

NHH



# New insights into freelancers' and independent contractors' experiences

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## **Abstract**

This PhD thesis provides new insights into freelancers' and independent contractors' experiences. This group of workers has increasing relevance to companies and organization scholars. Many countries have seen significant growth in their numbers, and we can expect this to continue. These workers are also theoretically interesting because their work arrangement differs substantially from those of employees. However, current organization theories have primarily been developed from studies of employees and have them at their centre, while organization scholars are yet to fully acknowledge freelancers' and independent contractors' increasing relevance and theoretical uniqueness. As organization scholars, we are therefore currently less capable of describing the experiences of freelancers than what is called for, considering their increasing relevance and theoretical uniqueness.

I aim to help fill this gap in the literature on freelancing and independent contracting. To achieve this, I have gathered qualitative and quantitative primary data and conducted three studies, all of which are oriented towards describing some of the experiences of freelancers and independent contractors. The foci of Studies 1, 2, and 3 are, respectively, contract managers' on-the-job challenges, freelance journalists' professional identification, and freelance journalists' work–life balance. The first study, which is of a qualitative nature, uses an exploratory research design. In Studies 2 and 3, which are of a quantitative nature, I compare freelancers' experiences with those of employees.

Through these three studies, this PhD thesis offers several contributions to the literature on freelancing and independent contracting. Viewing contract managers' experiences in light of the inherent theoretical tension between independent contracting and management, the first study provides new insights into the relational and operational challenges that contract managers experience. Building on insights rooted in social identity theory, the second study improves our understanding of how freelancers view themselves as professionals. Through contrasting a resource perspective with a 'stress of higher status' perspective, the third study enhances our understanding of freelancers' work–life balance.

Regarding empirical contributions, this thesis contains two quantitative studies that compare freelancers' and employees' experiences. This is an important contribution to the extant literature on freelancers' experiences, which is predominantly of a qualitative nature and without empirical comparisons. More, by sampling from contract managers and journalists, this thesis sheds light on the experiences of a group of workers that have received limited scholarly attention to date. Sampling from these occupations is also beneficial for theory development.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Four years ago, I was sitting in a reading room and had just submitted my Master thesis. I decided to browse job postings and immediately came across a position as a PhD Candidate in a research project entitled *Freelancers, Independent Contractors and the Organization of Work*. I must admit that I did not think I would be eligible even if I had the necessary grades, yet I applied for the position. Some days after applying I had a casual meeting with Torstein Nesheim, and some weeks later a formal interview with him, Karen Modesta Olsen and Sven Arne Haugland. Two months later I entered NHH as a PhD Candidate and now my journey as a PhD Candidate is (almost) at an end. The point of this summary of my PhD journey being; I owe my entry into academia to Torstein, and I am forever grateful to him for choosing me as his Candidate. Even more so, I am grateful for his guidance throughout this journey. Torstein have *always* been available and responsive *whenever* I have reached out to him. My best guess for his average response time to mails – day and night, weekdays and weekend – is somewhere below five minutes. Beyond being incredibly responsive, Torstein have provided thorough, constructive and accurate feedback at every occasion. His eye for details and his ability to comprehend in minutes work that I have spent months to develop never ceases to amaze me. Thank you very much for supervising me, and supervising me the way you did, Torstein.

Karen Modesta Olsen also deserves a gigantic thanks. Like Torstein, Karen has guided me during this PhD journey from the job interview till this very day. On one of my first days as a PhD Candidate I walked into her office and asked if she was willing to co-supervise me. Looking back, I realize that I had no idea what being a PhD Candidate entailed and how important supervisors are during the PhD journey. Perhaps sensing that I had made a request prematurely, before knowing more details about the research I would end up doing, Karen sensibly asked something in the form of: “Are you sure you want me as a supervisor?” – a question to which I responded promptly: “Yeah, sure thing”. Were I not certain about my choice at the time, I am today *very* much certain about it today; I am certain I made the best choice possible. Karen is an extremely competent researcher and holds her work to a very high standard – a standard she has done her utmost to ask of my work. Her academic skills and her personality have also, to me, functioned as an excellent supplement and, at times, counterbalance to that of Torstein. Thank you very much for your extremely valuable insights and care, Karen.

