = -.00$, *n.s.*), and the curvature of the incongruence line was positive and significant ($a_4 = .20$, $p < .05$). The results indicated that there was no difference for subjective career success when professional identity was higher than organisational identity or vice versa. In Figure 4.4 (on the right side), this result reflected there was a U-shaped bend in the three-dimensional plot from left to right along the incongruence line. On the left side of incongruence line, the subjective career success was higher when organisational identity was higher than professional identity. On the right side of the incongruence line, the impact of professional identity on subjective career success was high, but the organisational identity impact was low. These results indicated that IPros' subjective career success was higher when IPros had either high professional or organisational identity than having both low identities.

Figure 4.4 Response surface relating professional identity and organisational identity with subjective career success

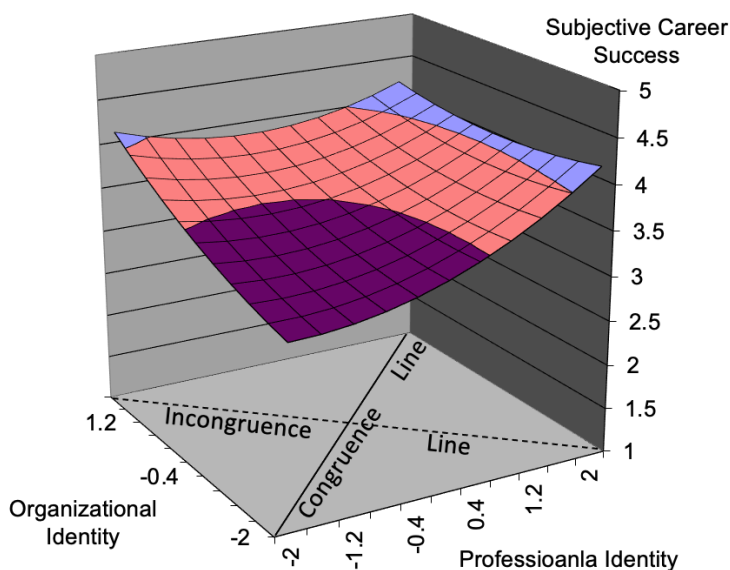
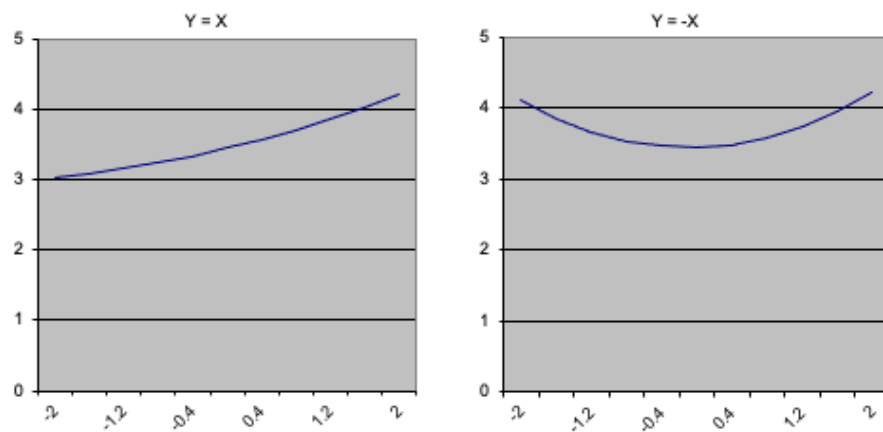


Figure 4.5 Congruence and incongruence between professional identification and organisational identification with subjective career success



4.6 Discussion

This study set out to explore how IPros' professional and organisational identities influence their work outcomes in the context of non-traditional work arrangements. To answer this research question, this study drew on social identity theory and adopted a time lagged design to explore the effects of IPros' dual identities on job satisfaction and subjective career success. The results indicated that both of the IPros' professional identity and organisational identity had a positive impact on their job satisfaction and subjective career success. Additionally, both job satisfaction and subjective career success was higher when professional and organisational identity converge at high rather than at low levels. This study enhances our understanding of IPros by highlighting the impact of professional and organisational identity alignment on career outcomes. This complementary pattern is particularly noteworthy, as prior research on identity tensions has largely focused on conflict, strain, or trade-offs between professional and organisational identities (e.g., Ostermeier et al., 2023). In contrast, the present findings reveal that identity tensions in IPros' work are complementary under certain conditions and emphasise the significance of identity congruence in fostering positive career experiences. Thus, this study has theoretical, practical implications and provides significant implications for future research on IPros identities.

4.6.1 Theoretical Implications

First, it contributes to the emerging literature on IPros by explicitly theorizing and empirically examining the dual identities that characterize this growing workforce segment. Although prior research has explored IPros' motivation, wellbeing, performance, and career development (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009; Burke, 2019; Kost et al., 2020), little is known about how their professional and organisational identities shape their work and career outcomes. By exploring identity paradox, this study extends existing literature by showing that identity dynamics among IPros involve alignment and reinforcement. Importantly, existing literature on identity tensions often emphasises conflict between professional and organisational logics (Ostermeier et al., 2023). In contrast, our findings demonstrate that, for IPros, these identities can reinforce each other when both are strongly developed. This finding is novel in that it challenges the prevailing assumption that multiple identities necessarily create tension or trade-offs, and instead highlights the conditions under which identity congruence produces positive outcomes. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that IPros experience more favourable career outcomes, specifically higher job satisfaction and subjective career success when professional and organisational identities converge at high levels. Thereby this study provides new insights into how dual identities shape IPros' careers by demonstrating that the simultaneous development of both professional and organisational identities is important for achieving positive work outcomes. Specifically, when these identities converge at high levels, they reinforce rather than compete with each other, suggesting that the relationship is less about trade-offs and more about complementary effects.

Second, this study contributes to the HRM literature by advancing our understanding of identity management among IPros, offering insights for organisations that rely on these professionals. By linking identity dynamics to HRM practices, this study also responds to calls in the literature to better understand how non-traditional workers can be effectively supported within organisational contexts (D'Amours & Legault, 2013; Lo Presti et al.,

2018). Specifically, this research contributes to extending current HRM theories by integrating concepts from social identity theory to address gaps in understanding the role of identities, professional and organisational identities, in influencing individual work outcomes. This study provides a deeper look into how IPros manage their professional and organisational identities. These individuals often operate outside traditional work environments, meaning they have to balance their self-perception as professionals while aligning with the expectations of client organisations. The rise of non-traditional work arrangements and flexible employment models challenges traditional HRM paradigms (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; McKeown & Cochrane, 2017; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Inclusive HRM practices are better able to meet the expectations and needs of both employers and IPros (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). While much of HRM research centres on traditional employees, this study extends HRM theory to IPros by exploring how dual identities shape their work outcomes. Specifically, the findings show that the alignment of professional and organisational identities plays a critical role in enhancing IPros' job satisfaction and subjective career success, thereby highlighting the importance of considering identity-based mechanisms in managing non-traditional workers.

Third, this study extends the current social identity theory from focus on traditional work arrangement to non-traditional work arrangement. Previous research on social identity theory focused on exploring traditional employee-employer relationships (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Based on this context, prior research has explored how organisational employees establish a sense of organisational identity and belonging (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Ostermeier et al., 2023), as well as how identity recognition influences performance outcomes (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2018; Voss et al., 2006). However, as non-traditional work arrangements become increasingly common with the rise of the gig economy and remote work trends (Friedman, 2014; Kuhn, 2016), it remains unclear how these identity processes operate among workers such as IPros, who engage with multiple

organisations Extending social identity theory to these contexts ensures that researchers and HR practitioners understand how IPros build connections with client organisations or professional groups, even without being full-time employees. The present findings provide new insights by showing that identity alignment remains possible even in the absence of formal organisational membership, and that such alignment can produce positive work and career outcomes. Thus, this study breaks away from the framework of traditional work relationships and applies social identity theory to IPros to explore their identity paradox. The findings demonstrate that the convergence of professional identity and organisational identity at high levels leads to enhanced job satisfaction and subjective career success. This finding supports social identity theory, which suggests that alignment in identity promotes positive psychological and career-related outcomes (Greco & Kraimer, 2020). Therefore, this study contributes to extend the current social identity theory research from focus on traditional work arrangement to non-traditional work arrangement.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature by developing a two-by-two identity matrix that conceptualises four distinct identity profiles among IPros based on the degree of professional and organisational identity alignment. Specifically, the findings identify: 1) balanced high identity, where both professional and organisational identities are strongly developed; 2) balanced low identity, where both identities remain weak; 3) high professional identity, characterised by strong professional identity but weaker organisational attachment; and 4) high organisational identity, characterised by stronger identity with client organisations than with professional identity. This framework extends existing identity research by explaining that identity dynamics among IPros are not simply characterised by conflict or compatibility, but may exist in multiple configurations with different implications for work and career outcomes. In particular, the balanced high identity profile produces the most favourable outcomes, suggesting that identity congruence contributes to positive work outcomes rather than being a source of tension.

4.6.2 Practical Implications

First, this study, highlighted the importance of identity management for IPros to sustain positive work-related and career outcomes, and provided important practical implications for IPros themselves. The findings suggested that IPros experience higher job satisfaction and subjective career success when they maintain a strong professional identity while simultaneously developing a strong organisational identity. This finding emphasised the importance of proactively managing dual identities, suggesting that intentional identity work allows individuals to reconcile competing professional and organisational demands and thereby have positive work-related and career outcomes (Ashforth et al., 2014; Pratt et al., 2006). IPros can enhance their work experiences by actively articulating their professional expertise, values, and boundaries, while also seeking to understand and align with client organisations' goals, norms, and expectations. Prior research suggested that viewing temporary organisational affiliation as a strategic resource rather than as a threat to independence can facilitate collaboration, learning, and access to future work opportunities (Barley & Kunda, 2006; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). Developing skills in boundary management, role negotiation, and communication can help IPros reduce identity tension and more effectively integrate professional and organisational identities across projects (Kreiner et al., 2006).

Second, addressing this identity paradox can inform HRM practices to better integrate IPros, enhance their wellbeing, and align their contributions with organisational goals. Organisations that employ IPros should design inclusive human resource management policies tailored to IPros to foster alignment between professional and organisational identities. Firstly, organisations can help IPros understand how their professional expertise aligns with organisational goals. For example, provide training include information about organisational values, culture, and how they complement the profession-specific knowledge that IPros bring. A stronger alignment between professional and organisational identities

leads to greater job satisfaction, stronger team cohesion, and improved performance (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). So by providing supports to both regular employees and IPros to facilitate collaboration and IPros' identity convergence, which improves engagement and alignment with the project objectives. Providing team-building activities for IPros as needed to integrate their professional self-concept with the organisational identity. This alignment reduces the identity dissonance that can arise when professionals work across multiple temporary projects.

Additionally, organisations should provide support for IPros to help them accept both professional and organisational identities through effective identity management. This aligns with the findings of Kreiner et al (2006), who noted that identity integration contributes to employee wellbeing and organisational commitment. Organisations should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of IPros while allowing flexibility to accommodate their professional standards and values. Clear expectations reduce identity conflict and is crucial for positive outcomes (Kreiner et al., 2006; Ostermeier et al., 2023b). A supportive and inclusive culture can help IPros feel a sense of belonging without compromising their professional autonomy (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Managers can achieve this by recognizing and valuing the unique contributions of IPros.

Furthermore, the four identity profiles identified in this study also provide practical insights for organisations and IPros regarding identity management strategies. For example, IPros with a high professional identity but weak organisational identity may require greater organisational inclusion and communication support to strengthen project engagement and belonging. In contrast, IPros with high organisational identity but weaker professional identity may benefit from opportunities to reinforce their professional autonomy and expertise development. Organisations should therefore recognise that IPros may experience different forms of identity alignment and design flexible HRM practices that support both professional independence and organisational integration.

4.6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the valuable insights, this study has a few limitations. First, this study focuses on IPros who are different from other non-traditional workers, such as gig workers or freelancers in less knowledge-intensive roles. This will lead to the generalisability issue. Unlike gig workers such as Uber drivers who work on short-term contracts and assignments (Duggan et al., 2020), IPros' work is about completing well-defined (often unique) projects for clients usually running over weeks/months (Bryant & McKeown, 2016). IPros are highly educated and skilled who deliver professional services to engage their clients under a commercial contract (McKeown, 2015). The participants in this study include project managers, consultants, engineers, analysts, counsellors and coaches etc. These characteristics of IPros distinguish them from other non-traditional work arrangements. Generally, their skills and professional knowledge determine their employability and they constantly update their skills to meet the needs of client organisations through continuous learning (Ghosh, McDonnell, et al., 2024; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). Other non-traditional work arrangements, such as the well-known temporary workers, seasonal workers, and contract workers, are mostly based on physical labor, providing services to customers for short-term or seasonal needs (Ainsworth & Purss, 2009; Aronsson, 1999; Burgess & Connell, 2006). Therefore, this study focuses on IPros may not be applicable to other non-traditional workers. Future research could use other types of non-traditional workers as samples, such as gig workers or contingent workers, to explore whether they face identity paradox in their work. And future research needs to explore the differences in identity recognition among various non-traditional workers and their impact on work outcomes.

Second, although adapting a time lagged design, the study did not fully capture long-term changes in identity and their impact on career outcomes. This is because the time span of the study is one year and experienced the Covid-19 pandemic, special major events may

have impact on the research results (Adisa et al., 2022). Moreover, IPros typically provides long-term services to client organisations based on projects and contracts (Burke et al., 2020; Burke & Cowling, 2020). Our research interval was only one year, and it cannot comprehensively examine whether there will be differences in the services provided by IPros in different companies or during different project service periods. Therefore, we suggest that future research can be conducted over a two-year or even longer time span to provide a comprehensive explanation of the results.

Third, the variations in company or cultural contexts might influence the interaction of identities and work outcomes. All the data used in this study were collected in single country (Ireland). There might be different results in other cultural backgrounds, such as Asian countries or the United States. This study suggest that future research should explore the role of cultural dimensions, such as collectivism or individualism, in shaping professional and organisational identity. Also future research should consider other potential mediators, such as social capital or emotional intelligence, should be studied in connection with career outcomes.

Another limitation of this study is that the detailed information regarding participants' legal or contractual employment arrangements is not collected, such as whether respondents worked directly with client organisations or through intermediaries (e.g., agencies or consulting firms). Thus, this study was unable to examine how different contractual structures may influence IPros' experiences of shaping identities and work outcomes. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating more detailed employment arrangement variables or adopting qualitative and mixed-method approaches to explore how different contractual relationships shape the work and career experiences of IPros.

Finally, this study focuses on a relatively narrow set of outcomes, including job satisfaction and subjective career success. While these outcomes are important indicators of

IPros' work and career experiences, they do not capture the full range of potential consequences associated with identity alignment. It is possible that the positive effects of identity congruence observed in this study may not extend to other relevant outcomes, such as stress, wellbeing, or task performance. For example, high levels of identity alignment may also increase role expectations or psychological demands, potentially leading to unexpected negative effects. Therefore, future research should examine a broader range of outcomes to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how identity alignment influences IPros' work and career experiences.

4.7 Conclusion

This study advances the IPros and HRM literature by examining how IPros' professional and organisational identities shape their work outcomes. Although IPros represent a growing and strategically significant workforce, existing research has largely focused on traditional employees and provided limited insight into identity research in non-traditional work arrangements. In particular, little is known about how IPros simultaneously identify with their profession and with client organisations, or how the interaction of these identities influences their work outcomes. Drawing on social identity theory, this time lagged study adopted polynomial regression and response surface analysis to demonstrate that convergence between professional and organisational identities at high levels is associated with higher job satisfaction and subjective career success. Overall, this study contributes to IPros and HRM research by highlighting that identities are a key mechanism shaping IPros' work outcomes. As organisations increasingly employ non-standard employees, understanding how identity processes operate beyond traditional employment relationships is important for both theory development and effective management practice.

Chapter 5 Study 3 Sustainable Careers of Independent Professionals: The Role of Inclusive HRM and Client Commitment in Career Development

5.1 Abstract

Independent professionals (IPros) are an increasingly important part of contemporary labour markets, yet they increasingly bring significant challenges for organisations in terms of how to effectively manage, support, and engage workers who operate outside standard employment relationships. IPros are typically excluded from formal HRM systems and must independently manage their career development, skill renewal, and labour market transitions. The research on how IPros perceive organisational support in HRM area is still limited. Therefore, this study draws on an inclusive HRM perspective and adopts the sustainable career framework to explore the impact of inclusive HRM practices and client commitment in shaping the sustainable career outcomes of IPros. Specifically, the aim of this study is to examine how inclusive HRM practices influence IPros' annual earning, subjective career success and burnout as well as the mediating role of client commitment. A cross-sectional quantitative study was employed to investigate the hypotheses (N=681). The results revealed that inclusive HRM has a significant positive impact on IPros' sustainable career outcomes via the mediating impact of client commitment. This study makes three main contributions. First, it extends inclusive HRM research to non-standard work arrangements by providing quantitative empirical evidence on its impact on career outcomes, addressing the current dominance of conceptual and qualitative studies in this area. Second, it advances IPros research by demonstrating that sustainable career outcomes are not solely shaped by individuals but are also significantly influenced by organisational practices and relational mechanisms, particularly client commitment. Third, it contributes to the sustainable career literature by applying and validating the productive, happy, and

healthy dimensions in a non-traditional work context. Highlighting that inclusive HRM practices are important for supporting IPros' sustainable career outcomes across these three dimensions. Overall, the findings provide important theoretical and practical implications and valuable directions for future research on the management and career development of IPros.

5.2 Introduction

Contemporary labour markets are characterised by increasing flexibility, fragmentation, and a growing reliance on non-standard forms of work. In recent years, an increasing number of organisations have chosen to hire independent professionals (IPros) to supplement their demand for high skilled labour due to changes in the structure of the labour market (Burke & Cowling, 2020; van den Groenendaal, Freese, Rob F. Poell, 2023). Compared to gig workers or temporary workers, the knowledge intensive experts known as IPros have grown rapidly in the labour market (Duggan et al., 2020). However, despite the fact that IPros play an increasingly important role in organisational functioning and knowledge creation, they typically remain excluded from formal human resource management (HRM) systems. This is because IPros are neither traditional employees nor employers, they typically lack access to formal HRM systems, placing greater responsibility on individuals to manage employability, career continuity, and wellbeing across career transitions (Burke & Cowling, 2020; Kost et al., 2020).

These structural changes have intensified challenges for HRM, particularly regarding how organisations support the wellbeing, development, and long-term career sustainability of individuals who operate outside traditional employment relationships (De Vos & Heijden, 2017; McDonald & Hite, 2018; Mcwhirter & Mcwha-hermann, 2021). IPros are also called freelancers or independent contractors. They are neither traditional employees nor employers (Burke et al., 2020; Burke & Cowling, 2020). Generally, IPros operate outside traditional organisational frameworks, their career sustainability is increasingly influenced by external

resources, personal skills, and the quality of professional relationships (Ghosh, McDonnell et al., 2024; Syrett, 2016). IPros typically provides professional skills or services to client organisations based on projects or contracts (Ashford, George, 2007; Burke & Cowling, 2020).

From the inclusive HRM perspective, this exclusion represents a critical challenge. Inclusive HRM emphasises fairness, respect, and investment in the sustainable employability of workers who are temporarily or indirectly connected to organisations (Borghouts-van de Pas & Freese, 2017; Shore et al., 2018). However, the current research on inclusive HRM is mostly widely discussed in the context of traditional employment and managing diversity, such as employment security for disabled people (Meacham et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017), workforce diversity (Buengeler et al., 2018; Shore et al., 2018), and older employees (Boehm et al., 2014; Midtsundstad, 2011). However, it's relevance for IPros who often navigate less structured work environments is underexplored (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009). IPros typically face unique challenges, including maintaining client relationships and ensuring financial stability (McKeown & Leighton, 2016; Syrett, 2016b). Van Den Groenendaal et al. (2023) have suggested incorporating IPros into the scope of inclusive HRM practices. They also proposed that apply inclusive HRM practices to high-skilled freelancers can create supportive external conditions to promote trust, access to opportunities, and meaningful engagement with clients, thereby enhancing their professional experiences and career sustainability. The empirical research exploring how inclusive HRM practices are perceived by IPros and how such practices influence their career outcomes remains limited.

To address this research gap, the present study draws on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) to examine how IPros perceived inclusive HRM practices influence their sustainable career outcomes. Management scholars have widely adopted this perspective to explain work relationships, showing that when organisations

conduct supportive and fair practices, workers are more likely to develop trust, commitment, and positive work-related attitudes and behaviours (Cook et al., 2013; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In the context of independent work, inclusive HRM practices such as access to development opportunities, inclusive networking, and work–life balance support and encourage IPros to develop stronger relational bonds with clients. In this study, these relational bonds are captured by client commitment, i.e. the extent to which IPros are committed to their client organisations. IPros' client commitment indicates IPros' trust, mutual obligation, and dedication with their client organisations. Client commitment is particularly important for IPros because client relationships constitute their primary source of work continuity and financial income. Strong client commitment can provide IPros with access to repeat contracts, stable income streams, and meaningful work, thereby supporting both objective and subjective aspects of career sustainability. From a social exchange perspective, inclusive HRM practices can be expected to strengthen client commitment by developing fairness, recognition, and long-term partnership, which in turn promote work outcomes.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how inclusive HRM practices influence the sustainable career outcomes of IPros and to investigate the mediating role of client commitment in these relationships. To test IPros' sustainable career outcomes, this study also adopts the sustainable career framework as the basis for the advanced research model. In a recent conceptual review, De Vos et al (2020) developed a model of sustainable career development and emphasised three important indicators for measuring sustainable career development: 1) productive, which includes performance, organisational citizenship behaviour and employability; 2) happy, which includes satisfaction and career success; 3) healthy, which includes wellbeing, stress and physical health. Drawing on this framework, the present study focuses on three key outcomes that capture these dimensions of sustainable careers among IPros: annual earnings as an indicator of the productive dimension, subjective career success as an indicator of the happy dimension, and burnout as an indicator of the

healthy dimension. Using the survey data collected from 681 IPros based in Ireland in 2023, this study addresses the following research question: How do inclusive HRM practices influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes? The findings reveal the importance of inclusive HRM practices on IPros' sustainable career outcomes.

This study first contributes to HRM literature by expanding its focus beyond standard employment relationships to non-traditional workers. Most HRM literature focuses on employees within organisations, but this study provides empirical evidence for the relationship between inclusive HRM practices and IPros sustainable career outcomes (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; McKeown & Pichault, 2021; Van den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Secondly, this study contributes to the IPros literature by shifting the focus from individual-level career self-management to the role of organisational and relational resources in shaping career outcomes. Third, this study contributes to sustainable career research by extending its application to non-standard work arrangements. Despite existing sustainable career research has mainly focused on employees embedded within organisations and internal labour markets (De Vos et al., 2020; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). The findings of this study provide quantitatively evidence that the core indicators of the sustainable career framework are also valuable for exploring IPros who are outside traditional employment contexts.

5.3 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

5.3.1 Research Context: IPros and Inclusive HRM

The nature of work and employment relationships has changed over the last decades in many countries worldwide (Barley et al., 2017). The workforce has shifted towards independent work, with an increasing number of professionals choosing freelancing, consulting, and self-employment over traditional full-time jobs (Kost et al., 2020). This shift towards independent work is driven by various factors, including technological advancements, economic shifts, and evolving work preferences that prioritize flexibility and

autonomy (Pichault & McKeown, 2019; van den Born & van Witteloostuijn, 2013b). These professionals, often referred to as IPros who operate without a long-term employment contract and rely on project-based engagements with multiple clients (Bryant & McKeown, 2016). IPros play an increasingly significant role in today's labour market due to the rise of the gig economy, remote work, and knowledge-based industries (Vaiman et al., 2021). The rise of IPros such as freelancers, consultants, and self-employed specialists is growing in number across various industries (Barley & Kunda, 2006; Kitching & Smallbone, 2012). Unlike traditional employees, IPros operate outside the boundaries of formal organisations, managing their careers autonomously while navigating unpredictable work environments (McKeown, 2015; Sulbout & Pichault, 2023). This is because IPros do not have permanent contracts with a single employer and often operate autonomously, selling their skills and expertise to multiple clients (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; McKeown & Pichault, 2021).

Furthermore, unlike employees in traditional organisations who benefit from structured career development programs, IPros must develop their careers independently (Ghosh, McDonnell, et al., 2024; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). IPros often rely on external stakeholders such as clients, professional networks, and HRM initiatives targeted at independent workers to sustain their careers (Ghosh, McDonnell, et al., 2024; Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). The absence of formal organisational structures support raises concerns about long-term employability, work stability, burnout, and career success (Erdogan et al., 2004; Jawahar et al., 2007; Van Den Broeck et al., 2014). Therefore, IPros generally face more challenges in career development due to the lack of formal HRM support, job security, and career development opportunities (Guest, 2017).

Moreover, the increasing prevalence of non-standard work arrangements also challenged traditional assumptions in HRM, which have historically centred on employees within organisational boundaries. IPros represent a growing segment of highly skilled workers who contribute critical expertise to organisations while remaining formally external

to them. Despite their strategic importance, IPros are typically excluded from formal HRM systems, receiving limited access to training, career development, and wellbeing support (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009; Kost et al., 2020).

Inclusive HRM provides a promising framework for addressing this tension. It is grounded in the broader diversity, equity, and inclusion (EDI) literature, which emerged in response to persistent inequalities and exclusionary practices within organisations, and seeks to create fair, supportive, and accessible work environments for all employees. EDI research primarily focused on workforce diversity and equal opportunity, examining how demographic differences such as gender, race, age, and disability affect access to employment, career advancement, and organisational outcomes (Chan & Hutchings, 2025; Ely & Thomas, 2001). However, with the development of EDI research, it further highlighted that without inclusive practices, diverse workers may remain marginalised and unable to fully contribute (Pless & Maak, 2004; Shore & Chung, 2022). More recent EDI scholarship has shifted from an emphasis on representation toward inclusion, emphasizing the extent to which individuals feel respected, valued, and able to participate fully in organisational life (Shore et al., 2011). These research highlight that inclusive practices such as equal access to development, transparent communication, and respectful treatment can develop trust, belonging, and positive work outcomes across diverse worker groups (Shore et al., 2011, 2018). Inclusion research emphasises that organisational systems, practices, and leadership behaviours play an important role in creating fair and supportive environments for diverse workers (Boekhorst, 2015; Randel et al., 2018). Empirical studies show that inclusive practices such as equitable access to development opportunities, transparent decision-making, and voice mechanisms are associated with higher commitment, wellbeing, and performance (Nishii, 2013; Roberson, 2006).

Building on these insights, HRM scholars have extended EDI principles into the design and implementation of HR practices, giving rise to the concept of inclusive HRM.

Inclusive HRM emphasises fairness, respect, and access to developmental opportunities for diverse workers, including those who are temporarily, indirectly, or atypically connected to organisations (Boehm et al., 2014; Borghouts-van de Pas & Freese, 2017; Shore et al., 2018). Rather than focusing on standard employees, inclusive HRM emphasises equal access to training, career development, information, and wellbeing support across diverse employment relationships (Van den Groenendaal et al., 2023). More recent work has argued that inclusion should not be limited to standard employees but should encompass a wider range of employment relationships present in contemporary labour markets (Shore et al., 2018; Van den Groenendaal et al., 2023).

Applying inclusive HRM to IPros means recognising their contributions, providing access to relevant developmental resources, and developing fair and respectful working relationships despite their non-employee status. Recent conceptual and qualitative research suggests that inclusive HRM practices (e.g., inclusive onboarding, access to development opportunities, information sharing, and respectful treatment) can help organisations better integrate IPros and support their careers (Van den Groenendaal et al., 2023). However, quantitative evidence on how these practices influence IPros' career outcomes remains limited. Addressing this gap is important for IPros, whose career sustainability depends on access to developmental and relational resources. By providing quantitative insights into these relationships, this study extends the existing literature and strengthens our understanding of inclusive HRM in non-traditional employment contexts. It is also important for organisations that increasingly rely on IPros' expertise yet face challenges in managing and supporting them.

5.3.2 Inclusive HRM and Sustainable Career Outcomes

Inclusive HRM refers to HR policies and practices that promote fairness, diversity, and equal access to career development resources (Shore et al., 2018). It ensures that all workers who regardless of their employment status (full-time, part-time, or freelance) can

receive fair treatment, opportunities for growth, and workplace support (Baker & Kelan, 2018; Bamber et al., 2017). This study draws on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) to examine how IPros perceived inclusive HRM practices influence their sustainable career outcomes. Social exchange theory emphasises the reciprocal nature of relationships between two parties, in which the provision of resources, support, or favourable treatment by one party creates an obligation for the other party to respond in kind (Blau, 1964). From a social exchange theory perspective, inclusive HRM practices signal organisational investment, recognition, and fairness, which encourage workers to reciprocate through positive attitudes, stronger commitment, and sustained work engagement (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

The research shows that employees who receive equal opportunities in professional development report higher career satisfaction and job performance (Nishii, 2013). For freelancers and IPros, fair client relationships and access to networking or upskilling programs enhance career sustainability (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). In addition, inclusive HRM practices can influence IPros' earnings by enhancing access to high-quality work opportunities and strengthening their position within client organisations. When IPros perceive fair treatment, transparent communication, and access to development resources, they are more likely to build trust and reputation with clients, which can lead to repeat contracts, higher-value projects, and more stable income streams (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). From a social exchange perspective, these practices signal long-term investment, encouraging IPros to reciprocate with greater effort and engagement, which in turn enhances their economic outcomes (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Moreover, career sustainability is not just about long-term employability but also about maintaining mental and emotional wellbeing (De Vos et al., 2020). Inclusive HRM practices, such as supportive client relationships and fair treatment, reduce stress and job insecurity among freelancers (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Research indicates that a lack of inclusive HRM can

increase role ambiguity, leading to burnout among independent workers (Kroon & Paauwe, 2014).

Furthermore, inclusive HRM practices are expected to reduce burnout by mitigating key stressors associated with independent work (Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičienė, 2019). In particular, transparent expectations, fair workload allocation, and access to support resources can reduce uncertainty, role ambiguity, and perceived insecurity (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Drawing on social exchange theory, when IPros perceive that client organisations provide fair and supportive working conditions (Blau, 1964), they are less likely to experience emotional exhaustion and stress, as the relationship is perceived as balanced and mutually beneficial.

While existing research highlights its benefits for traditional employees (Chambel et al., 2015; Kloutsiniotis et al., 2022), there is an increasing need to extend HRM frameworks to IPros (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Recent studies have explored the career sustainability of solo-employed workers (van den Groenendaal et al., 2022) and inclusive HRM on freelancers (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). However, empirical evidence on the outcomes of inclusive HRM for IPros remains limited. To examine how inclusive HRM practices influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes, this study draws on the sustainable career framework (De Vos et al., 2020), which provides a structured lens for identifying and assessing key outcomes of interest. Specifically, the framework helps focus the analysis on critical dimensions of sustainable careers, enabling a more systematic evaluation of how inclusive HRM practices relate to IPros' career sustainability. De Vos et al (2020) developed a model of sustainable career development and emphasised three important indicators for measuring sustainable career development: 1) productive, which includes performance, organisational citizenship behaviour and employability; 2) happy, which includes satisfaction and career success; 3) healthy, which includes wellbeing, stress and physical health. Drawing on this framework, the present study explored three key factors to measure

IPros' sustainable career outcomes, including 1) annual earning representing the productive indicator; 2) job satisfaction, representing the happy indicator; and 3) burnout, representing the health indicator. Therefore, based on existing literature and research, our first hypothesis is:

H1: Inclusive HRM is positively associated with IPros' annual earning (H1a) and subjective career success (H1b); and negatively associated with IPros' burnout (H1c).

5.3.3 Inclusive HRM and Client Commitment

To explore why and how inclusive HRM practices shape and enhance IPros' sustainable careers, this study draws upon social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) as a relational mechanism linking inclusive HRM practices to career outcomes. While inclusive HRM can directly influence career outcomes, its effects may also operate indirectly by shaping the quality of relationships between IPros and client organisations. Social exchange theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how relationships develop and are maintained through reciprocal exchanges of resources over time. Social exchange theory was proposed by Blau (1964) and emphasises that social relationships evolve based on interactions that generate obligations, trust, and mutual commitment. When one party provides valued resources such as support, recognition, or fair treatment, the receiving party feels a sense of obligation to reciprocate, thereby strengthening the relationship.

In this study, commitment is conceptualised in line with established commitment literature as a psychological bond reflecting an individual's attachment and dedication to a specific target (Klein et al., 2012; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Importantly, commitment is increasingly understood as a target-specific construct, which may be directed towards different foci such as organisations, professions, or clients (van Rossenberg et al., 2018). Applied to the context of independent work, this study uses social exchange theory to explain

how inclusive HRM practices applied by client organisations make IPros feel trust and fair, despite the absence of a formal employment relationship. In the context of independent work, inclusive HRM practices may strengthen relational bonds between IPros and client organisations by developing long-term support and recognition. These relational bonds are conceptualised in this study as client commitment, IPros client commitment refers to IPros experience trust, dedication, and mutual obligation in their relationships with clients. Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2006) proposed that commitment can take different forms or bases (e.g., emotions, persistence, norms) and be targeted towards different goals, such as organisations, professions, unions, and superiors. Client commitment is built on trust, reliability, and long-term engagement (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999).

Client commitment is conceptualised as a form of target-specific commitment directed towards the client organisation, reflecting IPros' sense of attachment, dedication, and willingness to maintain a relationship with a particular client. This conceptualisation aligns with Klein et al.'s (2012) view of commitment, while extending it to a non-traditional employment context. Unlike traditional organisational commitment, which assumes stable employment relationships (Meyer & Allen, 1991), client commitment captures a more flexible and relational form of attachment that emerges within temporary, project-based, and contract-driven work arrangements (Coyle-Shapiro & Morrow, 2006). This distinction is particularly important for IPros, whose work is characterised by boundary-spanning roles and repeated engagements with multiple client organisations.

Prior research highlights that strong client relationships are essential for IPros, as they provide access to repeat contracts, stable income, and professional growth opportunities (McKeown & Leighton, 2016; Syrett, 2016). Inclusive HRM policies such as fair payment structures and professional development opportunities to help reduce uncertainty for freelancers and enhance their commitment to clients (Griep et al., 2025). Breslin and Wood (2016) argued that freelancers who receive mentorship and networking opportunities build

stronger, lasting client relationships. Relevant research has also shown that freelancers who experience fair and respectful treatment from clients are more likely to invest in long-term relationships (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Furthermore, transparent HRM policies reduce transaction costs and enhance trust, leading to stronger commitment (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020). Therefore, this study assumes that when IPros perceive HRM practices as inclusive, such as transparent communication, fair payment arrangements, access to development opportunities, and respectful treatment, they are likely to interpret these practices as long-term support and recognition. In accordance with a social exchange theory logic, such perceptions encourage IPros to reciprocate by strengthening their relational ties with clients. Accordingly, our second hypothesis is:

H2: Inclusive HRM is positively associated with IPros' client commitment.

5.3.4 Client Commitment and Sustainable Career Outcomes

A sustainable career often depends on strong professional networks and repeat client relationships (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Inclusive HRM practices encourage collaboration, transparency, and long-term partnerships, which benefit both organisations and freelancers (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Studies suggested that freelancers with strong client commitment experience higher career stability and wellbeing (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020). For example, research by Connelly and Gallagher (2004) found that independent contractors with long-term client relationships reported greater career security and work satisfaction. Similar results were also found by Barley and Kunda (2006) whereby tech freelancers who establish multi-year contracts with corporate clients enjoy higher career stability than those who rely on short-term gigs. Moreover, Burtch et al. (2018) found that freelancers on Upwork with high client ratings secured 50% more projects and higher earnings than those without repeat clients. This result confirmed that IPros with long-term corporate clients earn more stable annual incomes compared to those who only rely on short-term task (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020).

In a similar way, research confirmed that building strong client commitment can promote career success and enhance wellbeing. For example, Kunda et al. (2002) found that freelancers with strong client relationships reported higher career satisfaction and skill development opportunities. Independent consultants who secure retainer contracts with organisations experience higher career satisfaction than those who constantly chase new projects (Ashford et al., 2007). Tims et al. (2013) also found that job crafting such as maintaining strong client relationships buffers against burnout. While past research of career sustainability focused on individual competencies, labour market conditions, and career adaptability (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; Hall, 2002), this study emphasises the role of client commitment as a critical determinant of career sustainability, especially for IPros. Therefore, based on existing literature and research, our third hypothesis is:

H3: Client commitment is positively associated with IPros' annual earning (H3a), subjective career success (H3b); and negatively associated with IPros' burnout (H3c).

While prior research has identified a range of mediating mechanisms linking HRM practices to employee outcomes, such as employee resilience (Lu et al., 2023), person-organisation and person-job fit (Boon et al., 2011) and employee engagement (Alfes et al., 2013), these mechanisms are largely focused on traditional employment contexts rather than inclusive HRM. In the context of IPros, mediating mechanisms remain underexplored due to the absence of formal organizational membership. Given the project-based and exchange-driven nature of IPros' work, this study argues that client commitment represents a more contextually appropriate and central mediating mechanism. Specifically, client commitment captures the quality of ongoing exchange relationships between IPros and client organisations, which are critical for securing repeat contracts, stable income, and professional opportunities.

According to social exchange theory, inclusive HRM practices are expected to influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes indirectly by strengthening relational exchanges with client organisations. For IPros, client commitment represents a critical relational resource, as sustained client relationships provide continuity of work, opportunities for professional development, and psychological security in the absence of formal employment arrangements (McKeown & Leighton, 2016; Syrett, 2016). Client commitment is expected to translate inclusive HRM practices into significant sustainable career outcomes. Consistent with the target-specific commitment perspective (van Rossenberg et al., 2018), client commitment functions as the primary mediating mechanism that translates inclusive HRM practices into meaningful career outcomes for IPros. By strengthening IPros' attachment to client organisations, inclusive HRM creates the relational conditions necessary for sustainable career development. Therefore, we propose that client commitment mediates the relationship between inclusive HRM and IPros' sustainable career outcomes. To test the mediating effect of client commitment between inclusive HRM and sustainable career outcomes, this study propose the fourth hypothesis is:

H4: Client commitment mediates the relationship between inclusive HRM and IPros' annual earning (H4a); subjective career success (H4b); and burnout (H4c).

5.4 Methodology

5.4.1 Sample and Procedure

The data were collected as part of a large research project. The research team collaborated with an accounting firm which engaged professional contractors in varied industries. In Jan 2023, an online survey were sent to their active contractors with a few reminders. In total, 735 responses were received from contractors (25% response rate). After deleting invalid responses, the valid sample size was 681.

Among the sample, 77% were male. The average (and also median) age was 49 years old (SD = 12), and the average contract length is 16 months (SD = 19). 30% of the sample

aged from 40 to 49 years old. Almost 75% of respondents were over 40 years old. They earn an average salary of €123,572 per annum, which is 71% more than equivalent employees. Participants came from five main different industries, including the pharma, medical device and life science (33%), technology (16%), finance (14%), and other industries (37%). The sample consisted of IPros where were well-educated with 95% of the participants having attained third level qualifications of 6 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications in Ireland; and 71% had a Bachelor's Degree or higher. Among the sample, 15% had one or more other professional qualifications beside their formal education.

5.4.2 Measurements

Variables used in this study were assessed using established measures except inclusive HRM and annual earning. Additionally, given that the original scales used in this study were designed for traditional wage employees, the research team made appropriate deletions and modifications to ensure their applicability to IPros and to enable a more in-depth exploration of the constructs relevant to this project.

Inclusive HRM. The scale used in this study was developed based on the qualitative findings of Van den Groenendaal et al. (2023), which identified various aspects of inclusive HRM activities. The decision to develop a context-specific inclusive HRM measure was guided by the limited availability of validated quantitative scales that capture inclusive HRM practices in non-traditional work settings, particularly for IPros. Existing HRM scales are predominantly designed for standard employment relationships and may not fully reflect the relational and project-based nature of IPros' work. Van den Groenendaal et al. (2023) revealed six HRM practices that were important for freelancers and this study drew on existing HRM research and developed relevant HRM items: 1) providing role clarity (e.g., "My assignment(s) is/are clear from the start without disguising the exact content of

assignment(s)” and “My role is very clear during my work”); (2) complying with contractual agreements (e.g., “My payment is in compliance with financial agreements” and “My fee is paid on time”); (3) onboarding (e.g., “My client organisation provides the necessary resources” and “My client organisation builds connections with the people involved”); (4) information sharing (e.g., “My client organisation would inform me if I seem to go in the wrong direction”, “My client organisation communicates with me openly about the progress of projects” and “I receive all information needed to execute my work”); (5) providing autonomy (e.g., “I have sufficient autonomy in completing the assignment in my own way”); and (6) providing clarity about the future (e.g., “My client organisation informs me whether assignments will be extended or not”). Participants responded to these items based on their experience based on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach's α was .85.

Client commitment. The measurement of client commitment was developed based on Allen and Meyer's (1990) conceptualisation of employee commitment to organisations. Given the absence of existing measures of client commitment, we draw on Marrone et al.'s (2007) team viability items which focus on individuals' willingness to continue working with a team in future collaborations. Items were "Team members have found being a member of this team to be a very satisfying experience," "Most team members feel like they are learning a great deal by working on this project," and "Most of the members of this team would welcome the opportunity to work as a group again in the future". Given the temporary and project-based nature of IPros' work arrangements, such willingness to continue to work with the same organisation was considered relevant for capturing IPros' client commitment. To better fit the IPros context, these concepts were adapted from employee commitment to “client commitment,” reflecting the extent to which IPros are willing to continue working with and remain psychologically connected to client organisations across projects. Therefore, three items were developed and used to evaluate the likelihood that employee

will continue their relationship for the client company. These items included “I feel like I am learning a great deal by working on this project”, “I have found working in this organisation to be a very satisfying experience”, and “I would welcome the opportunity to work for this organisation again in the future”. Participants’ responses were based on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach’s α was .80.

Annual earnings. Different from full-time employees, IPros do not usually have a fixed number of annual earnings. Their earnings are often influenced by across projects and over time due to variations in contract duration, workload intensity, client availability, and market conditions (Burke & Cowling, 2020; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). As a result, directly collecting annual income figures can be inaccurate, as respondents may find it difficult to accurately estimate total earnings or may be reluctant to disclose exact financial information, leading to increased measurement error and item non-response. Therefore, to calculate IPros’ annual earning, research team first asked their daily rate. Research team then asked their IPros’ non-work days in the past year. The question was: thinking about the last 12 months, how many days (excluding bank holidays and weekends) did you take as holidays and spend not working but looking for work/in between contracts? Based on the above information, IPros’ annual earning was calculated by taking the daily rate and multiplying it by the total number of working days in a year. This total was based on a standard working year of 52 weeks with 5 working days per week, from which 9 Irish public holidays and other non-working days were deducted.

Subjective career success. Two items were adapted from Abele and Spurk (2009), which are based on the original 5-item career satisfaction scale developed by Greenhaus et al., (1990). This scale evaluated the degree of satisfaction towards a wide array of career success facets, including: “The success I have achieved in my career” and “The progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals”. Participants responded to these items

based on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. Cronbach's α was .85.

Burnout. Five items were adapted from Maslach et al. (1997), which evaluated the degree of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress in work environments. These items included “I feel emotionally drained from my work”, “I feel used up at the end of the day”, “I feel burned out from my work”, “I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job”, and “Working with people all day is really a strain for me”. Participants responded to these statements based on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach's α was .90.

Control variables. Prior empirical research on sustainable career outcomes suggests that individual characteristics such as age, gender, and industry are associated with career success (Frear et al., 2019; Van der Heijden et al., 2009), performance (Hitt & Ireland, 1985) and burnout (Antoniou et al., 2006; Purvanova & Muros, 2010). Accordingly, this study controls for IPros' gender, age, average contract length and industry, given their potential associations with annual earnings, subjective career success, and burnout. Gender was measured using 3 categories (1 = Male, 2 = Female, 3 = Non-binary, other or prefer not to say). Participants were asked to provide data on their birth year and their age was calculated using 2023 minus birth year. This study used the self-report question to measure average contract length (What is the average length (months) of your contracts in self-employment?). Industry variable was represented using a set of dummy variables indicating whether respondents worked in pharma/medical devices/life sciences (Dummy 1), finance (Dummy 2), technology (Dummy 3) and other as the baseline.

5.4.3 Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis and additional analyses were performed to assess the potential influence of common method bias and to establish the discriminant validity of the scales. A full measurement model was tested with subjective career success, burnout,

inclusive HRM and client commitment. The four-factor model showed a good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 769.81/203$; Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = .91; Incremental Fit Index [IFI] = .91; root-mean-square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .07; standardized root-mean-square residual [SRMR] = .05), apart from χ^2/df value. However, because the χ^2/df value is sensitive to large sample size (Bentler, 1990; Hair et al., 2012), as the test tends to indicate poor fit even when other indices suggest an acceptable model (Bentler, 1990; Hair et al., 2012). Therefore, following established methodological guidance (Conway et al., 2016; Liao et al., 2009), greater emphasis is placed on alternative fit indices, which indicate that the model demonstrates an acceptable fit.

In addition, additional indexes helpful in establishing validity and reliability including Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were also checked. Based on Hair et al. (2012), CR values need to be above .70 to get acceptable reliability and the AVE values need to be less than CR and above .50 to get acceptable convergent validity. Table 5.1 presented the validity and reliable index values for our constructs which supported the validity of our measures. For instance, CR values were .86 for subjective career success, .91 for burnout, .89 for inclusive HRM and .82 for client commitment. Moreover, AVE values were .75 for subjective career success, .66 for burnout, .42 for inclusive HRM and .60 for client commitment, which was less than the CR values but were not all above .50. However, according to the explanation of Fornell and Larcker (1981) if AVE is less than .50, but CR is higher than .60, the convergent validity of the construct can still be adequate.

Three subsequent χ^2 difference tests were then performed to compare the full measurement model to alternative nested models. As shown in Table 5.2, the comparison results reveal that the model fit of the full measurement model was significantly better than the alternative models (all at $p < .001$).

Table 5.1 Validity and Reliability Index Values

Variables	CR	AVE
Subjective Career Success	.86	.76
Burnout	.91	.66
Inclusive HRM	.87	.42
Client Commitment	.81	.60

Table 5.2 Fit Statistics from Measurement Model Comparison

Models	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
Full measurement model	769.81/203	.91	.90	.07	.05		
Model A ^a	1183.75/206	.85	.83	.09	.08	413.95	3***
Model B ^b	2448.86/208	.65	.61	.14	.11	1679.05	5***
Model C ^c	2631.18/209	.62	.58	.15	.11	1861.37	6***

(Harman's single factor test)

Note(s): N = 532. In all measurement models, error terms were free to covary to improve fit and help reduce bias in the estimated parameter values. All models are compared to the full measurement model.