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I had no idea what I was supposed to do and was far from his equal). Alexander also made sure to involve me wherever possible in the years that followed, allowing me to take charge where I felt comfortable, providing support whenever needed and sharing wisdom whenever he was able. One of the first advices he gave me was: “When you evaluate output from students, try to understand where *they* want to go, as opposed to where *you* want them to go, and help them get there.” To me, this advice perfectly illustrates how kind teacher *and* person Alexander is. During my four years at NHH I have made countless trips to Alexander’s office and asked for advice, and he has always invited me in (even when he had ten Zoom-meetings on hold and four calls waiting, i.e., practically every time I came knocking). Thank you for helping me to become a kinder and better teacher, Alexander.

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I also owe a thousand thanks to the organizations and their representatives that facilitated the research in this thesis. Interimleder AS and its CEO Vegard Rooth have been a highly valuable partner in study 1, aiding both the research itself but also encouraging and enabling me to present my findings at contract management conferences. Similarly, Norsk Journalistlag with Trond Idås as my main contact person, and Norsk Kritikerlag represented by Anne Merethe K. Prinos were also instrumental in producing this thesis. I am very grateful for their friendly and professional assistance, not to mention the fact that they distributed questionnaires on my behalf to their members. I am confident that this dissertation would not have been produced, in its current shape and by the time it was, were it not for the help of these organizations and their excellent representatives.

Finally, to the women in my life; my mother, my sister, my grandmother, and my wife, I am who I am, and I am where I am in life, because of you. My mother was the strongest and

most enduring woman I have ever known. She made sure that I become an unafraid person that pursue my dreams. My sister is extraordinarily brave and inquisitive. She has supported my endeavours and has been someone I can share both sadness and joy with throughout life. My grandmother always puts everyone else first, despite all the hardships continuously placed on her, and demonstrates at every occasion what it means to be a good person. My kind, strong, funny and smart wife, my best friend who's smile light up not only the room but the entire building; while the PhD journey have been an incredibly rewarding journey, **BY FAR** the best part of this journey was meeting you that August-day in the lunch area and embarking on this journey with you by my side. All of you are unique, all of you are amazing, and all of you inspire me. I am so very grateful to you all that volumes could, and perhaps should, be written about how highly I value you. For now, I dedicate this thesis to you. I love you all.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "flatøy". The letters are connected and fluid, with a prominent 'f' and a long tail on the 'y'.

Christer A. Flatøy  
Bergen, 02.06.2023

*I dedicate this thesis to Mona, Cecilie, Kari and Tatevik.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This PhD thesis summary (hereafter thesis summary) has four purposes: (i) to describe how studies of freelancers fit into the broader scholarly field that focuses on nonstandard work arrangements (NSWAs), (ii) to summarize what we already know about freelancers' experiences, (iii) to highlight important methodological considerations when examining freelancers' and independent contractors' experiences (hereafter referred to jointly as 'freelancers' unless otherwise specified),<sup>1</sup> and (iv) to provide a summary of the three studies that make up this thesis. The thesis summary opens with a discussion of why research on freelancers' experiences is called for and a description of how this thesis addresses this call.

### 1.1 Why examine freelancers' and independent contractors' experiences?

#### 1.1.1 *The increasing relevance of nonstandard work arrangements*

NSWAs – that is, work arrangements that somehow deviate from permanent full-time direct employment – are of increasing relevance to organization scholars, workers, and organizations (Spreitzer et al., 2017). As a demonstration of this, the percentage of workers in the United States (US) who are engaged in NSWAs rose from 10.7% in 2005 to 15.8% in 2015, accounting for 94% of the net employment growth in the US economy in that period (Katz & Krueger, 2016; 2019).

NSWAs externalize work and workers from organizations (i) physically, (ii) by creating relationships between workers and organizations marked by less permanency, or (iii) through relationships that have less administrative control, from organization's perspective, than is the case with the standard work arrangement (Pfeffer & Baron, 1988; Spreitzer et al., 2017). This externalization has implications for individuals, groups, and organizations (Ashford et al., 2018; Broschak et al., 2008; Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). The nature of these implications varies from one work arrangement to another, as some arrangements entail more externalization of work than others (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). This thesis is concerned with the experiences of freelancers, which are embedded in the work arrangements that generally externalize work and workers more than other work arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> In Section 2.4, I explain this choice of terminology and why it is sensible to group freelancers and independent contractors.