Abbreviations: CFI, comparative fit index; df, degrees of freedom; IFI, incremental fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual; Δdf , difference in degrees of freedom; $\Delta\chi^2$, difference in chi-square; χ^2 , chi-square discrepancy.

a Subjective career success and burnout combined into a single factor.

b Subjective career success, burnout and inclusive HRM combined into a single factor.

c All factors combined into a single factor.

*** $p < .001$.

In particular, the Harman's single factor test had the worst model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2631.18/209$, $p < .001$; CFI = .62; IFI = .62; RMSEA = .15; SRMR = .11), suggesting that the variables are distinct and ruling out concerns of common method bias. Similarly, variance inflation factors (VIFs) and the Durbin-Watson test were calculated to assess the potential for multicollinearity and autocorrelation among variables. With all the results of VIF value was 1.00, less than the threshold of 5 suggested by Haan (2002), indicating no concerns for multicollinearity. Likewise, the range of Durbin-Watson is from 1.86 to 1.99 showed no concern for autocorrelation (Field, 2024).

5.5 Results

5.5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 5.3 presented the descriptive statistics for the key studies variables about their means, standard deviations, and correlations.

5.5.2 Direct Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 1 proposed that inclusive HRM has a significant impact on sustainable career outcomes, e.g. positive impact on annual earning (1a) and subjective career success (1b) as well as negative impact on burnout (1c). The direct linear regression analysis results in Table 5.4 show that inclusive HRM was positively associated with annual earning ($\beta = .12, p < .01$); positively related to subjective career success ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), and negatively associated with burnout ($\beta = -.38, p < .001$). Thus, Hypotheses 1a to 1c were all supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that inclusive HRM is positively related to client commitment. Table 5.4 presented the hierarchical linear regression analysis results. Model 1 shows that inclusive HRM was positively associated with client commitment ($\beta = .68, p < .001$). Hypothesis 2 was supported. Hypothesis 3 proposed that client commitment has a significant impact on annual earning, subjective career success and burnout. Model 2 (Step 2) shows that client commitment was positively associated with annual earning but not significant ($\beta = .06, n.s.$). Model 3 (Step 2) shows that client commitment was positively related to subjective career success ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). Model 4 (Step 2) shows that client commitment was and negatively associated with burnout ($\beta = -.40, p < .001$). Hypotheses 3b and 3c were supported and 3a was not.

Table 5.3 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Annual Earning	124094.40	65699.67								
2. Subjective Career Success	4.05	.75	.10*							
3. Burnout	2.29	.87	-.03	-.35**						
4. Client Commitment	4.06	.73	.01	.36**	-.41**					
5. Inclusive HRM	3.87	.59	.08*	.37**	-.39**	.68**				
6. Average Contract Length	16.30	19.46	.03	.04	.05	-.05	-.01			
7. Age	49.41	11.87	.20**	.15**	-.19**	.03	.06	.15**		
8. Industry	49.98	6.88	-.05	-.03	.04	.00	-.04	.10*	.09*	
9. Gender	1.24	.46	-.11**	-.12**	.02	-.01	-.08*	.00	-.10*	.09*

Notes: N=681, all tests were two-tailed, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

5.5.3 Mediating Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 4 proposed that client commitment mediates the inclusive HRM and annual earning, subjective career success and burnout. Mediation analyses were conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Indirect effects were considered significant when the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval did not include zero (Hayes, 2018). According to Hayes (2018), mediation requires three steps: 1) significant effect of the independent variable on the mediator; 2) significant effect of the mediator on the dependent variable; and 3) significant indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator using bootstrapped confidence intervals.

Table 5.4 reports the regression coefficients corresponding to the constituent paths of the mediation model. Model 1 shows that inclusive HRM was positively and significantly related to client commitment ($\beta = .68, p < .001$), supporting the first step of mediation analysis. For testing mediating effect of inclusive HRM on annual earning, Model 2 (Step 2) shows that the effect of client commitment was positively but non-significantly related to annual earning ($\beta = .06, n.s.$). Given the second criterion was not met, the mediating hypothesis (H4a) was not supported. For testing mediating effect of inclusive HRM on subjective career success, Model 3 (Step 2) shows that the effect of client commitment was positively and significant related to subjective career success ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). For the third step, the indirect effect of inclusive HRM on subjective career success via client commitment was significant (indirect effect = .11; 95% CI [.01,.22], not covering 0). Thus, Hypothesis 4b was supported.

For testing mediating effect of inclusive HRM on burnout, Model 4 (Step 2) shows that the effect of client commitment was negative and significant related to burnout ($\beta = -.20, p < .001$). PROCESS results confirmed a significant indirect effect of inclusive HRM on burnout through client commitment (indirect effect = -.29; 95% CI [-.43,-.17] not covering 0). Hypothesis 4c was supported.

Table 5.4 Hierarchical Linear Regression Results

Variables	Model 1 CM	Model 2 AEARN		Model 3 SCS		Model 4 BURN	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 2	Step 3	Step 2	Step 3
<i>Control</i>							
Average Contract Length	-.04	.01	.00	.04	.03	.06	.06
Age	-.01	.20***	.20***	.12**	.11**	-.18**	-.18***
Industry (Dummy 1)	.01	-.05	-.05	-.02	-.02	.03	.03
Industry (Dummy 2)	-.03	.01	.01	.04	.04	-.08	-.08
Industry (Dummy 3)	.02	-.07	-.07	.07	.07	-.06	-.06
Gender (Dummy 2)	.05	-.09*	-.08	-.08*	-.06	-.01	-.02
Gender (Dummy 3)	.02	.01	.01	-.08*	-.06		
<i>Predictors</i>							
Inclusive HRM	.68***		.14*		.29***		-.20***
<i>Mediator</i>							
Client Commitment		.06	-.03	.32***	.13*	-.40***	-.27***
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.46	.05	.06	.14	.18	.20	.22
<i>ΔR²</i>	.46	.07	.08	.15	.19	.21	.23
<i>ΔF</i>	500.25**	4.37**	4.58***	12.80***	15.42***	21.39***	21.20***

Notes: Standardized coefficients were reported. Gender was dummy coded (Dummy 1 = male, Dummy 2 = female, Dummy 3 = Non-binary, other or prefer not to say); Industry was dummy coded (Dummy 1 = Pharma/Med device/Life science, Dummy 2 = Finance, Dummy 3 = Technology); AEARN, annual earning; SCS, subjective career success; BURN, burnout; For models with the dependent variable burnout, Gender Dummy 3 variable with no variance were excluded from the analysis; N=681, all tests were two-tailed, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5.4 reports the regression coefficients corresponding to the constituent paths of the mediation model. Model 1 shows that inclusive HRM was positively and significantly related to client commitment ($\beta = .68, p < .001$), supporting the first step of mediation analysis. For testing mediating effect of inclusive HRM on annual earning, Model 2 (Step 2) shows that the effect of client commitment was positively but non-significantly related to annual earning ($\beta = .06, n.s.$). Given the second criterion was not met, the mediating hypothesis (H4a) was not supported. For testing mediating effect of inclusive HRM on subjective career success, Model 3 (Step 2) shows that the effect of client commitment was positively and significant related to subjective career success ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). For the third step, the indirect effect of inclusive HRM on subjective career success via client commitment was significant (indirect effect = .11; 95% CI [.01,.22], not covering 0). Thus, Hypothesis 4b was supported.

For testing mediating effect of inclusive HRM on burnout, Model 4 (Step 2) shows that the effect of client commitment was negative and significant related to burnout ($\beta = -.20, p < .001$). PROCESS results confirmed a significant indirect effect of inclusive HRM on burnout through client commitment (indirect effect = -.29; 95% CI [-.43,-.17] not covering 0). Hypothesis 4c was supported.

5.6 Discussion

Independent working has become an important component of and contributor to labor market and economies (Cross & Swart, 2022; Leighton & McKeown, 2015). An increasing number of professionals choosing independent work was driven by the independence, variety, and potential for higher earnings. Such increases of IPros also presents significant challenges (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Pichault et al., 2020). Unlike employees within traditional organisations, IPros must independently secure clients, negotiate contracts, manage financial stability, and ensure continuous professional growth (Murgia & Pulignano, 2021). This raises important concerns regarding career sustainability, as many IPros face

income instability, career insecurity, and burnout due to work-related pressures (Osnowitz, 2006).

Addressing this challenge, this study explored how inclusive HRM practices shape IPros' sustainable career outcomes. This study is from an inclusive HRM perspective and draws on social exchange theory to enhance our understanding of how IPros perceive organisational support by highlighting the impact of inclusive HRM practices on sustainable career outcomes. The findings show that inclusive HRM practices are positively associated with key career outcomes, including annual earnings, subjective career success, and burnout. Client commitment has a significant impact on IPros' subjective career success and burnout. Furthermore, the client commitment mediates the inclusive HRM and on IPros' subjective career success and burnout. This study provides significant implications for future research on IPros.

5.6.1 Theoretical Implications

Based on the growing importance of non-standard work and the need for more inclusive approaches to managing external professionals, this study provides important theoretical contributions to the HRM literature, IPros research and sustainable career research. First, this study contributes to the HRM literature by extending inclusive HRM research beyond traditional employment relationships to IPros. HRM research has traditionally focused on employees within organisational settings, emphasizing recruitment, training, performance management, and retention strategies (Bratton & Gold, 2001). The underlying assumption has been that HRM primarily serves full-time, salaried employees working within hierarchical structures (Chang, 2005). However, this approach fails to account for the growing freelance workforce, which now constitutes a significant portion of the labor market (De Stefano, 2016). Despite the number of IPros increased, the HRM research has largely neglected their unique needs, career development, and the role of external organisations (clients) in shaping their work experiences. IPros often face career

instability, lack of support, and unclear career development pathways (McKeown, 2016). Unlike traditional employees, they are responsible for their own professional growth, wellbeing, and financial security (Syrett, 2016). However, organisations and HRM policies still play a vital role in enhancing freelancer careers while simultaneously benefiting from a more engaged and highly skilled IPros (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023).

Thus, this study addresses this research gap by providing empirical evidence demonstrating that inclusive HRM practices influence meaningful career outcomes for IPros. This research shows that HRM remains relevant even when workers are project-based and not formally employed by organisations. Importantly, while prior research has begun to conceptualise inclusive HRM in the context of freelancers and external workers, much of this work remains largely conceptual or qualitative in nature (e.g., Borghouts-van de Pas & Freese, 2017; Van den Groenendaal et al., 2023). There is a notable lack of quantitative studies testing the relationships between inclusive HRM practices and measurable career outcomes in non-standard work contexts. This study directly addresses this gap by providing quantitative empirical evidence on how inclusive HRM practices shape IPros' career outcomes, thereby strengthening the empirical foundation of inclusive HRM research.

Moreover, this study advances inclusive HRM research by moving beyond conceptual and qualitative explorations to provide empirical evidence. Although prior work has suggested that inclusive HRM practices may help organisations improve freelancers' performance and support their employability (Borghouts-van de Pas & Freese, 2017; Van den Groenendaal et al., 2023), empirical studies examining how such practices translate into career outcomes have remained limited. By explicitly testing these relationships using quantitative methods, this study not only validates prior conceptual claims but also demonstrates the strength and direction of these effects, thereby providing more focus and generalisable insights into inclusive HRM practices. This distinction further clarifies the

contribution of this study relative to existing work and differentiates it from prior qualitative and exploratory research.

This study addresses this gap by demonstrating that inclusive HRM practices are associated with higher client commitment and improved sustainable career outcomes, thereby strengthening the empirical foundation of inclusive HRM theory in non-standard work settings. In addition, by integrating social exchange theory, this study provides a relational explanation for how inclusive HRM practices operate in independent work arrangements. Indeed, traditional HRM research often assumes that exchange relationships are based on direct employment arrangements (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This study shows that inclusive HRM practices can foster reciprocal relationships indirectly through client commitment. This insight extends HRM theory by highlighting that HRM practices may shape career outcomes through relational mechanisms even in the absence of formal employment relationships. In doing so, this study not only extends inclusive HRM research to a new context but also strengthens its empirical foundation by demonstrating the measurable impact of inclusive HRM practices in non-traditional employment arrangements.

Second, this study contributes to the IPros' literature by shifting the focus from individual-level career self-management to the role of organisational and relational resources in shaping career outcomes. Existing IPros research has largely emphasised individual agency, entrepreneurial orientation, and self-management as key characteristics of their career success (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Lo Presti et al., 2018). While these factors are important, this study demonstrates that external support in the form of inclusive HRM practices and strong client relationships also plays a critical role in sustaining IPros' careers. Furthermore, by empirically examining the mediation role of client commitment between inclusive HRM practices and career outcomes, this study advances understanding of client–professional relationships in independent work. Prior research has highlighted the importance of maintaining client relationships for securing ongoing work and income

(McKeown & Leighton, 2016; Syrett, 2016;), but has little research to test how organisational practices contribute to these relationships. This study provides empirical evidence for this relationship by examining how inclusive HRM practices strengthen client commitment, which in turn enhances subjective career success and reduces burnout.

Third, this study contributes to sustainable career research by extending its application to non-standard work arrangements. Sustainable career research has mainly focused on employees embedded within organisations and internal labour markets (De Vos et al., 2020; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). By applying the sustainable career framework to IPros, this study demonstrates that the core dimensions of productive, happy, and healthy retain explanatory power in non-traditional employment contexts. Importantly, this study shows that sustainable career outcomes for IPros are multidimensional and unevenly influenced by organisational practices. While inclusive HRM practices and client commitment strongly affect subjective career success and burnout, their influence on annual earnings is more limited. This finding suggests that objective financial outcomes for IPros may be shaped more strongly by market conditions and pricing strategies, whereas inclusive HRM and relational resources are particularly important for subjective and wellbeing related outcomes (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017).

5.6.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study provides several important practical implications. For IPros, the findings emphasise that sustainable careers outcomes are not achieved through individual self-management alone, but also depend on access to supportive organisational and relational resources. While prior research has highlighted autonomy, adaptability, and entrepreneurial orientation as key drivers of freelance career success (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Lo Presti et al., 2018), this study demonstrates that organisational support and client commitment also play a crucial role in IPros' sustainable career outcomes. IPros may benefit from client organisations that apply inclusive practices, such as openness to

learning opportunities, respectful collaboration, and transparent communication. Actively investing in trust-based and reciprocal client relationships can enhance career sustainability by increasing access to repeat contracts, meaningful work, and psychological resources that support wellbeing (McKeown & Leighton, 2016; Syrett, 2016). At the same time, the findings suggest that financial outcomes such as annual earnings may be more strongly influenced by market conditions and pricing strategies, highlighting the importance of balancing relational and economic considerations in independent careers.

The findings of this study provides several important practical implications for HRM practitioners and policymakers, organisations hiring IPros and IPros themselves. For HR practitioners and policymakers, this study provides empirical support for broadening career support systems to include non-standard workers such as IPros. This study highlights that IPros' sustainable career outcomes are not only dependent on individual efforts but also significantly influenced by external factors such as inclusive HRM and client commitment. This study suggests HR practitioners redefine the role of HR in managing external professionals, expanding HR responsibilities beyond full-time employees. And encourage HR professionals to develop inclusive policies that integrate freelancers into organisational talent management strategies, such as providing training and career support programs to help IPros enhance their skills or provide mental health and wellbeing resources to help IPros manage stress and burnout. Policymakers may therefore consider promoting institutional frameworks that facilitate IPros' access to training, upskilling, and lifelong learning opportunities. Including IPros into publicly supported career development and employability initiatives may help reduce burnout risks and enhance long-term labour market participation. Such measures not only benefit individual IPros but also contribute to a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable labour market overall (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017; Van der Heijden et al., 2020).

For organisations hiring IPros, this study highlights the importance of extending inclusive HRM practices beyond the boundaries of standard employment relationships. Although IPros are not formal employees, the findings demonstrate that inclusive HRM practices (e.g., access to development opportunities, inclusive networking, fair treatment, and work–life balance support) play a critical role in developing client commitment and supporting sustainable career outcomes, particularly subjective career success and reduced burnout. These results confirm that HRM practices can shape sustainable career outcomes in non-standard work arrangements (Borghouts-van de Pas & Freese, 2017; Cross & Swart, 2021). It calls for organisations to rethink HRM frameworks to include IPros, ensuring fair treatment, career support, and long-term relationship-building strategies. Practically, organisations should view inclusive HRM practices as relational investments by applying fairness, recognition, and long-term orientation practices to strengthen trust-based relationships with IPros, which in turn enhances client commitment. Stronger client commitment may lead to more stable collaborations, higher-quality contributions, and lower risks of disengagement or burnout among external professionals (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Van den Groenendaal et al., 2023). Importantly, the findings suggest that such practices are particularly effective in supporting wellbeing-related outcomes, underscoring the value of inclusive onboarding, clear communication, and realistic workload expectations in project-based work.

5.6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be considered. First, this study primarily focuses on IPros, findings may not generalise across other non-traditional work arrangements. The landscape of non-traditional employment is diverse, ranging from highly skilled professionals working on long-term contracts to gig workers performing short-term, task-based work through digital platforms (McKeown, 2015; Jabagi et al., 2019). The IPros examined in this research are highly educated and skilled

professionals who take on knowledge-intensive roles within client companies (Burke & Cowling, 2020; McKeown, 2015). Unlike other non-traditional workers, they operate independently and generally under project-based or contract-based arrangements (Ashford et al., 2007). Compared with gig workers have less control over their work arrangements, IPros exercise greater autonomy in selecting projects, negotiating contracts, and shaping their career paths (Florin & Pichault, 2020). These professionals provide specialised services in areas such as IT, consulting, finance, and creative industries (Knapp et al., 2021). Their career sustainability is largely influenced by long-term client relationship, ongoing skill development, and access to professional networks (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). Despite this distinction reinforce the importance of inclusive HRM practices tailored to IPros, the results may not generalise to other non-traditional workers. Future research should consider a broader, more diverse sample, further explore how different HRM strategies can be adapted to meet the unique needs of various non-traditional workers, particularly in the evolving gig economy.

Second, this study applied a cross-sectional research design, meaning that data was collected at a single point in time. This approach limits the ability to establish causal relationships between inclusive HRM, client commitment, and sustainable career outcomes. To better understand career sustainability, researchers should conduct long-term studies tracking freelancers over several years. A longitudinal study would provide deeper insights into how these variables evolve over time and how they influence IPros' career sustainability in the long run. Additionally, the findings rely on self-reported measures, which may be influenced by individual perceptions, biases, or social desirability effects (van de Mortel, 2005). Future research could incorporate objective performance indicators (e.g., income growth, client retention rates) or third-party evaluations to enhance the robustness of the results.

Third limitation relates to the use of client commitment as the central mediating mechanism in this study. The measurement of client commitment in this study was developed based on Allen and Meyer's (1990) organisational commitment measurement and Marrone et al.'s (2007) team viability measurement to better fit the temporary and project-based nature of IPros' client relationships. Although this approach enhanced contextual relevance, the construct and measurement have not yet been widely validated in the IPros literature. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the mediating role of client commitment.

Furthermore, while client commitment captures an important relational dimension, other mechanisms may also explain how inclusive HRM influences career outcomes. Future research could explore additional mediators such as perceived organisational support, psychological contract, employability, or career resilience to further research exploring sustainable careers in independent work (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017; Rousseau, 1989). Moreover, this study draws on the sustainable career framework to explore sustainable career outcomes using three indicators, including annual earnings, subjective career success, and burnout. While these indicators capture key aspects of being productive, happy, and healthy, future studies could use a broader range of indicators, such as employability, satisfaction, stress or wellbeing, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable careers among IPros (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; Van der Heijden et al., 2020).

In addition, while the inclusive HRM scale used in this study is developed by prior qualitative research and tailored to the IPros context, it represents a context-specific operationalisation rather than a widely validated quantitative measure. Although this approach enhances contextual relevance, it may limit comparability with studies that employ established HRM scales. Future research could build on this work by developing and

validating more generalisable quantitative measures of inclusive HRM or by adapting existing HRM scales for non-traditional work contexts.

5.7 Conclusion

This study aims to explore how inclusive HRM practices shape the sustainable career outcomes of IPros, drawing on the sustainable career framework and social exchange theory. Responding to growing calls to extend HRM and career research beyond traditional employment relationships, the findings demonstrate that HRM practices are still significant in non-standard work contexts. The results show that inclusive HRM practices are positively associated with IPros' client commitment and with key dimensions of sustainable career outcomes. Moreover, client commitment was found to mediate the relationships between inclusive HRM and subjective career success and burnout, highlighting the importance of relational mechanisms in sustaining independent careers. These findings align with social exchange theory, which emphasises trust, reciprocity, and mutual obligation as central drivers of positive work-related outcomes. Overall, this study demonstrates that inclusive HRM remains relevant in non-standard work contexts and plays a key role in supporting sustainable careers for IPros. By examining these critical issues, this research contributes to HRM and IPros literature, providing valuable insights for freelancers, organisations, HR practitioners, and policymakers.

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Summary of Three Studies

While an increasing number of studies focus on IPros, there is limited theoretical and empirical understanding of how IPros experience their work and career. Three studies were designed to fill three sub-gaps but together to address the overarching question. These three sub-gaps include: 1) lack of systematic investigation of key themes emerge in the literature on IPros' work and career experiences; 2) research puzzle on how IPros' dual identity shapes their work outcomes; and 3) research puzzle on how inclusive HRM influences IPros' sustainable career outcomes. To address these research gaps, this thesis adopted a three-study format. Each study had its own research question, research aim, and research conclusion, and they interrelate together to answer the overarching question of this thesis.

Study 1, titled "*Beyond Traditional Employment: A Systematic Review of Independent Professionals*", adopted a systematic review method to investigate current research status on IPros over the past three decades (1993-2025). After reviewing the selected 143 studies. Study 1 found four themes and corresponding paradoxes, which include: 1) work experiences and challenges: work conditions paradox which highlights the tension between control of work and the reality; 2) work-life balance, wellbeing and health: wellbeing paradox which reveals how the pursuit of work-life balance and jobless stress; 3) career development, support and success: career management paradox which exposes the inherent contradiction between IPros' self-management independence and social net interdependence; 4) identity and management: identity paradox which reveals IPros' professional and organisational identities. Based on these themes and paradoxes, Study 1 identified the autonomy–precarity mega paradox as a fundamental defining feature of IPros' work. It revealed that while autonomy provides flexibility and control, it coexists with economic insecurity, client dependence, and limited institutional protection. Following these

themes and paradoxes, a theoretical framework was developed and an agenda was offered for future research, including 1) the comparative analysis of work models and the experience of flexibility; 2) the effect of age, income, and segment on IPros' health and wellbeing; 3) the role of reputation, age, and professional networks in shaping career trajectories; and 4) the construction of a coherent professional self across diverse contexts and career stages. As such, this study filled in the first sub-gap of the lack of systematic investigation of current research status of IPros.

Study 2 and Study 3 are in parallel and both focus on IPros' work experiences and career outcomes, but examine these issues from distinct yet complementary perspectives. Following the findings of Study 1, Study 2 titled "*Being Professional or Organisational? Exploring the Identity Paradox of Independent Professionals*", adopts an individual-level perspective to investigate how IPros' professional and organisational identities shape their work outcomes. Drawing on time lagged data collected from IPros in Ireland, Study 2 revealed IPros manage their dual identities as both autonomous experts and temporary organisational insiders. This study found that both IPros' job satisfaction and subjective career success are higher when professional and organisational identity converge at high rather than low levels. In order to manage dual identities, client organisations should provide support for IPros to help them accept both professional and organisational identities through effective identity management. This study thus filled the second sub-gap regarding the unknown of the professional and organisational identities paradox of IPros.

Still following the findings of Study 1 and extending the findings of Study 2, Study 3, titled "*Sustainable Careers of Independent Professionals: The Role of Inclusive HRM and Client Commitment in Career Development*", adopts an organisational-level perspective and deepens our understanding of IPros' work outcomes by exploring the influence of inclusive HRM practices and client commitment on IPros' sustainable career outcomes. Using a quantitative cross-section study, this study found that inclusive HRM significantly improves

IPros subjective career success and reduces burnout. Moreover, client commitment has a significant impact on IPros' subjective career success and burnout. Client commitment also mediates the inclusive HRM and on IPros' subjective career success and burnout. This study answers how inclusive HRM practices impact IPros' sustainable career outcomes. Doing so filled the third sub-gap concerning the under-explored the relationship between inclusive HRM practices and IPros' sustainable career outcomes.

The three studies collectively presented an integrated analysis of IPros. Study 1 served as a conceptual foundation that provides valuable insights on IPros research. The recurring themes, central autonomy-precarity mega paradox and future research directions were provided. Study 2 (quantitative time lagged study) then built on this foundation by offering an in-depth understanding of IPros' identity experiences. Study 2 explored how IPros' dual identity shapes their work outcomes. It examined how IPros manage the dual demands of maintaining their professional identity while simultaneously adapting to organisational expectations within client firms. Study 3 (quantitative cross-sectional study) further explored the same theme as Study 2 and answered the question of how inclusive HRM practices influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes. It analysed how inclusive HRM practices and client commitment shape IPros' career outcomes, providing empirical evidence of how IPros perceive organisational support.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis focus on IPros and explore the main question how to hire and manage IPros. By doing so, this thesis offers several important theoretical contributions by integrating insights across paradox theory, social identity theory, sustainable career theory, HRM research and the broader field of IPros research. Together, the findings extend and refine existing conceptual frameworks while advancing new theoretical insights relevant to the management of external professionals in contemporary labour markets.

6.2.1 Contributions to HRM Research

The second major theoretical contribution of this thesis is the extension of HRM research to the management of IPros which is a group traditionally outside the domain of HRM practices. Generally, HRM research almost mainly focused on full-time employees who are individuals with formal organisational membership, employment contracts, and participation in internal HR systems (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). The external contractors such as IPros, freelancers, or contingent workers are characterised as peripheral labour with limited relevance for HRM theory (Kalleberg, 2011). This thesis challenges that assumption by exploring how HRM practices, particularly inclusive HRM influence the work experiences, relational engagement, and career outcomes of IPros.

The findings of Study 3 provide the strong empirical evidence for this contribution. By showing that inclusive HRM practices, including fair treatment, transparent communication, respect, recognition, and involvement in making decisions, significantly enhance IPros' subjective career success and reduce burnout. The study shows that HRM practices can operate effectively even without formal employment relationships. This contributes to HRM theory by expanding the conceptual boundaries of HRM beyond traditional organisational hierarchies. It also provides evidence that HRM practices can function in contractual relationships where the organisation and IPros are operationally independent but interdependent.

Conclusion, this thesis extends HRM research to hire and manage IPros, findings reveal that HRM practices remain influential even when applied beyond traditional employment boundaries. Especially, the exploration of the impact of inclusive HRM practices on IPros career outcomes further extends HRM theory to explain the function of HRM practices in temporary, short-term and project-based employment relationships. The thesis calls for more academy focus to broadens the scope of HRM theory to move beyond organisational boundaries and incorporate external, flexible, and knowledge-based professionals into mainstream theoretical debates.

6.2.2 Contributions to IPros Research

The final major contribution of this thesis is the advancement of research on IPros as a distinct category of contract workers in contemporary labour markets. Although the number of IPros has grown rapidly across industries, research on IPros remains limited. Existing studies tended to explore single themes such as flexibility, autonomy, identity, or precarity without integrating these dimensions into a multidisciplinary theoretical understanding (Annink & Den Dulk, 2012; Pichault et al., 2020; Tomlinson et al., 2018). This thesis addresses this gap to answer the question of how IPros experience their work and career, providing empirical insights into identity management and sustainable career development. Therefore, this thesis contributes to filling current research gaps for a better understanding of IPros' work and career.

Specifically, Study 1 establishes a systematic theoretical foundation by reviewing three decades of research on IPros. The review summarised four main themes based on existing studies and also identifies that the autonomy–precarity paradox within IPros' work has been recognised but not theorised holistically. This study provides the theoretical foundation and identifies clear research gaps for the next two studies. Study 2 directly addresses one of the key gaps identified in Study 1 by empirically examining identity management, which is an area that has received limited attention in IPros scholarship despite being central to their occupational reality. This identity paradox reflects the dual positioning of IPros as both outside experts and inside temporary organisational members. By exploring how IPros manage and balance dual identities, Study 2 enriches IPros research with empirical evidence about the psychological and relational complexities of independent work. Study 3 extends IPros' research further by linking inclusive HRM practices to career sustainability. It reveals that inclusive HRM practices and strong client commitment enhance IPros' career sustainability. These insights challenge the assumption in current literature that IPros are solely responsible for managing their own career development through self-driven

strategies such as networking, reskilling, and self-positioning (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; Eppler-Hattab, 2022). Instead, the findings show that client organisations play a crucial role in shaping IPros' long-term career development, even in the absence of formal employment. This relational perspective advances IPros research by revealing how organisational actions influence contractor productivity, happiness and health.

The three studies provide an understanding of IPros from different aspects and explore the key research topic: IPros' work and career experiences. Importantly, this thesis positions IPros as a distinct professional group whose work is shaped by paradoxical conditions, hybrid identities, and cross-boundary relationships. It advances IPros research by offering theoretical and empirical evidence that can direct future studies on IPros' work motivations, identity management, labour market positioning, wellbeing, and relationships with clients. Therefore, this thesis fills research gaps and enriches current research on IPros.

6.2.3 Enriching Research Context

This thesis applies three major theoretical frameworks, i.e. paradox theory, social identity theory and sustainable career framework which have been well applied in the full-time employment context to the context of non-standard work arrangements. Although these theories were primarily developed in relation to traditional employees and stable organisational structures. The findings from Studies 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate their explanatory value when applied to external professionals whose work is flexible, boundaryless and project-based.

Firstly, this thesis makes a significant contribution to paradox theory. Paradox theory proposed that individuals and organisations often face persistent, interdependent, and contradictory tensions that cannot be resolved but must be continuously balanced (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). While paradox theory has been widely applied in organisational studies, its application to non-standard work arrangements remains limited. By integrating the insights of Study 1 and Study 2 to examine that IPros experience

paradoxes at both structural and identity aspects. Paradox theory has been increasingly used in recent research to explain complex dynamics such as leadership paradoxes (Cunha et al., 2019) and innovation paradoxes (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011). It has also been applied to identity paradoxes, such as physician-managers who must be both clinicians and administrators (Caza et al., 2018). Moreover, paradox theory also help to understand contemporary work arrangements such as gig economy labour where workers often experience freedom but also instability (Bunders & De Moor, 2024), and remote work which simultaneously increases autonomy and heightens feelings of isolation (Putnam et al., 2014). However, despite these advancements, paradox theory has not been systematically applied to understanding the experiences of IPros who are operating in knowledge-intensive and boundaryless roles.

Study 1 contributes to paradox theory by conceptualising that the tension between autonomy and precarity is a persistent paradox at the centre of IPros' work. Unlike traditional employees who experience paradoxical tensions within organisational boundaries, IPros face paradoxes that come with their employment form. The systematic literature review identifies autonomy and precarity not as absolutely conflicting but as mutually reinforcing forces shaping IPros' careers. Autonomy allows IPros to exercise independently, flexibility and self-management, yet the autonomy coexists with precarious conditions such as unstable income, job insecurity and dependence on clients. The finding, on the one hand, is consistent with the points of paradox theory that paradoxes are persistent contradictions that must be balanced rather than solved (Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). On the other hand, the thesis also extends paradox theory beyond organisational settings and demonstrates that paradoxes can be embedded within non-traditional contractual arrangements.

Furthermore, Study 2 also extends paradox theory by exploring IPros' professional–organisational identity paradox. The results shown that IPros must simultaneously sustain their professional distinctiveness and independently while aligning with organisational

expectations in client firms. The findings extend paradox theory by highlighting how temporary, non-traditional workers experience identity paradoxes more sensitively and acutely than traditional employees. Therefore, Study 1 and Study 2 together extend paradox research beyond traditional employment contexts to the domain of non-standard, external workers. They further provide the theoretical understanding of how paradoxical tensions manifest across identity, autonomy, and organisational embeddedness within non-standard work. The thesis fills the current research gap on paradox theory and confirms the value of paradox theory for understanding contemporary work arrangements and external workforce management.

Secondly, this thesis extends the social identity theory to non-standard and external professionals. Social identity theory proposed that individuals gain meaning, belonging, and guidance from group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Social identity theory has been applied to explore a wide range of organisational phenomena. For example, in leadership studies, social identity has been used to explain how leaders gain influence by embodying group norms and prototypical characteristics (Hogg et al., 2012). In diversity and inclusion research, social identity theory helps explain how demographic characteristics influence belonging, exclusion, and workplace outcomes (Roberson, 2019). Scholars also used social identity theory to understand gig workers' attempts to develop community identity on digital platforms (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017) and the identity transitions experienced by freelancers within project-based work (Petriglieri et al., 2019).

Despite these developments, the research gap on social identity theory still remains because it is less sufficiently focused on IPros who work across multiple organisations and must maintain both professional distinctiveness and organisational alignment. Study 2 addresses this gap by examining the professional–organisational identity paradox among IPros. While social identity theory assumes that individuals identify with groups they are formally part of, IPros must construct their multiple identities in more relational and

temporary ways. The findings reveal that IPros develop strong professional identities to maintain expertise and autonomy, while simultaneously engaging in temporary organisational identification to build trust and collaboration with clients. Furthermore, their dual identities contribute to work outcomes. Therefore, the thesis contributes to understanding IPros' identity construction and provides a theoretical foundation for future research on identity in non-standard work.

Thirdly, this thesis potentially extends the sustainable career framework to non-traditional work arrangements by exploring the influence of inclusive HRM and client commitment on IPros' career outcomes. In current research, sustainable career framework is generally applied primarily to traditional stable employment settings. Studies widely explore that supportive organisational contexts such as developmental opportunities and psychologically safe climates could strengthen career sustainability by enhancing learning and engagement over time (De Vos et al., 2020; Retkowsky et al., 2023). It also used to explain how employees sustain career uncertainty or transitions, such as ageing workforces or organisational change (Van der Heijden et al., 2020). In the HRM field, the framework is connected to employer strategies through strategic HRM, highlighting that organisational practices aimed at fairness, inclusion, and long-term development help employees to sustain both organisational capability and individual careers (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017; Ehnert et al., 2016).

However, applying the sustainable career framework to IPros is still limited. Although Study 3 didn't apply sustainable career theory, it was conducted from the inclusive HRM perspective and adopts sustainable career framework to build and test a research model for IPros' career outcomes. The findings reveal that sustainable career outcomes are substantially shaped by the HRM practices and relational stability. Specifically, inclusive HRM increases client commitment, which in turn strengthens subjective sustainability and reduces wellbeing risks. Therefore, Study 3 extends the sustainable career framework by

showing that sustainability in non-standard careers is co-constructed through inter-organisational inclusion and commitment. The thesis not only fills a gap in sustainable career research but also provides a theoretical framework for future sustainable career research to incorporate contingent and hybrid forms of professional work.

6.3 Practical Implications

The findings of this thesis offer several meaningful practical implications for organisations, HR practitioners, policymakers, and IPros themselves. From the perspective of IPros, exploring their work and career experiences is particularly important. It provides insight into how they navigate flexible employment arrangements, manage professional identities, and sustain long-term career development outside traditional organisational structures. This thesis provides evidence-based practical implications to client organisations, HR practitioners, policymakers and IPros through practices that acknowledge IPros' characteristics, multiple identities and career development needs.

For client organisations, the findings reveal that although IPros are not traditional full-time employees, organisational support is still needed. The paradoxes identified in Studies 1 and 2 show that IPros simultaneously seek autonomy and security, independence and belonging. This means that organisational practices should balance IPros' professional identity with efforts to create an inclusive and supportive environment. Study 3 provides compelling evidence that inclusive HRM practices directly enhance IPros' career outcomes. These inclusive HRM practices, including transparent communication, fair treatment, and clarity around project expectations should be applied in managing IPros. Organisations can therefore strengthen their talent strategies that treat IPros not as peripheral labour but as valued collaborators whose contributions depend on trust and mutual respect (McKeown & Pichault, 2021). Practices such as providing access to necessary information and ensuring consistent communication can help IPros integrate into project teams and enhance productivity (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023).

For HR practitioners, the results highlight the need to broaden the conceptual and operational scope of HRM to include external workers. Traditional HRM systems designed exclusively for full-time employees are insufficient in the era where organisations increasingly depend on flexible and project-based expertise (Leighton & McKeown, 2015). HR professionals should consider extending relevant practices such as performance feedback and learning opportunities to IPros in ways that respect their independent identity (Van Den Groenendaal et al., 2023). The findings of Study 2 suggest that such practices also support IPros' identity work by providing a stronger sense of belonging and legitimacy within client organisations. This more relational and inclusive orientation to HRM can create more cohesive project teams and improve the overall collaboration of hybrid workforces composed of employees and contractors.

For policymakers, the autonomy–precarity paradox revealed in Study 1 emphasises the ongoing vulnerabilities faced by IPros. While IPros contribute significantly to national economies and organisational innovation, they often lack access to social protections, collective bargaining mechanisms, and structured career support (Knapp et al., 2021; Syrett, 2016). Policymakers may therefore consider initiatives that enhance professional development access, promote fair contracting standards, or expand social protections for contractors. Such policies could help reduce the precarity highlighted in the systematic review and provide more support for IPros to contribute more sustainably and equitably.

Finally, for IPros themselves, the findings provide insights into strategies for managing identity, relationships, and career sustainability. Study 2 suggests that identity management can enhance job satisfaction, subjective career success and employability. Study 3 reveals that developing strong client relationships and seeking out inclusive organisational environments contribute significantly to positive career outcomes. IPros may not only benefit from investing in skills development and networking, but also consider strengthening flexibility in response to the paradoxical conditions of their work.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

Although this thesis makes important theoretical and practical contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations provide valuable opportunities for future research on IPros and non-standard work arrangements.

The first limitation relates to the data collection and methodological scope of the three studies. Study 1 used the keywords to capture all relevant studies. As university library subscriptions may not include all international journals or practitioner-oriented publications, some relevant studies may not be contained in the systematic review. Although the review provides an overview of 30 years of research, insights from industry reports, policy briefs, and grey literature are excluded from the review. These studies may help further contextualize the findings and provide broader insights. The generalizability of a single context is relatively limited, although Study 2 adopted a quantitative time lagged approach offers richer causal insight than cross-sectional designs and captures changes over time. Study 3 used a cross-sectional quantitative survey to examine the role of inclusive HRM and client commitment in shaping IPros' career sustainability outcomes. While the design enabled the identification of significant relationships across a large-scale sample, the inability to infer causality is a limitation of the study. Longitudinal or in-depth interview would provide stronger evidence further research.

A second limitation concerns the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Study 2 and 3 was conducted in a single country and in a single market, limiting the transferability of the findings from the data analysis. The results of these two studies may not be fully generalised to countries with different business contexts from Ireland. National differences in employment protection legislation, taxation regimes, and social welfare provisions may shape IPros' autonomy–precarity experiences, identity management strategies, and access to inclusive practices within client organisations. Future research is therefore encouraged to replicate and extend the studies in different national contexts,

particularly in countries with high levels of self-employment or expanding contractor economies. The cross-country comparative studies could also enhance the generalizability of the findings and identify how institutional environments shape the identity and career dynamics of IPros.

A third limitation relates to the focus of Studies 2 and 3 on specific organisational and individual factors, without fully exploring the broader range of social support mechanisms that may shape IPros' identity processes and career sustainability. Future research should therefore investigate the social support in the careers of IPros. Studies could examine how formal and informal, professional and personal interact to shape identity stability, client relationships, and long-term career sustainability.

6.5 Summary

This chapter summarized the key findings of the three studies and discussed their theoretical and practical implications for understanding how IPros are hired, managed, and supported. By integrating insights from paradox theory, social identity theory, sustainable career theory, and HRM scholarship, the chapter demonstrated how the thesis advances the current research on IPros in HRM area. The practical implications highlighted the value of inclusive organisational practices and relational support for enabling more effective and sustainable engagement with external professionals. The chapter also acknowledged several limitations relating to data collection, contextual generalisability, and methodology, and outlined directions for future research.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

In the past three decades, the growth of IPros has attracted the attention from both scholars and practitioners. The research on IPros who perform complex, knowledge-intensive work for organisations without becoming formal employees still limited. Especially, little research explore IPros' work and career experience. Thus, there is limited theoretical and empirical understanding of how IPros experience work, manage identities, and perceive organisational supports in contemporary labour markets. To fill this research gap, this thesis was set to answer the overarching research question of how IPros experience their work and career and conduct a three-study approach, this thesis contributes to existing knowledge by addressing the following three questions: 1) What is the key themes emerge in the literature on IPros' work and career experiences? 2) How do IPros' professional and organisational identities shape their work outcomes? and 3) How does inclusive HRM influence IPros' sustainable career outcomes? As such, the thesis was organized into three papers, separately but interconnectedly, to serve the overarching research objective of this thesis.

Study 1 presented a systematic review of 30 years of literature on IPros to establish an overall understanding of the field. It identified four core themes and emphasised that the autonomy–precarity mega paradox represents an enduring tension for IPros' work. The review also revealed a lack of theoretical integration within the field and proposed an agenda for future research. Studies 2 and 3 built on the findings and research agenda identified in Study 1 to explore the same research theme. Study 2 explored IPros' professional and organisational identity paradox through a quantitative time lagged research design. By drawing on paradox theory, Study 2 found the positive impact of dual identities on work outcomes. Study 3 followed the findings of Study 1 and extended the same theme of Study 2 by examining IPros' career outcomes using a cross-sectional quantitative study. By

adopting inclusive HRM perspective, the empirical results showed that inclusive HRM significantly enhances earnings, subjective career success, and reduces burnout.

Overall, this thesis makes several significant contributions to HRM research, IPros research and applications to paradox theory, social identity theory and sustainable career framework. First, it extends HRM theory by emphasizing that HRM practices can meaningfully influence external workers, and that inclusive HRM is an effective framework for managing non-employee professionals. Second, the thesis contributes to IPros research by exploring the autonomy-precarity mega paradox, identity management and perceive organisational support to provide more deeper and comprehensive understanding of independent professional work. Third, it extends paradox theory by exploring IPros' autonomy–precarity mega paradox and professional-organisational identity paradoxes in non-standard work arrangements. It also extends the application of social identity theory in non-standard work arrangements by exploring IPros' dual identity paradox and showing how their dual identities influence their work outcomes. Moreover, it advances sustainable career framework by highlighting the sustainable career outcomes of IPros is co-constructed through interactions with client organisations and through inclusive HRM practices.

As organisations increasingly rely on external expertise to drive innovation and flexibility, understanding IPros' work and career experiences is both practically and strategically important. The findings of this thesis emphasised the need for organisations to adopt relational and inclusive approaches to managing external professionals and for IPros to develop identity strategies and client relationships that support positive work outcomes. Although not the mainly focus, the thesis also highlights the role of institutional and social supports in reducing precarity and enhancing the carer development of independent work.

Finally, this thesis provides a timely and detailed examination of IPros' work and career experiences. It also provides the theoretical and empirical evidence for future research seeking to better understand the paradoxes, identities, and organisational support of IPros in

rapidly evolving labour markets. By deepening our knowledge of this under-explored group, the thesis contributes to the development of more effective management practices and more sustainable career opportunities for IPros in further research.