### ***1.1.2 The increasing relevance of freelancing***

The last 20 years have seen an increase in the number of freelancers (Grünfeld et al., 2016; Katz & Krueger, 2016). In the US, for instance, highly skilled freelancers accounted for the majority of the growth in nonstandard workers in the period 2005 to 2015 (Katz & Krueger, 2016, 2019). This growth has been related to the already large but growing gig economy (Vallas & Schor, 2020), which is fuelled by the labour that freelancers provide (Kuhn, 2016). Besides increasing in number, freelancers can now be found in occupations from which they were absent during most of the 20th century. One such example is interim/contract management, which is a profession that was described by Forbes as a ‘growing opportunity in the freelance revolution’ (Younger, 2022) and by some scholars as the prototype of the 21st-century worker (Inkson et al., 2001), and whose practitioners represent around 10% of today’s freelance workforce in the US (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019). Taken together, these developments demonstrate the increase in the number of freelance workers, many of whom are working in new ways and doing work that is new to freelancers.

### ***1.1.3 The uniqueness of freelancing***

Freelancing can be viewed as the opposite of the standard work arrangement, with other NSWAs lying somewhere along the spectrum between these two (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). In other words, freelancing embeds workers in a work setting that differs substantially from that of workers who are engaged in other work arrangements, particularly the standard work arrangement. This difference can be conceptualized in various ways (see Ashford et al., 2007; Spreitzer et al., 2017), with Ashford et al. (2018) providing the most up-to-date summary.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, freelancers’ world of work<sup>3</sup> differs from employees’ world of work with regard to three dimensions: (i) financial instability and job insecurity, (ii) autonomy, and (iii) physical and relational separation. Freelancers in general score higher on these dimensions than other

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<sup>2</sup> Ashford et al. (2018) discussed five dimensions. I focus on the three dimensions that apply more generally to freelancers, as opposed to those geared more specifically towards gig-working freelancers. I discuss these dimensions and this focus further in Section 2.7.

<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, the term ‘world of work’ is somewhat vague. I use it here and in several other places in the thesis summary because it is commonly used by organization scholars in discussions of how the characteristics and utilization of work arrangements have evolved over time from a macro/population/societal perspective (e.g., Ashford et al., 2018; Barley et al., 2017; Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Spreitzer et al., 2017). At the micro/individual level, the term can be understood as being synonymous with an individual’s given work arrangement, that is, how work is organized (Ashford et al., 2018).

workers in the sense that they experience these sensations more often and/or more strongly (Ashford et al., 2018).

#### ***1.1.4 How freelancing influences workers' experiences***

How the world of work is structured matters vis-a-vis individuals' experiences, as these are shaped by the institutional structure of their work arrangements (Barley et al., 2017; Barley & Tolbert, 1997). This means that freelancing exerts a comparatively common influence, giving rise to experiences that differ from those of permanent full-time direct employment and other work arrangements. In addition, work arrangements can exert a strong influence on individuals while they are not working as well as when they are working (Kelliher et al., 2019). As a simple illustration, many individuals who exclusively freelance do not know if they will have a job and a job income in six months, which often results in a type of discomfort that is unknown to most permanent full-time employees (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

#### ***1.1.5 Why research on freelancers' experiences is called for***

Organization scholars have been paying increasing attention to freelancing and freelancers' experiences, yielding valuable insights (Ashford et al., 2007; Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Flinchbaugh et al., 2020; Spreitzer et al., 2017). However, this attention has been limited in several respects. First, it has been limited compared to the immense and sustained growth in the number of freelancers in many countries (Bergman & Jean, 2016; Burke & Cowling, 2020). Second, it has been limited in light of the many new ways and occupations in which freelancers work (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Kuhn, 2016; Sutherland et al., 2020). Third, scholarly attention to freelancing has been limited considering its uniqueness and how much it formally and, very often, in practice differs from other work arrangements (Ashford et al., 2018; Caza et al., 2022). Finally, attention to freelancers has considered only a limited selection of their experiences (Bergman & Jean, 2016; Cropanzano, 2023; Wilkin, 2013). In short, freelancers remain an understudied group of workers (Lo Presti et al., 2018). Consequently, organization theories are currently less equipped to describe the experiences of freelancers than one would expect and hope for (Ashford et al., 2018; Barley et al., 2017; Cross & Swart, 2022).