References

- Abele, A. E., & Spurk, D. (2009). The longitudinal impact of self-efficacy and career goals on objective and subjective career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 74(1), 53–62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.10.005>
- Adisa, T. A., Antonacopoulou, E., Beauregard, T. A., Dickmann, M., & Adekoya, O. D. (2022). Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on Employees' Boundary Management and Work–Life Balance. *British Journal of Management*, 33(4), 1694–1709. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12643>
- Ainsworth, S., & Purss, A. (2009). Same time, next year?: Human resource management and seasonal workers. *Personnel Review*, 38(3), 217–235. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480910943304>
- Afshari, L., Young, S., Gibson, P., & Karimi, L. (2019). Organisational commitment: Exploring the role of identity. *Personnel Review*, 49(3), 774–790. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-04-2019-0148>
- Akkermans, J., & Kubasch, S. (2017). #Trending topics in careers: A review and future research agenda. *Career Development International*, 22(6), 586–627. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-08-2017-0143>
- Al Harbi, J. A., Alarifi, S., & Mosbah, A. (2019). Transformation leadership and creativity: Effects of employees psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation. *Personnel Review*, 48(5), 1082–1099. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-11-2017-0354>
- Albert, S., & Whetten, D. A. (1985). Organisational identity. *Research in Organisational Behavior*, 7, 263–295.
- Alberti, G., Bessa, I., Hardy, K., Trappmann, V., & Umney, C. (2018). In, Against and Beyond Precarity: Work in Insecure Times. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32(3), 447–457. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017018762088>

- Alfes, K., Shantz, A. D., Truss, C., & Soane, E. C. (2013). The link between perceived human resource management practices, engagement and employee behaviour: A moderated mediation model. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(2), 330–351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.679950>
- Allan, B. A., Autin, K. L., & Wilkins-Yel, K. G. (2021). Precarious work in the 21st century: A psychological perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 126, 103491. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103491>
- Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1990). The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organisation. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8325.1990.tb00506.x>
- Anderson, T., & Bidwell, M. (2019). Outside Insiders: Understanding the Role of Contracting in the Careers of Managerial Workers. *Organisation Science*, 30(5), 1000–1029. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2018.1275>
- Annan-Diab, F., & Filippaios, F. (2017). Multinational Firms' Motivations and Foreign Direct Investment Decisions: An Analysis of the Software and IT and Financial Services Sectors in the Irish Context. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 59(6), 739–755. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.21896>
- Annink, A. (2017). From social support to capabilities for the work–life balance of independent professionals. *Journal of Management & Organisation*, 23(2), 258–276. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2016.53>
- Annink, A., & Den Dulk, L. (2012). Autonomy: The panacea for self-employed women's work-life balance? *Community, Work & Family*, 15(4), 383–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2012.723901>
- Antoniou, A. -S., Polychroni, F., & Vlachakis, A. -N. (2006). Gender and age differences in occupational stress and professional burnout between primary and high-school

- teachers in Greece. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21(7), 682–690.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940610690213>
- Anwar, M. A., & Graham, M. (2021). Between a rock and a hard place: Freedom, flexibility, precarity and vulnerability in the gig economy in Africa. *Competition & Change*, 25(2), 237–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024529420914473>
- Apitzsch, B., Wilkesmann, M., Ruiner, C., Bassiouny, M., Ehlen, R., & Schulz, L. (2023). Labour market collectivism: New solidarities of highly skilled freelance workers in medicine, IT and the film industry. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 44(4), 1149–1175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X221120534>
- Aronsson, G. (1999). CONTINGENT WORKERS AND HEALTH AND SAFETY. *Work, Employment and Society*, 13(3), 439–459.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/09500179922118024>
- Arthur, M. B., Khapova, S. N., & Wilderom, C. P. M. (2005). Career success in a boundaryless career world. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 26(2), 177–202.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.290>
- Arvidsson, A., Malossi, G., & Naro, S. (2010). Passionate Work? Labour Conditions in the Milan Fashion Industry. *Journal for Cultural Research*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14797581003791503>
- Ashford, S. J., Caza, B. B., & Reid, E. M. (2018). From surviving to thriving in the gig economy: A research agenda for individuals in the new world of work. *Research in Organisational Behavior*, 38, 23–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2018.11.001>
- Ashford, S. J., George, E., & Blatt, R. (2007). 2 Old Assumptions, New Work. *Academy of Management Annals*, 1(1), 65–117. <https://doi.org/10.5465/078559807>
- Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S. H., & Corley, K. G. (2008). Identification in Organisations: An Examination of Four Fundamental Questions. *Journal of Management*, 34(3), 325–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206308316059>

- Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a Day's Work: Boundaries and Micro Role Transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(3), 472–491.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.3363315>
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social Identity Theory and the Organisation. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(1), 20–39. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258189>
- Auer, J. C., Kao, C., Hemphill, L., Johnston, E. W., & Teasley, S. D. (2014). The uncertainty challenge of contingent collaboration. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 24(4), 531–547. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12045>
- Augustsson, G. (2016). The client company marginally utilises the knowledge of highly skilled temporary staff. *Journal of Education and Work*, 29(5), 519–539.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2014.997681>
- Baker, D. T., & Kelan, E. K. (2018a). HRM practices to diversity management: Individualization, precariousness and precarity. In *Human Resource Management* (2nd edn). Routledge.
- Ballas, L., Schuster, T., & Pflaum, A. (2024). Unravelling psychological contracts in a digital age of work: A systematic literature review. *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 33(5), 614–631.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2024.2341821>
- Bamber, G. J., Bartram, T., & Stanton, P. (2017). HRM and workplace innovations: Formulating research questions. *Personnel Review*, 46(7), 1216–1227.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2017-0292>
- Barber, L. K., Kuykendall, L. E., & Santuzzi, A. M. (2023). How managers can reduce “always on” work stress in teams: An optimal work availability framework. *Organisational Dynamics*, 52(3), 100992.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2023.100992>

- Barley, S. R., Bechky, B. A., & Milliken, F. J. (2017). THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK: CAREERS, IDENTITIES, AND WORK LIVES IN THE 21ST CENTURY. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 3(2), 111–115.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2017.0034>
- Barley, S. R., & Kunda, G. (2006). Contracting: A New Form of Professional Practice. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 20(1), 45–66.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2006.19873409>
- Barnett, B. R., & Bradley, L. (n.d.). The impact of organisational support for career development on career satisfaction. 2007.
- Bartel, C. A., Wrzesniewski, A., & Wiesenfeld, B. M. (2012). Knowing Where You Stand: Physical Isolation, Perceived Respect, and Organisational Identification Among Virtual Employees. *Organisation Science*, 23(3), 743–757.
<https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1110.0661>
- Beard, K. M., & Edwards, J. R. (1995). Employees at Risk: Contingent Work and the Psychological Experience of Contingent Workers. *Journal of Organisational Behavior (1986-1998)*, 109.
- Beck, T. (2003). Financial Dependence and International Trade. *Review of International Economics*, 11(2), 296–316. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9396.00384>
- Beck, U. (2014). *The Brave New World of Work*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Beech, N., Gilmore, C., Hibbert, P., & Ybema, S. (2016). Identity-in-the-work and musicians' struggles: The production of self-questioning identity work. *Work, Employment and Society*, 30(3), 506–522.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017015620767>
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2), 107–128.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001>

- Bellesia, F., Mattarelli, E., Bertolotti, F., & Sobrero, M. (2019). Platforms as entrepreneurial incubators? How online labor markets shape work identity. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 34(4), 246–268. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-06-2018-0269>
- Benson, A., Sojourner, A., & Umyarov, A. (2020). Can Reputation Discipline the Gig Economy? Experimental Evidence from an Online Labor Market. *Management Science*, 66(5), 1802–1825. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2019.3303>
- Bentler, P. M. (1990). Comparative fit indexes in structural models. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(2), 238–246. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.107.2.238>
- Bidwell, M. (2009). Do Peripheral Workers Do Peripheral Work? Comparing the Use of Highly Skilled Contractors and Regular Employees. *ILR Review*, 62(2), 200–225. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001979390906200204>
- Bidwell, M. J., & Briscoe, F. (2009). Who Contracts? Determinants of the Decision to Work as an Independent contractor among Information Technology Workers. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(6), 1148–1168. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.47084649>
- Blatt, R. (2008). Organisational Citizenship Behavior of Temporary Knowledge Employees. *Organisation Studies*, 29(6), 849–866. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840608088704>
- Blau, P. M. (1964). Justice in social exchange. *Sociological inquiry*, 34(2).
- Bloom, N. (2014). Fluctuations in Uncertainty. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 28(2), 153–176. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.28.2.153>
- Boehm, S. A., Kunze, F., & Bruch, H. (2014). Spotlight on Age-Diversity Climate: The Impact of Age-Inclusive HR Practices on Firm-Level Outcomes. *Personnel Psychology*, 67(3), 667–704. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12047>

- Boekhorst, J. A. (2015). The role of authentic leadership in fostering workplace inclusion: A social information processing perspective. *Human Resource Management*, 54(2), 241-264.
- Bögenhold, D., Heinonen, J., & Akola, E. (2014). Entrepreneurship and Independent Professionals: Social and Economic Logics. *International Advances in Economic Research*, 20(3), 295–310. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11294-014-9474-z>
- Boon, C., Den Hartog, D. N., Boselie, P., & Paauwe, J. (2011). The relationship between perceptions of HR practices and employee outcomes: Examining the role of person–organisation and person–job fit. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(1), 138–162.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.538978>
- Borghi, P., Cavalca, G., & Fellini, I. (2016). Dimensions of precariousness: Independent professionals between market risks and entrapment in poor occupational careers. *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation*, 10(2), 50–67.
<https://doi.org/10.13169/workorglaboglob.10.2.0050>
- Borghouts-van de Pas, I., & Freese, C. (2017). Inclusive HRM and employment security for disabled people: An interdisciplinary approach. *E-Journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies*, 6(1), 9-33.
- Bouncken, R. B., & Reuschl, A. J. (2018). Coworking-spaces: How a phenomenon of the sharing economy builds a novel trend for the workplace and for entrepreneurship. *Review of Managerial Science*, 12(1), 317–334. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-016-0215-y>
- Boussebaa, M., & Morgan, G. (2008). Managing talent across national borders: The challenges faced by an international retail group. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, 4(1), 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17422040810849749>

- Bratton, J., & Gold, J. (2001). *Human Resource Management: Theory and Practice*. Psychology Press.
- Breslin, D., & Wood, G. (2016). Rule breaking in social care: Hierarchy, contentiousness and informal rules. *Work, Employment and Society*, 30(5), 750–765.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017015595956>
- Brown, A. D. (2015). Identities and Identity Work in Organisations. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 17(1), 20–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12035>
- Brown, A. D., & Humphreys, M. (2006). Organisational Identity and Place: A Discursive Exploration of Hegemony and Resistance. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(2), 231–257. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00589.x>
- Brown, R. (2000). Social identity theory: Past achievements, current problems and future challenges. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 30(6), 745–778.
[https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-0992\(200011/12\)30:6%253C745::AID-EJSP24%253E3.0.CO;2-O](https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-0992(200011/12)30:6%253C745::AID-EJSP24%253E3.0.CO;2-O)
- Bryant, M., & McKeown, T. (2016). Experts, outsiders or strangers? The self-positioning of highly skilled contractors. *Journal of Management & Organisation*, 22(3), 388–403. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2015.41>
- Budd, J. W., & Bhawe, D. P. (2019). The Employment Relationship: Key Elements, Alternative Frames of Reference, and Implications for HRM. In A. Wilkinson, N. Bacon, S. Snell, & D. Lepak, *The SAGE Handbook of Human Resource Management* (pp. 41–64). SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529714852.n4>
- Buengeler, C., Leroy, H., & De Stobbeleir, K. (2018). How leaders shape the impact of HR's diversity practices on employee inclusion. *Human Resource Management Review*, 28(3), 289–303. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.02.005>

- Bunders, D. J., & De Moor, T. (2024). Paradoxical Tensions as a Double-Edged Sword: Analysing the Development of Platform Cooperatives in the European Gig Economy. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 33(4), 366–382.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10564926231202422>
- Burbach, R., & Royle, T. (2010). Talent on demand?: Talent management in the German and Irish subsidiaries of a US multinational corporation. *Personnel Review*, 39(4), 414–431. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481011045399>
- Burgess, J., & Connell, J. (2006). Temporary work and human resources management: Issues, challenges and responses. *Personnel Review*, 35(2), 129–140.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480610645786>
- Burke, A., & Cowling, M. (2015). [PDF] *The Use and Value of Freelancers: The Perspective of Managers* | Semantic Scholar.
<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Use-and-Value-of-Freelancers%3A-The-Perspective-Burke-Cowling/c4b0d1698c7d666abd17e81f0358e4adf9584d52>
- Burke, A., & Cowling, M. (2020a). On the critical role of freelancers in agile economies. *Small Business Economics*, 55(2), 393–398. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00240-y>
- Burke, A., & Cowling, M. (2020b). The relationship between freelance workforce intensity, business performance and job creation. *Small Business Economics*, 55(2), 399–413. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00241-x>
- Burke, A., & Cowling, M. (2020c). The role of freelancers in entrepreneurship and small business. *Small Business Economics*, 55(2), 389–392.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00239-5>
- Burke, A., Fu, N., Sheehan, J., Penney, G., & Kapoor, H. (2025). *Ireland's Project Economy 2025: A Barometer of Independent Professionals, Contractors and Solo Self-Employed*. Dublin: Trinity College Dublin. <https://doi.org/10.25546/110827>

- Burke, A., Fu, N., Sun, Y., & Sheehan, J. (2022). *Ireland's Project Economy 2022: A Barometer of Independent Professionals, Contractors, and Solo Self-Employed*. Trinity College Dublin. <https://doi.org/10.25546/98363>
- Burke, A., Lyalkov, S., Millán, A., Millán, J. M., & Van Stel, A. (2021). How do country R&D change the allocation of self-employment across different types? *Small Business Economics*, 56(2), 695–721. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00196-z>
- Burke, A., Zawwar, I., & Hussels, S. (2020a). Do freelance independent contractors promote entrepreneurship? *Small Business Economics*, 55(2), 415–427. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00242-w>
- Burtch, G., Carnahan, S., & Greenwood, B. N. (2018). Can You Gig It? An Empirical Examination of the Gig Economy and Entrepreneurial Activity. *Management Science*, 64(12), 5497–5520. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2017.2916>
- Busch, C. (2024). Towards a Theory of Serendipity: A Systematic Review and Conceptualization. *Journal of Management Studies*, 61(3), 1110–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12890>
- Cameron, A. (2000). The hidden organisational costs of using non-standard employment. *Personnel Review*, 29(2), 188–206. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480010295989>
- Canrinus, E. T., Helms-Lorenz, M., Beijgaard, D., Buitink, J., & Hofman, A. (2012). Self-efficacy, job satisfaction, motivation and commitment: Exploring the relationships between indicators of teachers' professional identity. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 27(1), 115–132. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-011-0069-2>
- Cappelli, P., & Keller, J. (2013a). Classifying Work in the New Economy. *Academy of Management Review*, 38(4), 575–596. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2011.0302>

- Castleberry, A., & Nolen, A. (2018). Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds? *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, 10(6), 807–815.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019>
- Caza, B. B., Moss, S., & Vough, H. (2018). From Synchronizing to Harmonizing: The Process of Authenticating Multiple Work Identities. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 63(4), 703–745. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839217733972>
- Caza, B. B., Reid, E. M., Ashford, S. J., & Granger, S. (2022). Working on my own: Measuring the challenges of gig work. *Human Relations*, 75(11), 2122–2159.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267211030098>
- Chadwick, C., & Flinchbaugh, C. (2016). The Effects of Part-Time Workers on Establishment Financial Performance. *Journal of Management*, 42(6), 1635–1662.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313511116>
- Chambel, M. J., Sobral, F., Espada, M., & Curral, L. (2015). Training, exhaustion, and commitment of temporary agency workers: A test of employability perceptions. *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1359432X.2013.849246>
- Chan, X. W., & Hutchings, K. (2025). Exploring the careers of women with disabilities: a systematic review and implications for human resource management. *Personnel Review*, 54(5), 1202-1251.
- Chang, E. (2005). Employees' overall perception of HRM effectiveness. *Human Relations*, 58(4), 523–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705055037>
- Choi, Y. R., & Shepherd, D. A. (2004). Entrepreneurs' Decisions to Exploit Opportunities. *Journal of Management*, 30(3), 377–395. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2003.04.002>
- Clandinin, D. J., Connelly, F. M., & Bradley, J. G. (1999). [Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice]. In *McGill Journal of Education* (Vol. 34,

Issue 2, pp. 189–191). McGill Journal of Education.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/202719940/abstract/AB80429405AC4250PQ/1>

- Clarke, M., Hyde, A., & Drennan, J. (2013). Professional Identity in Higher Education. In B. M. Kehm & U. Teichler (Eds), *The Academic Profession in Europe: New Tasks and New Challenges* (pp. 7–21). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4614-5_2
- Cloutier, C., & Ravasi, D. (2020). Identity Trajectories: Explaining Long-Term Patterns of Continuity and Change in Organisational Identities. *Academy of Management Journal*, 63(4), 1196–1235. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2017.1051>
- Collison, P., Brennan, L., & Rios-Morales, R. (2017). Attracting Chinese Foreign Direct Investment to Small, Developed Economies: The Case of Ireland. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 59(3), 401–419. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.21894>
- Connelly, C. E., & Gallagher, D. G. (2004). Emerging Trends in Contingent Work Research. *Journal of Management*, 30(6), 959–983. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2004.06.008>
- Connelly, C. E., & Gallagher, D. G. (2006). Independent and dependent contracting: Meaning and implications. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16(2), 95–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2006.03.008>
- Conway, E., Fu, N., Monks, K., Alfes, K., & Bailey, C. (2016). Demands or Resources? The Relationship Between HR Practices, Employee Engagement, and Emotional Exhaustion Within a Hybrid Model of Employment Relations. *Human Resource Management*, 55(5), 901–917. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21691>
- Cook, K. S., Cheshire, C., Rice, E. R., & Nakagawa, S. (2013). Social exchange theory. In *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 61–88). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

- Coyle-Shapiro, J. A.-M., & Morrow, P. C. (2006). Organisational and client commitment among contracted employees. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 68(3), 416–431. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2005.10.002>
- Cropanzano, R., Keplinger, K., Lambert, B. K., Caza, B., & Ashford, S. J. (2023). The organisational psychology of gig work: An integrative conceptual review. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 108(3), 492–519. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001029>
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of management*, 31(6), 874-900.
- Cross, D., & Swart, J. (2021). Professional Fluidity: Reconceptualising the Professional Status of Self-Employed Neo-professionals. *Organisation Studies*, 42(11), 1699–1720. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840620964985>
- Cross, D., & Swart, J. (2022). The (ir)relevance of human resource management in independent work: Challenging assumptions. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 32(1), 232–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12389>
- Cruess, S. R., Cruess, R. L., & Steinert, Y. (2019). Supporting the development of a professional identity: General principles. *Medical Teacher*, 41(6), 641–649. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1536260>
- Cui, V., Vertinsky, I., Robinson, S., & Branzei, O. (2018). Trust in the Workplace: The Role of Social Interaction Diversity in the Community and in the Workplace. *Business & Society*, 57(2), 378–412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650315611724>
- Cunha, M. P. E., Fortes, A., Gomes, E., Rego, A., & Rodrigues, F. (2019). Ambidextrous leadership, paradox and contingency: Evidence from Angola. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 30(4), 702–727. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1201125>

- D'Amours, M., & Legault, M.-J. (2013). Highly Skilled Workers and Employment Risks: Role of Institutions. *Labor Studies Journal*, 38(2), 89–109.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0160449X13495920>
- David, J. (2009). Standard skilled employees' and job applicants' behaviors in the presence of independent contractors and outsourcing arrangements. *Personnel Review*, 39(1), 62–79. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481011007869>
- Davis-Blake, A., & Uzzi, B. (1993). Determinants of Employment Externalization: A Study of Temporary Workers and Independent Contractors. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(2), 195–223. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393411>
- De Cuyper, N., & De Witte, H. (2007). Job insecurity in temporary versus permanent workers: Associations with attitudes, well-being, and behaviour. *Work & Stress*, 21(1), 65–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370701229050>
- De Stefano, V. (2016). *Introduction: Crowdsourcing, the Gig-Economy and the Law* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 2767383). Social Science Research Network.
<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2767383>
- De Vos, A., & Van der Heijden, B. I. (2017). Current thinking on contemporary careers: The key roles of sustainable HRM and sustainability of careers. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 28, 41–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.07.003>
- De Vos, A., Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., & Akkermans, J. (2020). Sustainable careers: Towards a conceptual model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 117, 103196.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.06.011>
- D'Oliveira, T. C., & Persico, L. (2023). Workplace isolation, loneliness and wellbeing at work: The mediating role of task interdependence and supportive behaviours. *Applied Ergonomics*, 106, 103894. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2022.103894>

- Donnelly, R. (2009). Career behavior in the knowledge economy: Experiences and perceptions of career mobility among management and IT consultants in the UK and the USA. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3), 319–328.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.04.005>
- Dowie, J. (2001). Decision technologies and the independent professional: The future's challenge to learning and leadership. *BMJ Quality & Safety*, 10(suppl 2), ii59–ii63.
<https://doi.org/10.1136/qhc.0100059>
- Duggan, J., Carbery, R., McDonnell, A., & Sherman, U. (2023). Algorithmic HRM control in the gig economy: The app-worker perspective. *Human Resource Management*, 62(6), 883–899. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22168>
- Duggan, J., Sherman, U., Carbery, R., & McDonnell, A. (2020). Algorithmic management and app-work in the gig economy: A research agenda for employment relations and HRM. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 30(1), 114–132.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12258>
- Edwards, J. R. (1994). The Study of Congruence in Organisational Behavior Research: Critique and a Proposed Alternative. *Organisational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 58(1), 51–100. <https://doi.org/10.1006/obhd.1994.1029>
- Edwards, J. R., & Parry, M. E. (1993). On the Use of Polynomial Regression Equations As An Alternative to Difference Scores in Organisational Research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 36(6), 1577–1613. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256822>
- Ehnert, I., Parsa, S., Roper, I., Wagner, M., & Muller-Camen, M. (2016). Reporting on sustainability and HRM: A comparative study of sustainability reporting practices by the world's largest companies. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(1), 88–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1024157>

- Ely, R. J., & Thomas, D. A. (2001). Cultural diversity at work: The effects of diversity perspectives on work group processes and outcomes. *Administrative science quarterly*, 46(2), 229-273.
- Epadmin. (2018, June 12). Contingent Workforce: Trends | What is Contract to Hire? PeopleScout RPO - Recruitment Process Outsourcing.
<https://www.peoplescout.com/insights/contingent-workforce-landscape-trends/>
- Eppler-Hattab, R. (2022). From lifelong learning to later life self-employment: A conceptual framework and an Israeli enterprise perspective. *Journal of Enterprising Communities*, 16(6), 948–966. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-01-2021-0014>
- Erdogan, B., Kraimer, M. L., & Liden, R. C. (2004). Work Value Congruence and Intrinsic Career Success: The Compensatory Roles of Leader-Member Exchange and Perceived Organisational Support. *Personnel Psychology*, 57(2), 305–332.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2004.tb02493.x>
- Evans, J. A., Kunda, G., & Barley, S. R. (2004). Beach Time, Bridge Time, and Billable Hours: The Temporal Structure of Technical Contracting. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 49(1), 1–38. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4131454>
- Evetts, J. (2011). A new professionalism? Challenges and opportunities. *Current Sociology*, 59(4), 406–422. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392111402585>
- Farmer, S. M., & Van Dyne, L. (2010). The idealized self and the situated self as predictors of employee work behaviors. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(3), 503–516. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019149>
- Field, A. (2024). *DISCOVERING STATISTICS USING BM SPSS STATISTICS*.
- Fitzgerald, A. (2020). Professional identity: A concept analysis. *Nursing Forum*, 55(3), 447–472. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12450>

- Flatøy, C. A. (2025). Free to have imbalance? Freelancers' work–life balance and the moderating role of three key work facets. *Personnel Review*, 54(4), 1066–1080.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-02-2023-0104>
- Flinchbaugh, C., Zare, M., Chadwick, C., Li, P., & Essman, S. (2020). The influence of independent contractors on organisational effectiveness: A review. *Human Resource Management Review*, 30(2), 100681.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.01.002>
- Florin, L., & Pichault, F. (2020a). Emerging Forms of Precariousness Related to Autonomy at Work: Toward an Empirical Typology. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 5, 34.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00034>
- Florin, L., & Pichault, F. (2020b). Emerging Forms of Precariousness Related to Autonomy at Work: Toward an Empirical Typology. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 5.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00034>
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3151312>
- Fraser, J., & Gold, M. (2001). 'Portfolio Workers': Autonomy and Control amongst Freelance Translators. *Work, Employment and Society*, 15(4), 679–697.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/095001701400438152>
- Frear, K. A., Paustian-Underdahl, S. C., Heggstad, E. D., & Walker, L. S. (2019). Gender and career success: A typology and analysis of dual paradigms. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 40(4), 400–416. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2338>
- Friedman, G. (2014). Workers without employers: Shadow corporations and the rise of the gig economy. *Review of Keynesian Economics*, 2(2), 171–188.
<https://doi.org/10.4337/roke.2014.02.03>

- Gallagher, D. G., & Parks, J. M. (2001). I pledge thee my troth ... contingently: Commitment and the contingent work relationship. *Human Resource Management Review*, 11(3), 181–208. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1053-4822\(00\)00048-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1053-4822(00)00048-6)
- Gandini, A. (2019). Labour process theory and the gig economy. *Human Relations*, 72(6), 1039–1056. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718790002>
- Garbarino, E., & Johnson, M. S. (1999). The Different Roles of Satisfaction, Trust, and Commitment in Customer Relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(2), 70–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299906300205>
- Gardiner, J., Stuart, M., Forde, C., Greenwood, I., MacKenzie, R., & Perrett, R. (2007). Work–life balance and older workers: Employees’ perspectives on retirement transitions following redundancy. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190601167904>
- Garrett, L. E., Spreitzer, G. M., & Bacevice, P. A. (2017). Co-constructing a Sense of Community at Work: The Emergence of Community in Coworking Spaces. *Organisation Studies*, 38(6), 821–842. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840616685354>
- Gascoigne, C., & Kelliher, C. (2018). The transition to part-time: How professionals negotiate ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deals and craft their jobs. *Human Relations*, 71(1), 103–125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726717722394>
- Gerdenitsch, C., Scheel, T. E., Andorfer, J., & Korunka, C. (2016). Coworking Spaces: A Source of Social Support for Independent Professionals. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00581>
- Ghosh, K., McDonnell, A., & Irum, A. (2024). A conceptual framework of the perceived marketability of independent professionals. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 34(1), 197–213. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12520>

- Ghosh, K., McDonnell, A., & Irum, A. (2024). *A conceptual framework of the perceived marketability of independent professionals*. May 2023, 197–213.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12520>
- Gold, M., & Fraser, J. (2002). Managing Self-management: Successful Transitions to Portfolio Careers. *Work, Employment and Society*, 16(4), 579–597.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/095001702321587370>
- Gopalakrishnan, S., & Zhang, H. (2019). Client dependence: A boon or bane for vendor innovation? A competitive mediation framework in IT outsourcing. *Journal of Business Research*, 103, 407–416. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.12.023>
- Granger, S., Barker Caza, B., Ashford, S. J., & Reid, E. M. (2022). Adapting to a jolt: A mixed methods study identifying challenges and personal resources impacting professional gig workers' well-being during COVID-19. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 138, 103784. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2022.103784>
- Gravador, L. N., & Teng-Calleja, M. (2018). Work-life balance crafting behaviors: An empirical study. *Personnel Review*, 47(4), 786–804. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-05-2016-0112>
- Greco, L. M., & Kraimer, M. L. (2020). Goal-setting in the career management process: An identity theory perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 105(1), 40–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000424>
- Greco, L. M., Porck, J. P., Walter, S. L., Scrimshire, A. J., & Zabinski, A. M. (2022). A meta-analytic review of identification at work: Relative contribution of team, organisational, and professional identification. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 107(5), 795–830. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000941>
- Greenhaus, J. H., Parasuraman, S., & Wormley, W. M. (1990a). Effects of Race on Organisational Experiences, Job Performance Evaluations, and Career Outcomes. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(1), 64–86. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256352>

- Greenhaus, J. H., Parasuraman, S., & Wormley, W. M. (1990b). Effects of Race on Organisational Experiences, Job Performance Evaluations, and Career Outcomes. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 33(1), 64–86.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/256352>
- Grey, S., & Healy, G. (2004). Women and IT contracting work—A testing process. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 19(1), 30–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-005X.2004.00126.x>
- Griep, Y., Hansen, S. D., Kraak, J. M., Sherman, U., & Bankins, S. (2025a). Sustainable human resource management: The good, the bad, and making it work. *Organisational Dynamics*, 54(2), 101112.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2024.101112>
- Griep, Y., Hansen, S. D., Kraak, J. M., Sherman, U., & Bankins, S. (2025b). Sustainable human resource management: The good, the bad, and making it work. *Organisational Dynamics*, 54(2), 101112.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2024.101112>
- Guest, D. E. (2017). Human resource management and employee well-being: Towards a new analytic framework. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 27(1), 22–38.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12139>
- Gussek, L., Grabbe, A., & Wiesche, M. (2023). Challenges of IT freelancers on digital labor platforms: A topic model approach. *Electronic Markets*, 33(1), 55.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12525-023-00675-y>
- Haan, C. T. (2002). *Statistical methods in hydrology* (2. ed). Iowa State Press.
- Haapakorpi, A. (2020). Freedom but Insecurity: The Business Consulting Profession in the Post-Industrial Service Society. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.122225>

- Haas, M. R. (2010). The Double-Edged Swords of Autonomy and External Knowledge: Analyzing Team Effectiveness in a Multinational Organisation. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 53(5), 989–1008.
- Hair, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Mena, J. A. (2012). An assessment of the use of partial least squares structural equation modeling in marketing research. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 40(3), 414–433.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-011-0261-6>
- Hall, D. T. (2002). *Careers In and Out of Organisations*. SAGE.
- Hall, D. T., & Chandler, D. E. (2005). Psychological success: When the career is a calling. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 26(2), 155–176.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.301>
- Hall, D. T., Schneider, B., & Nygren, H. T. (1970). Personal Factors in Organisational Identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 15(2), 176–190.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2391488>
- Harrington, B., & Hall, D. T. (2007). *Career Management & Work-Life Integration: Using Self-Assessment to Navigate Contemporary Careers*. SAGE.
- Harris, R. G. (2001). The knowledge-based economy: Intellectual origins and new economic perspectives. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 3(1), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2370.00052>
- Haslam, S. A., Jetten, J., O'Brien, A., & Jacobs, E. (2004). Social identity, social influence and reactions to potentially stressful tasks: Support for the self-categorization model of stress. *Stress and Health*, 20(1), 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.995>
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2002). The Dynamics of Organisational Identity. *Human Relations*, 55(8), 989–1018. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726702055008181>
- Hauff, S., Alewell, D., & Hansen, N. K. (2014). HRM systems between control and commitment: Occurrence, characteristics and effects on HRM outcomes and firm

performance. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 24(4), 424–441.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12054>

He, H., & Brown, A. D. (2013). Organisational Identity and Organisational Identification: A Review of the Literature and Suggestions for Future Research. *Group & Organisation Management*, 38(1), 3–35.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601112473815>

Hekman, D. R., Bigley, G. A., Steensma, H. K., & Hereford, J. F. (2009). Combined Effects of Organisational and Professional Identification on the Reciprocity Dynamic for Professional Employees. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 52(3), 506–526.

Hessels, J., Rietveld, C. A., & Van Der Zwan, P. (2017). Self-employment and work-related stress: The mediating role of job control and job demand. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 32(2), 178–196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2016.10.007>

Higgins, M. C., & Kram, K. E. (2001). Reconceptualizing Mentoring at Work: A Developmental Network Perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(2), 264–288. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2001.4378023>

Higgins, M. C., & Thomas, D. A. (2001). Constellations and careers: Toward understanding the effects of multiple developmental relationships. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 22(3), 223–247. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.66>

Hillage, J., & Pollard, E. (1999). *Employability: Developing a framework for policy analysis*. Dept. for Education and Employment.

Hirsh, J. B., & Kang, S. K. (2016). Mechanisms of Identity Conflict: Uncertainty, Anxiety, and the Behavioral Inhibition System. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 20(3), 223–244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868315589475>

- Hirst, G., Van Dick, R., & Van Knippenberg, D. (2009). A social identity perspective on leadership and employee creativity. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 30(7), 963–982.
- Hitt, M. A., & Ireland, R. D. (1985). Strategy, Contextual Factors, and Performance. *Human Relations*, 38(8), 793–812. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678503800807>
- Hogg, M. A., Knippenberg, D. van, & III, D. E. R. (2012). The social identity theory of leadership: Theoretical origins, research findings, and conceptual developments. *European Review of Social Psychology*.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10463283.2012.741134>
- Hogg, M. A., Terry, D. J., & White, K. M. (1995). A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58(4), 255–269. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2787127>
- Hoque, K., & Kirkpatrick, I. (2003). Non-Standard Employment in the Management and Professional Workforce: Training, Consultation and Gender Implications. *Work, Employment and Society*, 17(4), 667–689.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017003174004>
- Horton, K. E., McClelland, C. R., & Griffin, M. A. (2014). Defined by our hierarchy? How hierarchical positions shape our identifications and well-being at work. *Human Relations*, 67(10), 1167–1188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713516374>
- Hotho, S. (2008). Professional identity – product of structure, product of choice: Linking changing professional identity and changing professions. *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 21(6), 721–742.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09534810810915745>
- Hotho, S., & Champion, K. (2011). Small businesses in the new creative industries: Innovation as a people management challenge. *Management Decision*, 49(1), 29–54. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741111094428>

How many gig workers are there? (2025). GigEconomyData.Org.

<https://gigeconomydata.org/basics/how-many-gig-workers-are-there>

Hundley, G. (2001). Why and When Are the Self-Employed More Satisfied with Their Work? *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 40(2), 293–316.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/0019-8676.00209>

Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional Selves: Experimenting with Image and Identity in Professional Adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4), 764–791.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2667055>

Jabagi, N., Croteau, A.-M., Audebrand, L. K., & Marsan, J. (2019). Gig-workers' motivation: Thinking beyond carrots and sticks. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 34(4), 192–213. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-06-2018-0255>

Jackson, S. E., & Schuler, R. S. (1995). *UNDERSTANDING HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENTS*.

Jawahar, I. M., Stone, T. H., & Kisamore, J. L. (2007). Role conflict and burnout: The direct and moderating effects of political skill and perceived organisational support on burnout dimensions. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 14(2), 142–159. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1072-5245.14.2.142>

Johnson, D., & Lake, C. J. (2019). Contingent worker monetary influence, work attitudes and behavior. *Personnel Review*, 48(7), 1669–1684. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-05-2018-0170>

Johnson, M., Cowin, L. s., Wilson, I., & Young, H. (2012). Professional identity and nursing: Contemporary theoretical developments and future research challenges. *International Nursing Review*, 59(4), 562–569. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1466-7657.2012.01013.x>

Johnson, M. D., Morgeson, F. P., Ilgen, D. R., Meyer, C. J., & Lloyd, J. W. (2006).

Multiple professional identities: Examining differences in identification across work-related targets. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(2), 498–506.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.2.498>

Joseph, J., Maon, F., Uribe-Jaramillo, M. T., Katsos, J. E., & Lindgreen, A. (2025).

Business, Conflict, and Peace: A Systematic Literature Review and Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Management Studies*, 62(4), 1779–1810.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13139>

K. Smith, W., Erez, M., Jarvenpaa, S., Lewis, M. W., & Tracey, P. (2017). Adding

Complexity to Theories of Paradox, Tensions, and Dualities of Innovation and Change: Introduction to Organisation Studies Special Issue on Paradox, Tensions, and Dualities of Innovation and Change. *Organisation Studies*, 38(3–4), 303–317.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617693560>

Kabeel, A. R. A., & Mosa Eisa, S. A. E.-M. (2017). Relationship between job satisfaction

and professional identity among psychiatric nurses. *Egyptian Nursing Journal*, 14(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.4103/2090-6021.206939>

Kaine, S., & Josserand, E. (2019). The organisation and experience of work in the gig economy. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 61(4), 479–501.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185619865480>

Kalleberg, A. L. (2000). Nonstandard Employment Relations: Part-time, Temporary and

Contract Work. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(Volume 26, 2000), 341–365.

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.341>

Kalleberg, A. L. (2001). Organizing Flexibility: The Flexible Firm in a New Century.

British Journal of Industrial Relations, 39(4), 479–504.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8543.00211>

- Kalleberg, A. L. (2003). Flexible Firms and Labor Market Segmentation: Effects of Workplace Restructuring on Jobs and Workers. *Work and Occupations*, 30(2), 154–175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888403251683>
- Kalleberg, A. L. (2009). Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition. *American Sociological Review*, 74(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400101>
- Karanika-Murray, M., Duncan, N., Pontes, H. M., & Griffiths, M. D. (2015). Organisational identification, work engagement, and job satisfaction. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 30(8), 1019–1033. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-11-2013-0359>
- Katz, J. A. (1995). Modelling Entrepreneurial Career Progressions: Concepts and Considerations. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 19(2), 23–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104225879501900203>
- Kaufman, B. E., Barry, M., Wilkinson, A., & Gomez, R. (2021). Alternative balanced scorecards built from paradigm models in strategic HRM and employment/industrial relations and used to measure the state of employment relations and HR system performance across U.S. workplaces. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 31(1), 65–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12271>
- King, Z. (2004). Career self-management: Its nature, causes and consequences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65(1), 112–133. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791\(03\)00052-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791(03)00052-6)
- Kinnie, N., Purcell, J., & Adams, M. (2008). Explaining Employees' Experience of Work in Outsourced Call Centres: The Influence of Clients, Owners and Temporary Work Agencies. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 50(2), 209–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185607087898>

- Kinowska, H., & Sienkiewicz, Ł. J. (2023). Influence of algorithmic management practices on workplace well-being – evidence from European organisations. *Information Technology & People*, 36(8), 21–42. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-02-2022-0079>
- Kinsella, P., Williams, S., Scott, P., & Fontinha, R. (2021). Varieties of flexibilisation? The working lives of information and communications technology professionals in the United Kingdom and Germany. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 36(3), 409–428. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12204>
- Kitching, J., & Smallbone, D. (2012). Are freelancers a neglected form of small business? *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 19(1), 74–91. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14626001211196415>
- Kloutsiniotis, P. V., Mihail, D. M., Mylonas, N., & Pateli, A. (2022). Transformational Leadership, HRM practices and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of personal stress, anxiety, and workplace loneliness. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 102, 103177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103177>
- Knapp, M., Sawy, A., & Bögenhold, D. (n.d.). *Independent Contractors, IPros, and Freelancers: New Puzzle Pieces in a Conceptual Jungle*.
- Knapp, M., Sawy, A., & Bögenhold, D. (2021). Independent Contractors, IPros, and Freelancers: New Puzzle Pieces in a Conceptual Jungle. *International Review of Entrepreneurship*, 19(3), 333–354.
- Kornelakis, A., & Petrakaki, D. (2020). Embedding employability skills in UK higher education: Between digitalization and marketization. *Industry and Higher Education*, 34(5), 290–297. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422220902978>
- Kost, D., Fieseler, C., & Wong, S. I. (2020). Boundaryless careers in the gig economy: An oxymoron? *Human Resource Management Journal*, 30(1), 100–113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12265>

- Kraimer, M. L., Seibert, S. E., Wayne, S. J., Liden, R. C., & Bravo, J. (2011). Antecedents and outcomes of organisational support for development: The critical role of career opportunities. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96(3), 485–500.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021452>
- Kreiner, G. E., & Ashforth, B. E. (2004). Evidence toward an expanded model of organisational identification. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 25(1), 1–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.234>
- Kreiner, G. E., Hollensbe, E. C., & Sheep, M. L. (2006). Where Is the ‘Me’ among the ‘We’? Identity Work and the Search for Optimal Balance. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 49(5), 1031–1057.
- Kroon, B., & Paauwe, J. (2014). Structuration of precarious employment in economically constrained firms: The case of Dutch agriculture. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 24(1), 19–37. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12024>
- Kuhn, K. M. (2016). The Rise of the “Gig Economy” and Implications for Understanding Work and Workers. *Industrial and Organisational Psychology*, 9(1), 157–162.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2015.129>
- Kuhn, K. M., & Maleki, A. (2002). Micro-Entrepreneurs, Dependent Contractors, and Instaserfs: Understanding Online Labor Platform Workforces. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 31(3), 183–200.
- Kunda, G., Barley, S. R., & Evans, J. (n.d.). Why Do Contractors Contract? The Experience of Highly Skilled Technical Professionals in a Contingent Labor Market. 2002.
- Kunisch, S., Denyer, D., Bartunek, J. M., Menz, M., & Cardinal, L. B. (2023). Review Research as Scientific Inquiry. *Organisational Research Methods*, 26(1), 3–45.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10944281221127292>

- Lawler, E., Cammann, C., Nadler, D., & Jenkins, D. (2013). *Michigan Organisational Assessment Questionnaire* [Data set]. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t01581-000>
- Lee, B.-H., & Frenkel, S. J. (2004). Divided workers: Social relations between contract and regular workers in a Korean auto company. *Work, Employment & Society*, 18(3), 507–530.
- Lehdonvirta, V. (2018). Flexibility in the gig economy: Managing time on three online piecework platforms. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 33(1), 13–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12102>
- Leighton, P. (2015). Independent Professionals: Legal Issues and Challenges. *International Review of Entrepreneurship*, 13(2), 81–92.
- Leighton, P., & McKeown, T. (2015). The rise of independent professionals: Their challenge for management. *Small Enterprise Research*, 22(2–3), 119–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13215906.2015.1085627>
- Leisink, P., & Boxall, P. (2021). HRM and social legitimacy in the public sector. In *Research Handbook on HRM in the Public Sector* (pp. 189-201). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Lent, R. W., & Brown, S. D. (2020). Career decision making, fast and slow: Toward an integrative model of intervention for sustainable career choice. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 120, 103448. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103448>
- Lepak, D. P., Liao, H., Chung, Y., & Harden, E. E. (2006). A Conceptual Review of Human Resource Management Systems in Strategic Human Resource Management Research. In *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management* (Vol. 25, pp. 217–271). Emerald (MCB UP). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-7301\(06\)25006-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-7301(06)25006-0)

- Lepak, D. P., & Snell, S. A. (1999). The human resource architecture: Toward a theory of human capital allocation and development. *Academy of management review*, 24(1), 31-48.
- Lewis, M. W. (2000). Exploring Paradox: Toward a More Comprehensive Guide. *The Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), 760–776. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259204>
- Lewis, R. E., & Heckman, R. J. (2006). Talent management: A critical review. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16(2), 139–154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2006.03.001>
- Li, Y., Wei, F., Ren, S., & Di, Y. (2015). Locus of control, psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation relation to performance. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 30(4), 422–438. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-10-2012-0318>
- Liao, H., Toya, K., Lepak, D. P., & Hong, Y. (2009). Do they see eye to eye? Management and employee perspectives of high-performance work systems and influence processes on service quality. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(2), 371–391. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013504>
- Liu, P., Zhang, F., Liu, Y., Liu, S., & Huo, C. (2024). Enabling or burdening?—The double-edged sword impact of digital transformation on employee resilience. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 157, 108220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2024.108220>
- Lo Presti, A., Pluviano, S., & Briscoe, J. P. (2018a). Are freelancers a breed apart? The role of protean and boundaryless career attitudes in employability and career success. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 28(3), 427–442. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12188>
- Locke, E. A. (1969). What is job satisfaction? *Organisational Behavior and Human Performance*, 4(4), 309–336. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(69\)90013-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(69)90013-0)

- Lu, Y., Zhang, M. M., Yang, M. M., & Wang, Y. (2023). Sustainable human resource management practices, employee resilience, and employee outcomes: Toward common good values. *Human Resource Management*, 62(3), 331–353.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22153>
- Luis Fragoso, J., & Kleiner, B. H. (2005). How to distinguish between independent contractors and employees. *Management Research News*, 28(2–3), 136–149.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/01409170510785183>
- Maanen, J. V., & Barley, S. (1983). *Cultural Organisation: Fragments of a Theory*, (No. TR25ONR). Article TR25ONR. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/html/tr/ADA141412/>
- Mackenzie, E., & McKinlay, A. (2021). Hope labour and the psychic life of cultural work. *Human Relations*, 74(11), 1841–1863. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726720940777>
- Mael, F., & Ashforth, B. E. (1992). Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organisational identification. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 13(2), 103–123. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030130202>
- Magee, J. C., & Galinsky, A. D. (2008). 8 Social Hierarchy: The Self-Reinforcing Nature of Power and Status. *Academy of Management Annals*, 2(1), 351–398.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520802211628>
- Mallon, M., & Duberley, J. (2000). Managers and professionals in the contingent workforce. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 10(1), 33–47.
- Mann, S., & Holdsworth, L. (2003). The psychological impact of teleworking: Stress, emotions and health. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 18(3), 196–211.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-005X.00121>
- Mao, J., & Shen, Y. (2020). Identity as career capital: Enhancing employability in the creative industries and beyond. *Career Development International*, 25(2), 186–203.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-01-2019-0025>

- Marrone, J. A., Tesluk, P. E., & Carson, J. B. (2007). A Multilevel Investigation of Antecedents and Consequences of Team Member Boundary-Spanning Behavior. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 50(6), 1423–1439.
- Marshall, G. W., Michaels, C. E., & Mulki, J. P. (2007). Workplace isolation: Exploring the construct and its measurement. *Psychology & Marketing*, 24(3), 195–223.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20158>
- Martínez-Sánchez, A., Vela-Jiménez, M.-J., Pérez-Pérez, M., & de-Luis-Carnicer, P. (2011). The Dynamics of Labour Flexibility: Relationships between Employment Type and Innovativeness. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(4), 715–736.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00935.x>
- Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). Maslach Burnout Inventory: Third edition. In *Evaluating stress: A book of resources* (pp. 191–218). Scarecrow Education.
- McArdle, S., Waters, L., Briscoe, J. P., & Hall, D. T. (Tim). (2007). Employability during unemployment: Adaptability, career identity and human and social capital. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 71(2), 247–264. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2007.06.003>
- McDonald, K. S., & Hite, L. M. (2018). *Conceptualizing and Creating Sustainable Careers*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484318796318>
- McKeown, T. (2015). What's in a Name? The Value of 'Entrepreneurs' Compared to 'Self-Employed' ... But What about 'Freelancing' or 'IPro'? *International Review of Entrepreneurship*, 13(2).
- McKeown, T. (2016). A consilience framework: Revealing hidden features of the independent contractor. *Journal of Management & Organisation*, 22(6), 779–796.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2016.44>

- McKeown, T. (2018). Working as an Independent Professional: Career Choice or the Only Option? In *Work, Working and Work Relationships in a Changing World*. Routledge.
- McKeown, T., & Cochrane, R. (2017). Independent professionals and the potential for HRM innovation. *Personnel Review*, 46(7), 1414–1433.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-09-2016-0256>
- McKeown, T., & Leighton, P. (2016). Working as a self-employed professional, freelancer, contractor, consultant ... issues, questions ... and solutions? *Journal of Management & Organisation*, 22(6), 751–755.
- McKeown, T., & Lindorff, M. (2011). Temporary Staff, Contractors, and Volunteers: The Hidden Workforce in Victorian Local Government. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 70(2), 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8500.2011.00722.x>
- McKeown, T., & Pichault, F. (2021). Independent professionals as talent: Evidence from individual views of working as a contractor. *Human Resource Management*, 60(2), 313–328. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22045>
- Mcwhirter, E. H., & Mcwha-hermann, I. (2021). Social justice and career development: Progress , problems , *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 126(April), 103492.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103492>
- Meacham, H., Cavanagh, J., Shaw, A., & Bartram, T. (2017). HRM practices that support the employment and social inclusion of workers with an intellectual disability. *Personnel Review*, 46(8), 1475–1492. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-05-2016-0105>
- Meijerink, J., & Keegan, A. (2019). Conceptualizing human resource management in the gig economy: Toward a platform ecosystem perspective. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 34(4), 214–232. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-07-2018-0277>
- Mesmer-Magnus, J. R., Asencio, R., Seely, P. W., & DeChurch, L. A. (2018). How Organisational Identity Affects Team Functioning: The Identity Instrumentality

Hypothesis. *Journal of Management*, 44(4), 1530–1550.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315614370>

Meyer, J. P., Becker, T. E., & van Dick, R. (2006). Social identities and commitments at work: Toward an integrative model. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 27(5), 665–683. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.383>

Midtsundstad, T. I. (2011). Inclusive workplaces and older employees: An analysis of companies' investment in retaining senior workers. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(6), 1277–1293.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.559099>

Millán, J. M., Lyalkov, S., Burke, A., Millán, A., & Van Stel, A. (2021). 'Digital divide' among European entrepreneurs: Which types benefit most from ICT implementation? *Journal of Business Research*, 125, 533–547.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.10.034>

Miller, A., & Vanhove, A. (2024). Experiencing the pull and push: Influences on independent contractor motivation and job satisfaction. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 39(5), 555–569. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-02-2023-0081>

Miron-Spektor, E., Erez, M., & Naveh, E. (2011). The Effect of Conformist and Attentive-to-Detail Members on Team Innovation: Reconciling the Innovation Paradox. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 54(4), 740–760.