Several of these limitations apply not only to freelancers but also to workers in other types of NSWAs (Barley et al., 2017). What makes these limitations particularly important in the case of freelancing is precisely the fact that it externalizes work more than alternative work arrangements do (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). In other words, freelancers spend more of their work life in the job market and less of it in organizations than other workers do, and they retain

directive control of their work (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Osnowitz, 2010). This limits the extent to which, or at least the ease with which, the knowledge generated from studies of other workers can be transferred to freelancers (Ashford et al., 2018; Barley et al., 2017). This is particularly the case with regard to studies of workers with permanent full-time direct employment, who have received the vast majority of scholarly attention (Bergman & Jean, 2016; Cappelli & Keller, 2013). Many scholars have therefore concluded that there is a need for further studies that explore freelancers' experiences (e.g., Bergman & Jean, 2016; Caza et al., 2022; Cropanzano et al., 2022; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Kuhn, 2016; Spreitzer et al., 2017).

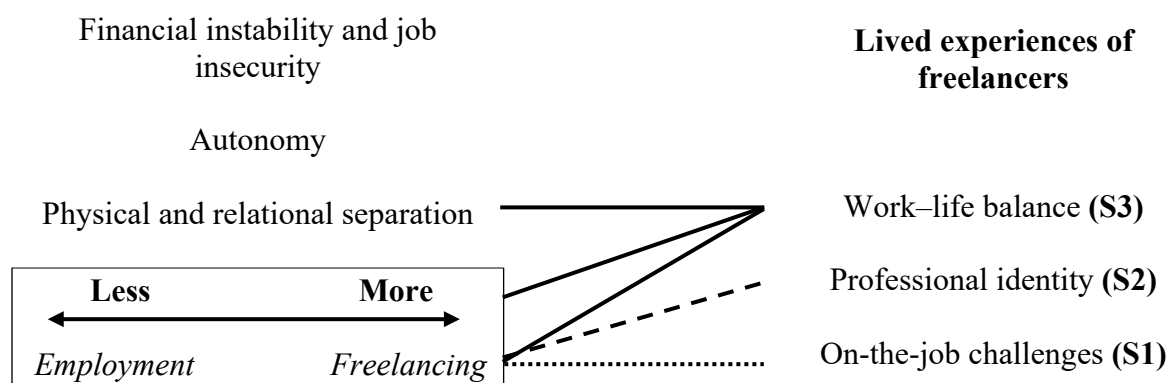
### ***1.1.6 How this thesis addresses the gap in the literature***

This thesis answers the call for further studies on freelancers and their experiences. Each study in this thesis provides new insights into freelancers' experiences. These experiences all relate to one or more of the three dimensions that follows from the structural characteristics of the world of work (Ashford et al., 2018). Specifically, Study 1 explores the on-the-job challenges that contract managers experience, some of which can be considered outcomes of their status as organizational outsiders, a status that entails relational separation between them and their organizational colleagues. Study 2 informs us of whether and to what extent freelance journalists experience relational separation from their profession and professional colleagues. Study 3 informs us of how freelancers' work–life balance differs from that of permanent employees and whether autonomy, financial instability and job insecurity, and a particular relational characteristic are relevant to this relationship.

Figure 1 summarizes the conceptual foci of the studies in this thesis.<sup>4</sup> The figure is an adaptation and combination of two figures found in Ashford et al. (2018, p. 26). As noted earlier, Ashford et al. (2018) discussed how freelancers' world of work differs from that of employees. These differences are shown on the left side of Figure 1. The right side of the figure shows some of the lived experiences which we do not know enough about in freelancers' case. The solid line indicates which experiences Study 3 seeks to shed further light on, while the long-dashed line does so for Study 2 and the short-dashed line for Study 1.

### **Dimensions of work and the**

**differences between employment and freelancing**  
<sup>4</sup> Keep in mind that Figure 1 is intended to provide only an overview of the conceptual focus in the three papers that make up this thesis and to connect them to the research agenda promoted by Ashford et al. (2018). For more details on the empirical and specific conceptual foci of the three papers, please see the papers themselves and Section 4 of this thesis summary.



**Figure 1.** The conceptual foci of the three papers that make up this thesis.

### 1.2 Structure of the thesis

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In Section 2, I describe the theoretical background of the three studies that make up the thesis; in Section 3, I discuss key methodological considerations when examining freelancers' experiences; and in Section 4, I provide an extended description of the three papers of this thesis. Each section contains numerous subsections, and I describe the content and purpose of these subsections in the introduction to each section or in the subsections themselves. In addition, I provide relevant supplementary material in the appendices, which can be found after the list of references. Finally, at the end of this thesis summary, I have attached the three papers that make up this thesis.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

## **2.1 Introduction**

In this section, I provide a theoretical background for the three papers that make up this thesis, and I address the first and second purposes of the thesis summary: (i) to describe how studies of freelancers fit into the broader scholarly field focused on NSWAs and (ii) to summarize what we already know about freelancers' experiences. In Section 2.2, I discuss the focus of the field of research on NSWAs; this discussion serves to situate research on freelancers' experiences in its broader field. In Section 2.3, I define NSWAs. Building on this description, in Section 2.4 I discuss what freelancing is, and elaborate on the institutional features that characterize freelancing. In Section 2.5, I discuss how many freelancers there are; this discussion not only provides some contextual information but also serves to highlight the relevance of studying freelancers' experiences. In Section 2.6, I point out the benefits of freelancing for workers and organizations, discussing why they engage in it. Finally, in Section 2.7 I discuss and provide an overview of the extant research on freelancers' experiences and point to some limitations of this research.

## **2.2 The field of research on nonstandard work arrangements**

Pfeffer and Baron (1988) seminal essay titled 'Taking the Workers Back Out: Recent Trends in the Structuring of Employment' served to popularize research on NSWAs.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, Pfeffer and Baron (1988) pointed out that the trend seen after the Second World War – that is, the increasing prevalence of permanent full-time direct employment – was waning and that organizations were increasingly externalizing work. This externalization was characterized by three dimensions: the physical location of work, the administrative control of work, and the duration of employment. Workers were increasingly working elsewhere than from the locales of their employers, employers had less or no administrative control of the work process, and fewer workers were being permanently employed. Observing these trends, Pfeffer and Baron (1988) posed three questions which characterize research on NSWAs to this day (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Spreitzer et al., 2017): (i) How are work and employment structured? (ii) Why do answers to this first question vary across organizational settings and time? (iii) What are the

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that Pfeffer and Baron (1988) were the first scholars to examine or point out the increasing relevance of NSWAs. After all, Pfeffer and Baron (1988) build on work by other scholars. Nonetheless, they were among the first to popularize NSWAs as a scholarly field, and their influence persists to this day (Ashford et al. 2007; Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Spreitzer et al. 2017).

consequences, at the individual, team, and organizational levels, of NSWAs? This thesis is concerned with a version of this third question – specifically, the experiences of individuals who freelance.

### **2.3 What are nonstandard work arrangements?**

A work arrangement is an agreement between a worker and an employer or client who purchases the labour or the outcome of the labour produced by that worker, as well as the agreed-upon terms surrounding this purchase. In other words, a work arrangement is an economic transaction between two or sometimes three parties wherein labour is usually exchanged for financial compensation (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Pfeffer & Baron, 1988).

NSWAs are work arrangements that somehow deviate from the standard.<sup>6</sup> The standard work arrangement is characterized by four features. First, it involves two parties: an employer and an employee. Second, the employer has directive control over the worker's labour. Third, the worker is engaged full-time. Fourth, the employer and employee have a mutual expectation of continued employment (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). Workers with NSWAs have arrangements that deviate from one or more of these four features, implying that there are several NSWAs.

The state-of-the-art article of Cappelli and Keller (2013) differentiated between two broad categories of work arrangements: employment and contract work. Both have two broad subgroups: two-party (direct) work arrangements and tri-party work arrangements. These subgroups in turn have their own subgroups. In total, Cappelli and Keller (2013) operated with 10 unique work arrangements, including the standard.

### **2.4 What is freelancing?**

In this section, I present the definition of freelancing that this thesis and its three papers rely on. In Section 2.4.2, I discuss the potential number of parties involved in the work arrangement – that is, two- and tri-party arrangements. In the third part of this section, I describe the legal framework surrounding the freelance status in the Norwegian context. This discussion, together with several subsequent parts in this section, serves to contextualize the empirical domain of this thesis. In section 2.4.3, I also comment on the legal differences between freelancers and independent contractors. In Section 2.4.4, I discuss occupational variations in the use of the terms 'freelancer' and 'independent contractor'. Finally, I conclude Section 2.4 with a

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<sup>6</sup> Several terminologies have been developed to classify work arrangements, and each has its advantages and disadvantages. I follow the most common approach (Cappelli & Keller, 2013), using and distinguishing between the terms 'standard work arrangement' and 'nonstandard work arrangements'.

discussion of the phenomenon of ‘dependent’ contractors, because such workers represent an important divergence between law and practice.

#### ***2.4.1 Freelancing as a nonstandard work arrangement***

Freelancing is a NSWA, and the work arrangement is understood in this thesis as being synonymous with Cappelli and Keller (2013)’s contract work arrangement category,<sup>7</sup> with one important partial exception, which is discussed below (see Section 2.4.2 – particularly the final paragraph).