Moore, K., McDonald, P., & Bartlett, J. (2017). The social legitimacy of disability inclusive human resource practices: The case of a large retail organisation. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 27(4), 514–529. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12129>

Mowery, D., & Rosenberg, N. (1979). The influence of market demand upon innovation: A critical review of some recent empirical studies. *Research Policy*, 8(2), 102–153. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-7333\(79\)90019-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-7333(79)90019-2)

- Muehlberger, U., & Bertolini, S. (2008). The organisational governance of work relationships between employment and self-employment. *Socio-Economic Review*, 6(3), 449–472. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwm026>
- Murgia, A., & Pulignano, V. (2021). Neither precarious nor entrepreneur: The subjective experience of hybrid self-employed workers. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 42(4), 1351–1377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X19873966>
- Narayanan, V. K., Zane, L. J., & Kemmerer, B. (2011). The Cognitive Perspective in Strategy: An Integrative Review. *Journal of Management*, 37(1), 305–351. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310383986>
- Nemkova, E., Demirel, P., & Baines, L. (2019). In search of meaningful work on digital freelancing platforms: The case of design professionals. *New Technology, Work and*
- Ng, T. W. H., Eby, L. T., Sorensen, K. L., & Feldman, D. C. (2005). Predictors of Objective and Subjective Career Success: A Meta-Analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 58(2), 367–408. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2005.00515.x>
- Ng, T. W. H., & Feldman, D. C. (2014). Subjective career success: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 85(2), 169–179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2014.06.001>
- Nishii, L. H. (2013). The Benefits of Climate for Inclusion for Gender-Diverse Groups. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 56(6), 1754–1774.
- Öhlén, J., & Segesten, K. (1998). The professional identity of the nurse: Concept analysis and development. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 28(4), 720–727. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1998.00704.x>
- O'Reilly, C. A., & Chatman, J. (1986). Organisational commitment and psychological attachment: The effects of compliance, identification, and internalization on

prosocial behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(3), 492–499.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.71.3.492>

Osnowitz, D. (2006). Occupational Networking as Normative Control: Collegial Exchange Among Contract Professionals. *Work and Occupations*, 33(1), 12–41.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888405280160>

Osnowitz, D., & Henson, K. D. (2016). Leveraging Limits for Contract Professionals: Boundary Work and Control of Working Time. *Work and Occupations*, 43(3), 326–360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888416642599>

Ostermeier, K., Anzollitto, P., Cooper, D., & Hancock, J. (2023). When identities collide: Organisational and professional identity conflict and employee outcomes. *Management Decision*, 61(9), 2493–2511. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-07-2022-0971>

Panteli, N., & Urquhart, C. (2022). Job crafting for female contractors in a male-dominated profession. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 37(1), 102–123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12210>

Parker, S. C. (2010). CONTRACTING OUT, PUBLIC POLICY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 57(2), 119–144. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9485.2010.00510.x>

Peel, S., & Inkson, K. (2004). Contracting and careers; choosing between self and organisational employment. *Career Development International*, 9(6), 542–558. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430410559142>

Peeters, M. C. W., Plomp, J., Peeters, M. C. W., & Plomp, J. (2022). For Better or for Worse: The Impact of Workplace Automation on Work Characteristics and Employee Well-Being. In *Digital Transformation—Towards New Frontiers and Business Opportunities*. IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.102980>

- Petriglieri, G., Ashford, S. J., & Wrzesniewski, A. (2019). Agony and Ecstasy in the Gig Economy: Cultivating Holding Environments for Precarious and Personalized Work Identities. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 64(1), 124–170.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839218759646>
- Pichault, F., Fatien Diochon, P., & Nizet, J. (2020). Autonomy of independent professionals: A political process perspective. *European Management Journal*, 38(4), 623–633. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2019.12.007>
- Pichault, F., & McKeown, T. (2019). Autonomy at work in the gig economy: Analysing work status, work content and working conditions of independent professionals. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 34(1), 59–72.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12132>
- Pless, N., & Maak, T. (2004). Building an inclusive diversity culture: Principles, processes and practice. *Journal of business ethics*, 54(2), 129-147.
- Polivka, A. E. (1996). Contingent and Alternative Work Arrangements, Defined. *Monthly Labor Review*, 119(10), 3–9.
- Polivka, A. E., & Nardone, T. (1989). On the Definition of Contingent Work The Quality of Jobs. *Monthly Labor Review*, 112(12), 9–16.
- Poole, M. S., & van de Ven, A. H. (1989). Using Paradox to Build Management and Organisation Theories. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 562–578.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/258559>
- Post, C., Sarala, R., Gatrell, C., & Prescott, J. E. (2020). Advancing Theory with Review Articles. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(2), 351–376.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12549>
- Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K. W., & Kaufmann, J. B. (2006). Constructing Professional Identity: The Role of Work and Identity Learning Cycles in the Customization of

Identity among Medical Residents. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 49(2), 235–262.

Pulignano, V., Grimshaw, D., Domecka, M., & Vermeerbergen, L. (2024). Why does unpaid labour vary among digital labour platforms? Exploring socio-technical platform regimes of worker autonomy. *Human Relations*, 77(9), 1243–1271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267231179901>

Pulignano, V., Muszyński, K., & Tapia, M. (2024). Variations of Freelancers’ “Effort-Bargain” Experiences in Platform Work: The Role of Skills. *ILR Review*, 77(5), 742–769. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00197939241268165>

Purvanova, R. K., & Muros, J. P. (2010). Gender differences in burnout: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77(2), 168–185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.04.006>

Putnam, L. L., Myers, K. K., & Gailliard, B. M. (2014). Examining the tensions in workplace flexibility and exploring options for new directions. *Human Relations*, 67(4), 413–440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713495704>

Randel, A. E., Galvin, B. M., Shore, L. M., Ehrhart, K. H., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., & Kedharnath, U. (2018). Inclusive leadership: Realizing positive outcomes through belongingness and being valued for uniqueness. *Human resource management review*, 28(2), 190-203.

Ravasi, D., & Schultz, M. (2006). Responding to Organisational Identity Threats: Exploring the Role of Organisational Culture. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 49(3), 433–458.

Ravenelle, A. (2019). “We’re not uber:” control, autonomy, and entrepreneurship in the gig economy. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 34. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-06-2018-0256>

- Ray, T. K., Kenigsberg, T. A., & Pana-Cryan, R. (2017). Employment arrangement, job stress, and health-related quality of life. *Safety Science*, 100, 46–56.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2017.05.003>
- Redpath, L., Hurst, D., & Devine, K. (2008). Knowledge workers, managers, and contingent employment relationships. *Personnel Review*, 38(1), 74–89.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480910920723>
- Ren, S., Cooke, F. L., Stahl, G. K., Fan, D., & Timming, A. R. (2023). Advancing the sustainability agenda through strategic human resource management: Insights and suggestions for future research. *Human Resource Management*, 62(3), 251–265.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22169>
- Retkowsky, J., Nijs, S., Akkermans, J., Jansen, P., & Khapova, S. N. (2023). Toward a sustainable career perspective on contingent work: A critical review and a research agenda. *Career Development International*, 28(1), 1–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-06-2022-0181>
- Retkowsky, J., Nijs, S., Akkermans, J., Khapova, S., & Jansen, P. (2023). Seeking stability in unstable employment: An exploratory study of temporary agency workers' career self-management. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 143, 103877.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2023.103877>
- Roberson, Q. M. (2019). Diversity in the Workplace: A Review, Synthesis, and Future Research Agenda. *Annual Review of Organisational Psychology and Organisational Behavior*, 6(Volume 6, 2019), 69–88.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012218-015243>
- Rousseau, D. (1995). *Psychological Contracts in Organisations: Understanding Written and Unwritten Agreements*. SAGE.
- Rousseau, D. M. (1998). Why Workers Still Identify with Organisations. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 19(3), 217–233.

- Rousseau, D. M., & Libuser, C. (1997). Contingent workers in high risk environments. *California Management Review*, 39(2), 103–123.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (n.d.). *Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being*.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Sabancıogullari, S., & Dogan, S. (2015). Effects of the professional identity development programme on the professional identity, job satisfaction and burnout levels of nurses: A pilot study. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 21(6), 847–857. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijn.12330>
- Sachs, J. (2001). Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(2), 149–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930116819>
- Saloniemi, A., & Zeytinoglu, I. U. (2007). Achieving Flexibility through Insecurity: A Comparison of Work Environments in Fixed-term and Permanent Jobs in Finland and Canada. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 13(1), 109–128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680107073971>
- Sayah, S. (2013a). Managing work–life boundaries with information and communication technologies: The case of independent contractors. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 28(3), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12016>
- Sayah, S. (2013b). Managing work–life boundaries with information and communication technologies: The case of independent contractors. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 28(3), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12016>

- Schad, J., Lewis, M. W., Raisch, S., & Smith, W. K. (2016a). Paradox Research in Management Science: Looking Back to Move Forward. *Academy of Management Annals*, 10(1), 5–64. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2016.1162422>
- Schad, J., Lewis, M. W., Raisch, S., & Smith, W. K. (2016b). Paradox Research in Management Science: Looking Back to Move Forward. *Academy of Management Annals*, 10(1), 5–64. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2016.1162422>
- Schärrer, L., & Sender, A. (2023). Boomerang independent contractors: An experimental study using a psychological contract approach. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(5), 966–986. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.2013922>
- Schwartz, D. (2018). Embedded in the Crowd: Creative Freelancers, Crowdsourced Work, and Occupational Community. *Work and Occupations*, 45(3), 247–282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888418762263>
- Shanock, L. R., Baran, B. E., Gentry, W. A., Pattison, S. C., & Heggstad, E. D. (2010). Polynomial Regression with Response Surface Analysis: A Powerful Approach for Examining Moderation and Overcoming Limitations of Difference Scores. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(4), 543–554. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9183-4>
- Shore, L. M., & Chung, B. G. (2022). Inclusive leadership: How leaders sustain or discourage work group inclusion. *Group & organisation management*, 47(4), 723–754.
- Shore, L. M., Cleveland, J. N., & Sanchez, D. (2018). Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. *Human Resource Management Review*, 28(2), 176–189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.07.003>

- Shore, L. M., Randel, A. E., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., Holcombe Ehrhart, K., & Singh, G. (2011). Inclusion and diversity in work groups: A review and model for future research. *Journal of management*, 37(4), 1262-1289.
- Signoretti, A., Pederiva, L., & Zaninotto, E. (2022). Trading-off flexibility: Contingent workers or human resource practices? A configurational approach. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 32(1), 58–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12394>
- SJ Ashford, E George, R. B. (2007). 2 old assumptions, new work: The opportunities and challenges of research on nonstandard employment. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 1(1), 65–117.
- Sjanne Marie E. van den Groenendaal, Charissa Freese, Rob F. Poell, D. T. A. M. K. (2023). Inclusive human resource management in freelancers ' employment relationships: The role of organisational needs and freelancers ' psychological contracts. December 2020, 224–240. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12432>
- Slay, H. S., & Smith, D. A. (2011). Professional identity construction: Using narrative to understand the negotiation of professional and stigmatized cultural identities. *Human Relations*, 64(1), 85–107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726710384290>
- Smidts, A., Pruyn, A. Th. H., & Van Riel, C. B. M. (2001). The Impact of Employee Communication and Perceived External Prestige On Organisational Identification. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(5), 1051–1062. <https://doi.org/10.5465/3069448>
- Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a Theory of Paradox: A Dynamic Equilibrium Model of Organizing. *The Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 381–403.

- Smith, W. K., & Tracey, P. (2016). Institutional complexity and paradox theory: Complementarities of competing demands. *Strategic Organisation*, 14(4), 455–466. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127016638565>
- Spector, P. E. (1985). Measurement of human service staff satisfaction: Development of the Job Satisfaction Survey. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 13(6), 693–713. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00929796>
- Spector, P. E. (1997). *Job Satisfaction: Application, Assessment, Causes, and Consequences*. SAGE.
- Spreitzer, G. M., Cameron, L., & Garrett, L. (2017). Alternative Work Arrangements: Two Images of the New World of Work. *Annual Review of Organisational Psychology and Organisational Behavior*, 4(1), 473–499. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113332>
- Spurk, D., & Straub, C. (2020). Flexible employment relationships and careers in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 119, 103435. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103435>
- Spurk, D., Hirschi, A., & Dries, N. (2019). Antecedents and Outcomes of Objective Versus Subjective Career Success: Competing Perspectives and Future Directions. *Journal of Management*, 45(1), 35–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318786563>
- Stankevičiūtė, Ž., & Savanevičienė, A. (2019). Can Sustainable HRM Reduce Work-Related Stress, Work-Family Conflict, and Burnout? *International Studies of Management & Organisation*, 49(1), 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2019.1565095>
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), 224–237. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870>

- Stewart, A., & Stanford, J. (2017). Regulating work in the gig economy: What are the options? *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 28(3), 420–437.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304617722461>
- Stewart, J. (2018). MNE tax strategies and Ireland. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, 14(4), 338–361. <https://doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-02-2016-0002>
- Stryker, S., & Burke, P. J. (2000). The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), 284–297. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695840>
- Su, F., Mao, J.-Y., & Jarvenpaa, S. L. (2014). How Do IT Outsourcing Vendors Respond to Shocks in Client Demand? A Resource Dependence Perspective. *Journal of Information Technology*, 29(3), 253–267. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2013.28>
- Sulbout, J., & Pichault, F. (2023). Free agents seeking for career support: Exploring the expectations of skilled contingent workers vis-à-vis labour market intermediaries. *Personnel Review*, 52(9), 2304–2321. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2021-0727>
- Sulbout, J., Pichault, F., Jemine, G., & Naedenoen, F. (2022). Are skilled contingent workers neglected? Evidence from a cross-sector multiple case study on organisational career management practices. *European Management Journal*, 40(3), 429–440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2021.07.005>
- Süß, S., & Becker, J. (2013). Competences as the foundation of employability: A qualitative study of German freelancers. *Personnel Review*, 42(2), 223–240.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481311309393>
- Süß, S., & Kleiner, M. (2010). Commitment and work-related expectations in flexible employment forms: An empirical study of German IT freelancers. *European Management Journal*, 28(1), 40–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2009.02.002>
- Sutherland, W., Jarrahi, M. H., Dunn, M., & Nelson, S. B. (2020). Work Precarity and Gig Literacies in Online Freelancing. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(3), 457–475.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017019886511>

- Sydow, J., Schreyögg, G., & Koch, J. (2009). Organisational Path Dependence: Opening the Black Box. *The Academy of Management Review*, 34(4), 689–709.
- Syrett, M. (2016). Independent professionals (IPros) and well-being: An emerging focus for research? *Journal of Management & Organisation*, 22(6), 817–825.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2016.54>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (2004). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In J. T. Jost & J. Sidanius (Eds), *Political Psychology* (0 edn, pp. 276–293). Psychology Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203505984-16>
- Tarique, I., & Schuler, R. S. (2010). Global talent management: Literature review, integrative framework, and suggestions for further research. *Journal of World Business*, 45(2), 122–133. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2009.09.019>
- Teece, D., Peteraf, M., & Leih, S. (2016). Dynamic Capabilities and Organisational Agility: Risk, Uncertainty, and Strategy in the Innovation Economy. *California Management Review*, 58(4), 13–35. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2016.58.4.13>
- Tempest, S., & Coupland, C. (2017). Lost in time and space: Temporal and spatial challenges facing older workers in a global economy from a career capital perspective. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09585192.2015.1128455>
- Thompson, C. A., & Prottas, D. J. (2006). Relationships among organisational family support, job autonomy, perceived control, and employee well-being. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 11(1), 100–118. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.10.4.100>
- Thornton, P. H., Ocasio, W., & Lounsbury, M. (2012). *The Institutional Logics Perspective: A New Approach to Culture, Structure, and Process*. OUP Oxford.

- Tims, M., Bakker, A. B., & Derks, D. (2013). The impact of job crafting on job demands, job resources, and well-being. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 18*(2), 230–240. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032141>
- Tomlinson, J., Baird, M., Berg, P., & Cooper, R. (2018). Flexible careers across the life course: Advancing theory, research and practice. *Human Relations, 71*(1), 4–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726717733313>
- Toth, I., Heinänen, S., & Blomqvist, K. (2020). Freelancing on digital work platforms – roles of virtual community trust and work engagement on person–job fit. *VINE Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems, 50*(4), 553–567. <https://doi.org/10.1108/VJKMS-12-2018-0124>
- Tóth, Z., Nemkova, E., Hizsák, G., & Naudé, P. (2022). Social capital creation on professional sharing economy platforms: The problems of rating dependency and the non-transferability of social capital. *Journal of Business Research, 144*, 450–460. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.01.090>
- Tremblay, D.-G., & Genin, E. (2010). IT self-employed workers between constraint and flexibility. *New Technology, Work and Employment, 25*(1), 34–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-005X.2009.00237.x>
- Triana, M. D. C., Gu, P., Chapa, O., Richard, O., & Colella, A. (2021). Sixty years of discrimination and diversity research in human resource management: A review with suggestions for future research directions. *Human Resource Management, 60*(1), 145–204.
- Turner, J. C., Brown, R. J., & Tajfel, H. (1979). Social comparison and group interest in ingroup favouritism. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 9*(2), 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420090207>

- Vaiman, V., Cascio, W. F., Collings, D. G., & Swider, B. W. (2021). The shifting boundaries of talent management. *Human Resource Management*, 60(2), 253–257. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22050>
- Valcour, M., & Ladge, J. J. (2008). Family and career path characteristics as predictors of women's objective and subjective career success: Integrating traditional and protean career explanations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73(2), 300–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.06.002>
- Vallas, S. P., & Christin, A. (2018). Work and Identity in an Era of Precarious Employment: How Workers Respond to “Personal Branding” Discourse. *Work and Occupations*, 45(1), 3–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888417735662>
- Vallas, S., & Schor, J. B. (2020). What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 46(1), 273–294. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054857>
- van de Mortel. (2005). *Faking it: Social desirability response bias in self-report research*.
- van den Born, A., & van Witteloostuijn, A. (2013a). Drivers of freelance career success. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 34(1), 24–46. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1786>
- van den Born, A., & van Witteloostuijn, A. (2013b). Drivers of freelance career success. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 34(1), 24–46. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1786>
- Van Den Broeck, A., De Cuyper, N., Baillien, E., Vanbelle, E., Vanhercke, D., & De Witte, H. (2014). Perception of organisation's value support and perceived employability: Insights from self-determination theory. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(13), 1904–1918. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.860385>
- van den Groenendaal, S. M. E., Akkermans, J., Fleisher, C., Kooij, D. T. A. M., Poell, R. F., & Freese, C. (2022). A qualitative exploration of solo self-employed workers'

career sustainability. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 134, 103692.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2022.103692>

Van Den Groenendaal, S. M. E., Freese, C., Poell, R. F., & Kooij, D. T. A. M. (2023).

Inclusive human resource management in freelancers' employment relationships:

The role of organisational needs and freelancers' psychological contracts. *Human*

Resource Management Journal, 33(1), 224–240. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748->

8583.12432

Van Den Groenendaal, S. M. E., Rossetti, S., Van Den Bergh, M., Kooij, T. A. M.

(Dorien), & Poell, Rob. F. (2021). Motivational profiles and proactive career

behaviors among the solo self-employed. *Career Development International*, 26(2),

309–330. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-06-2020-0149>

Van der Heijden, B., De Vos, A., Akkermans, J., Spurk, D., Semeijn, J., Van der Velde,

M., & Fugate, M. (2020). Sustainable careers across the lifespan: Moving the field

forward. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 117, 103344.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103344>

Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., de Lange, A. H., Demerouti, E., & Van der Heijde, C. M.

(2009). Age effects on the employability–career success relationship. *Journal of*

Vocational Behavior, 74(2), 156–164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.12.009>

Van Der Zwan, P., Hessels, J., & Burger, M. (2020). Happy Free Willies? Investigating the

relationship between freelancing and subjective well-being. *Small Business*

Economics, 55(2), 475–491. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00246-6>

Van Dick, R., Christ, O., Stellmacher, J., Wagner, U., Ahlswede, O., Grubba, C.,

Hauptmeier, M., Höhfeld, C., Moltzen, K., & Tissington, P. A. (2004). Should I

Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Turnover Intentions with Organisational

Identification and Job Satisfaction. *British Journal of Management*, 15(4), 351–

360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2004.00424.x>

- van Dick, R., van Knippenberg, D., Kerschreiter, R., Hertel, G., & Wieseke, J. (2008). Interactive effects of work group and organisational identification on job satisfaction and extra-role behavior. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72(3), 388–399. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2007.11.009>
- Van Knippenberg, D. (2000). Work Motivation and Performance: A Social Identity Perspective. *Applied Psychology*, 49(3), 357–371. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1464-0597.00020>
- van Oosterhout, M., Waarts, E., & van Hillegersberg, J. (2006). Change factors requiring agility and implications for IT. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 15(2), 132–145. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000601>
- Vassiley, A., Shafaei, A., Nejati, M., Onnis, L., & Bentley, T. (2025). The autonomy paradox, working from home and psychosocial hazards. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 67(2), 356–385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221856251315859>
- Vincent, S. (2016). Bourdieu and the gendered social structure of working time: A study of self-employed human resources professionals. *Human Relations*, 69(5), 1163–1184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715612898>
- Vogt, K. C. (2016). The post-industrial society: From utopia to ideology. *Work, Employment and Society*, 30(2), 366–376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017015577911>
- von Hippel, C., Issa, M., Ma, R., & Stokes, A. (2011). Stereotype threat: Antecedents and consequences for working women. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 41(2), 151–161. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.749>
- Vos, A. De, & Heijden, B. I. J. M. Van Der. (2017). ScienceDirect Current thinking on contemporary careers: The key roles of sustainable HRM and sustainability of careers. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 28(February), 41–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.07.003>

- Voss, Z. G., Cable, D. M., & Voss, G. B. (2006). Organisational Identity and Firm Performance: What Happens When Leaders Disagree About “Who We Are?” *Organisation Science*, 17(6), 741–755. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1060.0218>
- Waldkirch, M., Bucher, E., Schou, P. K., & Grünwald, E. (2021). Controlled by the algorithm, coached by the crowd – how HRM activities take shape on digital work platforms in the gig economy. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(12), 2643–2682. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1914129>
- Waldman, D. A., Putnam, L. L., Miron-Spektor, E., & Siegel, D. (2019). The role of paradox theory in decision making and management research. *Organisational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 155, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.04.006>
- Wallace, J. E. (1995). Organisational and Professional Commitment in Professional and Nonprofessional Organisations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(2), 228–255. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393637>
- Warr, P., & Inceoglu, I. (2018). Work Orientations, Well-Being and Job Content of Self-Employed and Employed Professionals. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32(2), 292–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017017717684>
- Watson, G. P., Kistler, L. D., Graham, B. A., & Sinclair, R. R. (2021). Looking at the Gig Picture: Defining Gig Work and Explaining Profile Differences in Gig Workers’ Job Demands and Resources. *Group & Organisation Management*, 46(2), 327–361. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601121996548>
- Weldon, D., White, A., Bouldin, A., Gregory, D., Kuo, G. M., & Fuentes, D. (2023). Organisational values: Essential substrate for professional identity formation. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 87(12), 100542. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajpe.2023.100542>

- Wiener, M., Cram, W. A., & Benlian, A. (2023). Algorithmic control and gig workers: A legitimacy perspective of Uber drivers. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 32(3), 485–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0960085X.2021.1977729>
- Wiles, F. (2013). ‘Not Easily Put Into a Box’: Constructing Professional Identity. *Social Work Education*, 32(7), 854–866. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2012.705273>
- Wilkens, U., & Nermerich, D. (2011). ‘Love it, change it, or leave it’—Understanding Highly-skilled Flexible Workers’ Job Satisfaction from a Psychological Contract Perspective. *Management Review*, 22(1), 65–83.
- Wilkin, C. L. (2013). I can’t get no job satisfaction: Meta-analysis comparing permanent and contingent workers. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 34(1), 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1790>
- Williams, M., & Moser, T. (2019). The Art of Coding and Thematic Exploration in Qualitative Research. *International Management Review*, 15(1), 45–55.
- Wolfe, M. N. (1996). That’s Not an Employee, That’s an Independent Contractor. *Compensation & Benefits Review*, 28(4), 60–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088636879602800409>
- Wood, A. J., Graham, M., Lehdonvirta, V., & Hjorth, I. (2019). Good Gig, Bad Gig: Autonomy and Algorithmic Control in the Global Gig Economy. *Work, Employment and Society*, 33(1), 56–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017018785616>
- Wood, A. J., & Lehdonvirta, V. (2023). Platforms Disrupting Reputation: Precarity and Recognition Struggles in the Remote Gig Economy. *Sociology*, 57(5), 999–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385221126804>
- Wood, A. J., Lehdonvirta, V., & Graham, M. (2018). Workers of the Internet unite? Online freelancer organisation among remote gig economy workers in six Asian and African countries. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 33(2), 95–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12112>

- Yang, C., Chen, Y., Zhao, X., & Cui, Z. (2023). Career identity and organisational identification among professionals with on-demand work. *Personnel Review*, 52(3), 470–491. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-04-2019-0193>
- Yunus, S., & Mostafa, A. M. S. (2022). Flexible working practices and job-related anxiety: Examining the roles of trust in management and job autonomy. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 43(3), 1340–1368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X21995259>

Appendix 1 Selected articles in Study 1 (Sorted by author names)

Study	Country/Region	Item	Theme*	Method	Tools	Research focus
Allen & Sienko (1998)	US	Professional contingent workers	WCD	Quantitative	Survey	Motivations of contingent workers and make a comparison between organisational core employees and contingent workers
Anderson & Bidwell (2019)	US	Independent contractors	WLB WCD IDE	Mixed	Survey + Interview	The role of contracting in managerial careers
Annink & den Dulk (2012)	Netherlands	Self-employed	WLB	Qualitative	Interview	The way self-employed women in different work contexts experience their work-life balance and the role of autonomy
Annink (2017)	Europe	Independent professionals	WLB WCD	Qualitative	Interview	How social support enables independent professionals to achieve work-life balance
Anwar & Graham (2021)	Africa	Highly skilled gig workers	WCD	Qualitative	Interview	Work conditions and lives of workers in the gig economy
Apitzsch et al (2023)	Germany	Highly skilled freelancers	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Manifestations of collectivism of highly skilled freelance workers
Auer et al (2014)	US	Contingent knowledge workers	WCD	Qualitative	Interview	How uncertainty shapes collaboration in contingent project work and how participants manage it
Augustsson (2016)	N/A	Highly skilled temporary workers	WLB WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Knowledge transfer and career development
Ayoobzadeh (2022)	Canada	Freelancers	WCD CS	Quantitative	Survey	Career orientation (self-directed career mindset) and job search strategies
Baitenizov et al (2019)	N/A	Freelancers	WCD IDE	Theoretical	N/A	Tendencies and perspectives for the development of self-employment in context of the processes of globalization
Barley & Kunda (2006)	US	Contingent workers	WCD	Theoretical	N/A	Employment relations
Bellesia et al (2019)	N/A	Gig workers	CS IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Technological platforms and work identity construction
Bidwell & Briscoe (2009)	US	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Who enters independent contracting, when, and why
Bidwell (2009)	US	Highly skilled contractors	WLB WCD CS IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Compare contractors and regular employees work within an information technology department

Study	Country/Region	Item	Theme*	Method	Tools	Research focus
Blatt (2008)	US	Temporary workers	IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Organisational citizenship behavior
Bögenhold et al (2014)	Finland	Independent professionals	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Entrepreneurial activity
Borghi et al (2016)	Italy	Independent professionals	WCD CS IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Market risks, weak career strategies and occupational careers
Briscoe et al (2011)	US	Independent contractors	WLB	Qualitative	Survey	Whether contracting enables better work-life balance compared to traditional employment
Bryant & McKeown (2016)	Melbourne	Highly skilled contractors	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Highly skilled contractors construct their identities through positioning
Bujacz et al (2017)	Sweden	Self-employed	WLB WCD	Quantitative	Survey	Job control and task types of shape work engagement
Burke & Cowling (2019)	N/A	Freelancers	WLB WCD	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	Freelancers' diverse roles in entrepreneurship, small business growth, and labour market dynamics
Burke (2012)	UK	Freelancers	CS IDE	Quantitative	Secondary data	1) Career development, professional success, and identity management 2) Strategic contribution to productivity
Burke (2019)	UK	Freelancers	WLB WCD CS IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Explore how freelancers drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and efficiency
Burke et al (2021)	Europe	Self-employed	IDE	Quantitative	Secondary data	National R&D and entrepreneurial activity
Burke et al (2020)	N/A	Independent contractors	CS	Quantitative	Secondary data	Entrepreneurial activity
Bush (2009)	N/A	Independent contractors	IDE	Theoretical	N/A	Leadership model
Connelly & Gallagher (2006)	N/A	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	Distinction between independent and dependent contractors and analyzing the implications of these arrangements
Cross & Sward (2022)	N/A	Independent workers	IDE	Theoretical	N/A	HRM theory in relation to independent work
Cross & Swart (2021)	UK	Independent professionals	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Professionalism and professional fluidity
D'Amours & Legault (2013)	Canada	Highly skilled professionals	WCD IDE	Mixed	Survey + Interview	Employment risks

Study	Country/Region	Item	Theme*	Method	Tools	Research focus
Das & Bhattacharya (2022)	India	Gig workers	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Psychological contract and organisational citizenship behavior
David (2005)	N/A	Skilled contingent workers	WCD IDE	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	Organisational cost
David (2010)	US	Independent contractors	IDE	Quantitative	Secondary data	Influence of independent contractors and outsourcing on turnover, tenure, and recruitment
Davis-Blake & Uzzi (1993)	US	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Organisational drivers of employment externalization
De Vries et al (2020)	Netherlands	Solo self-employed	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Secondary data Survey	The relationship between start-up motivation and entrepreneurial performance of solo self-employed
Donnelly (2009)	UK, US	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Mixed	Survey + Interview	Career mobility
Dowie (2001)	N/A	Independent professionals	WCD IDE	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	Decision analysis-based technologies, learning, leadership, and autonomy for independent professionals in healthcare
Evans et al (2004)	US	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview Observation	Time management, temporal flexibility and autonomy
Flatøy (2024)	Norway	Freelancers	WLB WCD CS	Quantitative	Survey	Work-life balance, autonomy, income security, and collegial support
Flatøy (2024)	Norway	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Challenges and legitimacy issues faced by interim managers due to their outsider status
Flinchbaugha et al (2020)	N/A	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Theoretical	Literature review	Organisational effectiveness
Florin & Pichault (2020)	N/A	Independent professionals	WLB	Quantitative	Secondary data	Different forms of autonomy and experiences of precariousness
Garen (2004)	N/A	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Secondary data	Why and when organisations employ independent contractors instead of regular employees
Gascoigne & Kelliher (2018)	UK, Netherlands	Part time professionals	WCD CS IDE	Qualitative	Interview	“Reduced time and workload” i-deals and work-life balance
Gerdenitsch et al (2016)	N/A	Independent professionals	WCD CS	Quantitative	Survey	Social interaction and social support
Ghosh et al (2024)	N/A	Independent professionals	WCD CS	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	Boundaryless career orientation, career construction behaviour and employability

Study	Country/Region	Item	Theme*	Method	Tools	Research focus
Granger et al (2022)	N/A	Professional gig workers	WLB	Mixed	Survey + Interview	Personal resources, resilience, wellbeing and COVID-19 crisis
Grey & Healy (2004)	UK	Contracting professional workers	WCD IDE	Mixed	Survey + Interview	Motivations, power dynamics, and gendered experiences
Gunawan & Kleiner (1999)	N/A	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Theoretical	N/A	Classification criteria, risks, and managerial best practices
Gussek et al (2023)	N/A	Freelancers	WCD CS IDE	Qualitative	Archival data	The challenges faced by IT freelancers
Haapakorpi (2020)	Finland	Independent professionals	WCD	Qualitative	Interview	Freedom and insecurity
Harpur & Blanck (2020)	N/A	Gig workers	WCD	Theoretical	N/A	Opportunities, challenges and regulatory responses
Henningera & Gottschall (2007)	Germany	Freelancers	WLB	Qualitative	Interview Archival data	The tension between freedom and precariousness
Hermes et al (2017)	Netherlands	Independent professionals	WLB WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Freedom, identity, and precarity in professional lives
Hessels et al (2017)	Australia	Self-employed	WLB	Quantitative	Secondary data	Relationship between self-employment type and work-related stress through job demand and control
Hoedemaekers (2021)	UK, Germany, Netherlands	Freelancers	WCD	Qualitative	Interview	The experiential, social, and identity dimensions of freelance work
Hoque & Kirkpatrick (2003)	UK	Professional contingent workers	IDE	Quantitative	Secondary data	Marginalization (less training, consultation) and gender differences
Huang & Lin (2016)	Taiwan	Contract workers	WCD CS	Quantitative	Survey	The impact of social and psychological factors on contract workers' job performance
Hudek et al (2021)	Slovenia	Freelancers	WLB CS	Quantitative	Survey	Human capital (education, skills, training, experience) and quality of life (subjective & objective success)
Hundley (2001)	US	Self-employed	WLB	Quantitative	Secondary data	Why and under what circumstances self-employed individuals report higher job satisfaction compared to employees
Hytti et al (2013)	Finland	Self-employed professionals	WLB	Quantitative	Survey	Determinants of job satisfaction among salaried and self-employed professionals
Inkson et al (2001)	New Zealand	Contractors	IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Careers, motivations, and identities

Study	Country/Region	Item	Theme*	Method	Tools	Research focus
Johal & Anastasi (2015)	UK	Independent professionals	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Archival data	Strategic development, policy engagement, and research collaboration
Khan & MacEachen (2024)	Canada	Solo self-employed	WLB WCD	Qualitative	Interview	Employment precarity, neoliberal labor conditions, health, wellness, and sense of security
Kim et al (2017)	Brazil	Contract workers	WCD	Qualitative	Interview	Identities, self-perception and professional success
Kinsella et al (2021)	UK, Germany	Self-employed	WLB WCD	Qualitative	Interview	Autonomy, work pressures, work–life balance, and employment security
Kinsella et al (2022)	UK, Germany	Self-employed	CS	Qualitative	Interview	Boundaryless career experiences
Knapp et al (2021)	N/A	Independent professionals	IDE	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	Clarify the conceptual distinctions among highly skilled, solo self-employed workers
Kost et al (2020)	N/A	Gig workers	WCD CS IDE	Theoretical	N/A	1) Boundaryless careers in the gig economy; 2) HRM support and competency development opportunities
Kozica et al (2014)	Germany	Freelancers	WCD	Qualitative	Interview	Concrete experiences and challenges in freelancer collaboration and its role in organisational knowledge absorption
Kunda et al (2002)	US	Highly skilled contractors	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Challenges, motivations, and identity construction
Latzke et al (2021)	Austria	Self-employed	WLB	Quantitative	Survey	Job satisfaction
Leighton & McKeown (2015)	Europe, Australia	Independent professionals	IDE	Qualitative	Interview Archival data	Growth, regulation, and management challenges
Leighton (2015)	UK, Europe	Independent professionals	WCD IDE	Theoretical	N/A	Employment classification, fiscal regulation, and social protection rights
Lemmon et al (2016)	US	Independent contractors	WCD	Quantitative	Survey	Psychological contract development, distributive justice, and performance
Lo Presti et al (2018)	Italy	Freelancers	WCD CS	Quantitative	Survey	Relationship between protean/boundaryless career attitudes, employability, professional commitment, and career success
Mallon & Duberley (2000)	UK	Contingent contract workers	IDE	Theoretical	N/A	The role, management, and psychological contract of contingent managers and professionals in organisations
Marín-Sanchiz et al (2023)	Spain	Freelancers	WLB WCD	Qualitative	Interview	Working conditions, job satisfaction, and self-empowerment strategies
Marjanovic & Murthy (2022)	Australia	Independent professionals	CS IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Competitiveness and management strategies of liquid IT professionals

Study	Country/Region	Item	Theme*	Method	Tools	Research focus
McKeown & Leighton (2016)	UK, Europe, Australia	Self-employed professionals	WCD IDE	Theoretical	N/A	Overview of global trends, policy, and conceptual challenges in self-employment and freelance work
McKeown & Cochrane (2012)	Australia	Professional contractors	WLB CS	Quantitative	Survey	Impact of organisational support and self-efficacy on contractor wellbeing, engagement, and knowledge sharing
McKeown & Cochrane (2017)	Australia	Independent professionals	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Relationship between HRM innovations and organisational performance
McKeown & Pichault (2021)	Australia, Belgium	Independent professionals	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	IPros' experience and manage talent identity outside traditional HR systems
McKeown (2003)	Australia	Professional contractors	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Work commitment and motivations
McKeown (2005)	Australia	Professional contractors	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Precariousness and motivations of entering non-standard work (push, pull, or default factors)
McKeown (2015)	N/A	Independent professionals	WCD	Theoretical	N/A	The definitional, social, and policy consequences
McKeown (2016)	Australia	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Archival data	To reconcile differing definitions and data on self-employment to reveal a comprehensive profile of independent contractors
Millán et al (2021)	Europe	Self-employed	WCD CS IDE	Quantitative	Secondary data	ICT adoption, frequency, and effect on earnings by entrepreneur type
Miller & Vanhove (2024)	US	Independent professionals	WLB CS IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Impact of motivational entry factors (pull/push) on job satisfaction via motivation, moderated by perceived support
Muethel & Hoegl (2013)	N/A	Independent contractors	IDE	Theoretical	N/A	Shared leadership effectiveness
Mufamadi & Koen (2021)	South Africa	Independent contractors	WCD CS	Theoretical	N/A	Extending social protection to independent contractors through tax and legislative reform
Mukherjee & Datta (2024)	India	Highly skilled gig workers	WLB	Quantitative	Survey	Ambition–burnout relationship
Murgia et al (2020)	N/A	Solo self-employed	WCD IDE	Theoretical	N/A	Hybrid work zones between employment and self-employment
Nawaz et al (2020)	Pakistan	Freelancers	WLB WCD	Quantitative	Survey	Freelancer value proposition and freelancer job satisfaction
Nemkova et al (2019)	N/A	Freelancers	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Case study Interview	Meaningful work

Study	Country/Region	Item	Theme*	Method	Tools	Research focus
Nierling et al (2023)	Germany	Freelancers	WCD CS IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Work autonomy and work conditions
Oren (2012)	Israel	Self-employed professionals	WLB	Quantitative	Survey	Compare job stressors and coping strategies between self-employed and employed professionals
Oren (2019)	Israel	Self-employed professionals	WLB	Mixed	Survey + Interview	Challenge and hindrance stressors relate to burnout among self-employed vs. employed professionals
Osnowitz & Henson (2016)	US	Professional contractors	WCD	Qualitative	Interview Observation	Work time control and maintain boundaries between professional contractors and standard employees
Panteli & Urquhart (2021)	UK	Independent professionals	WCD CS	Qualitative	Interview	Means of employability and mechanism of normative control
Panteli & Urquhart (2022)	UK	Independent professionals	IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Job crafting and empowerment
Park & Gough (2024)	US	Independent contractors	WLB WCD	Quantitative	Survey	Social network effects (centrality & tie strength) on arbitrators' satisfaction and fees
Parker (2010)	N/A	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Theoretical	N/A	How public policies shape firms' incentives to contract out and reclassify employees as independent contractors
Petriglieri et al (2019)	US	Independent workers	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Viable identities, emotional wellbeing and organisational support
Pichault & McKeown (2019)	N/A	Independent professionals	WLB	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	Work autonomy
Pichault et al (2020)	France	Independent professionals	WLB	Qualitative	Interview	1) Actually experience and enact autonomy 2) The tension between structural constraints and individual agency
Prottas (2008)	US, Europe	Independent contractors	WLB IDE	Quantitative	Secondary data	Job autonomy, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, stress
Pulignano et al (2024)	Belgium, Germany	Freelancers	WCD	Qualitative	Interview	Freelancers' effort–bargain experiences across skill levels
Rania et al (2021)	Italy	Freelancers	WLB IDE	Quantitative	Survey	1) Organisational wellbeing and motivation between employees and freelancers 2) Influence on life satisfaction
Rassuli (2005)	US	Professional contingent workers	WCD CS IDE	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	The evolution, characteristics, and implications of the professional contingent workforce
Ray et al (2017)	US	Independent contractors	WLB	Quantitative	Secondary data	Relationship between employment type, job stress, and health-related quality of life

Study	Country/Region	Item	Theme*	Method	Tools	Research focus
Redpath et al (2009)	Canada	Contingent workers	WCD CS IDE	Mixed	Survey + Interview	Comparing perceptions and psychological contracts in contingent employment relationships
Roberts & Douglas (2020)	US	Contract workers	IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Psychological contract and performance
Roberts & Douglas (2022)	US	Gig workers	IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Engagement and motivation in leaderless or minimally supervised work environments
Romke & Sayed (2018)	Bangladesh	Freelancers	WCD	Mixed	Survey Case study	1) The role of freelancing in reducing unemployment 2) The impact on the socio-economic development
Ruine et al (2020)	Germany	Independent contractors	WCD	Qualitative	Interview	Work conditions
Ruine et al (2020)	Germany	Independent contractors	WCD CS	Mixed	Survey + Interview	The role of staffing agencies in work relationships with highly skilled independent contractors
Sayah (2013)	Germany	Independent contractors	WLB	Qualitative	Interview	Using information and communication technologies to manage work–life boundaries
Schärrer & Sender (2021)	Europe	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Factors that influence the retention and return intentions of independent contractors
Schwartz (2018)	N/A	Freelancers	WCD	Qualitative	Interview Observation	1) Challenges of contingent work 2) Online occupational communities 3) Collective strategies
Shann & Hassell (2006)	UK	Self-employed	WLB IDE	Qualitative	Interview Focus group	Motivations, advantages, disadvantages, and professional implications
Spreitzer et al (2017)	N/A	Independent contractors	WCD IDE	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	The evolving nature of work under flexible arrangements and its diverging effects on workers
Stachura-Krzyształowicz et al (2024)	Poland	Freelancers	WLB WCD	Quantitative	Survey	Psychosocial working conditions and subjective wellbeing
Süß & Becker (2013)	Germany	Freelancers	CS	Qualitative	Interview	Identify key competences underpinning freelancers' employability and explore sectoral differences
Süß & Sayah (2013)	Germany	Contract workers	WLB	Qualitative	Interview	Work–life balance
Sulbout & Pichault (2021)	Belgium	Skilled contingent workers	WCD CS	Qualitative	Interview	Career support
Sulbout et al (2022)	Belgium	Skilled contingent workers	WCD CS	Qualitative	Interview	Career management and support
Sultana et al (2019)	Bangladesh	Freelancers	WCD	Quantitative	Survey	1) Self-efficacy, social capital and entrepreneurial behavior 2) Objective performance

Study	Country/Region	Item	Theme*	Method	Tools	Research focus
Süß & Kleiner (2007)	Germany	Freelancers	WCD	Quantitative	Survey	Organisational commitment and work-related expectations
Süß & Kleiner (2010)	Germany	Freelancers	WCD IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Work relationship, commitment and work-related expectations
Sutherland et al (2020)	N/A	Gig workers	WLB WCD	Qualitative	Interview Archival data	Challenges of precarious and gig literacies
Syrett (2016)	N/A	Independent professionals	WLB	Theoretical	Conceptional paper	Financial security, social support, mental health, and general wellbeing
Toth et al (2020)	Finland	Freelancers	WCD	Quantitative	Survey	Virtual community trust, work engagement and person–job fit
Tremblay & Genin (2010)	Canada	Self-employed	WLB	Mixed	Survey + Interview	Strategic and operational autonomy
Van den Born & Van Witteloostuijn (2013)	Netherlands	Freelancers	CS IDE	Mixed	Survey + Interview	Identify drivers of freelance career success (objective and subjective)
Van den Groenendaal et al (2023)	Netherlands	Freelancers	WCD IDE	Qualitative	Interview	Inclusive HRM and freelancer–organisation employment relationships
van der Zwan et al (2020)	UK	Freelancers	WLB IDE	Quantitative	Secondary data	Subjective wellbeing
Vincent (2016)	UK	Self-employed	WCD CS	Qualitative	Interview	Work time constraints and gendered inequalities
Voudouris (2004)	Greece	Independent contractors	IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Explore how and why Greek firms use different types of flexible employment arrangements
Waldkirch et al (2021)	N/A	Gig workers	CS IDE	Qualitative	Archival data	Understand how HRM activities actually take shape on a digital work platform from workers' perspectives
Warr & Inceoglu (2018)	UK	Self-employed	WLB WCD IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Work orientations, job characteristics and subjective wellbeing
Wickramasinghe & Chandrasekara (2011)	Sri Lanka	Casual workers	WLB IDE	Quantitative	Survey	Differences in job satisfaction, organisational justice, and performance between permanent and casual workers
Yang et al (2022)	China	On-demand professionals	CS IDE	Quantitative	Survey	How career identity leads to organisational identification among on-demand professionals

Note: * WLB = Work-life balance, wellbeing and health; WCD = Work conditions and experiences; CS = Career development, support and success; IDE = Identity and management

Appendix 2 Key Variables and Measurement in Study 2

Key variables	Items (scales)	Sources
Job satisfaction	- All in all, I am satisfied with my work. - Rate of pay - Location of job - Flexibility of hours - Remote working options - The work-life balance - With my current life in general	Cammann et al., (1979) (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied)
Subjective career success	- The success I have achieved in my career. - The progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.	Greenhaus et al (1990) (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied)
Professional identity	- Being a professional contractor is an important part of who I am. - I have strong positive feelings about being a professional contractor. - I will continue to work as a contractor in the future.	Farmer and Van Dyne (2010) (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)
Organisational identity	- I feel strong ties with this organisation. - I feel glad to work for this organisation.	Smidts et al., (2001) (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)

Appendix 3 Key Variables and Measurement in Study 3

Key variables	Items (scales)	Sources
Subjective career success	- The success I have achieved in my career. - The progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.	Greenhaus et al (1990); Abele and Spurk (2009) (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied)
Burnout	- I feel emotionally drained from my work. - I feel used up at the end of the day. - I feel burned out from my work. - I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job. - Working with people all day is really a strain for me.	Maslach et al., (1997) (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)
Client commitment	- I have found working in this organization to be a very satisfying experience. - I feel like I am learning a great deal by working on this project. - I would welcome the opportunity to work for this organization again in the future.	Marrone et al., (2007) (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)
Inclusive HRM	- Full time employees regard me as a competitive threat. - My client organization provides the necessary resources. - My client organization builds connections with the people involved. - My payment is in compliance with financial agreements. - My fee is paid on time. - My client organization would inform me if I seem to go in the wrong direction. - My client organization communicates with me openly about the progress of projects. - I receive all information needed to execute my work. - My client organization informs me whether assignments will be extended or not. - I have sufficient autonomy in completing the assignment in my own way.	Van den Groenendaal et al., (2023) (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)

-
- My assignment(s) is/are clear from the start without disguising the exact content of assignment(s).
 - My role is very clear during my work.
-