The primary feature differentiating freelancing from other work arrangements is that freelancers do not have an employment contract (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). As a consequence, unlike employees, freelancers have directive control of their work. This means that freelancers can decide how to do their work and often when and with whom to do it (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). In this sense, following from the absence of an employment contract and organizations’ lack of directive control of the work, organizations’ use of freelancers externalizes work more than other NSWAs.<sup>8</sup>

#### ***2.4.2 Two- and tri-party work arrangements***

Freelancers are sometimes involved in a two-party work arrangement and, at other times, a tri-party work arrangement. Two-party work arrangements involve workers and the organizations (or individuals)<sup>9</sup> they work for. Tri-party work arrangements include labour market intermediaries (LMIs) in addition to workers and the organizations (or individuals) they work for. LMIs come in many forms and can serve many functions (Roverud et al., 2017). A detailed account of this variation is beyond the scope of this thesis (see Bonet et al., 2013, for a thorough review), but one distinction is important because it relates to how freelancers’ work is organized.

Focusing specifically on LMIs that primarily target freelancers, Nesheim and Jesnes (2022) uncovered two primary functions they perform: (i) They match freelancers and clients

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<sup>7</sup> Note that Cappelli and Keller (2013) utilize the term ‘(independent) contracting’ and treat ‘freelancing’ as synonymous with ‘independent contracting’ (p. 588).

<sup>8</sup> Work can be externalized even further by outsourcing and offshoring it, but as Cappelli and Keller (2013, p. 577) pointed out, these economic arrangements are not work arrangements.

<sup>9</sup> This thesis is concerned with freelancers who have organizations, not individuals, as clients. This also means that the freelancers I have studied do not engage in what can be characterized as gig-work. While I believe it to be important to emphasize this focus, I do not distinguish conceptually between freelancers engaged in gig-work and not – that is, they all have the same work arrangement even if their work lives differ in some regards (see Section 2.7 and Footnote 15 for further details on the characteristics of gig-work).



and (ii) are involved in the management and organization of the work. Some LMIs perform one or the other function, while some perform both (Nesheim & Jesnes, 2022). The freelancers studied in this thesis are either not involved with LMIs or, like the contract managers interviewed in Study 1, are involved with a matchmaking LMI that does not engage with the management and organization of work. Therefore, after this section, we do not discuss the relevance of LMIs (the potential relevance of the matchmaking function to the experiences of the contract managers I interviewed in Study 1 is discussed in Paper 1).

Nesheim and Jesnes (2022) also uncovered a third function of some LMIs targeting freelancers: The employment of freelancers. More specifically, one of the LMIs in their sample employs the would-have-been freelancers, and the *employee* subsequently performs work for different organizations. Based on Cappelli and Keller (2013) framework, this is a case in which a would-have-been freelancer becomes an employed vendor on premises. Such vendors on premises are the only category of contract workers based in the framework of Cappelli and Keller (2013) that this thesis does not concern itself with. That is, this category is the exception noted above in Section 2.4.1, and seen in Table 1 which makes explicit the type of freelancers included in this thesis.

**Table 1.** Overview of some types of workers (the types included in this thesis in italics)

Arrangement		Type of worker	Employment contract/lack of directive control?	Third party involved?
Employment	Full-time employment	Employee	Yes	No
	Leased employment	Employee	Yes	Yes
Contracting	Subcontracting	Employed vendor on premises	Yes	Yes
		<i>Freelancer/independent contractor</i>	No	Yes
	Direct contracting	<i>Freelancer/independent contractor</i>	No	No

#### ***2.4.3 The legal characteristics of freelancing and independent contracting in Norway***

In this thesis I generally refer to independent contractors and freelancers jointly. This makes sense because they serve similar economic and organizational functions for organizations, and scholars and workers themselves often use the terms interchangeably (see, e.g., Kitching & Smallbone, 2008; McKeown, 2015; Pfeffer & Baron, 1988; Spreitzer et al., 2017). However,

freelancers and independent contractors are usually two separate legal categories, depending on which country's laws is considered (McKeown, 2015; Muhl, 2002).

In Norwegian law, the category of freelancing has a clear equivalent: 'frilans og oppdragstaking'. Non-employed wage receivers are placed in this category. These are viewed as workers but not employees, giving them some, but not all, of the social rights and obligations as employees.

The 'independent contracting' category does not have a direct equivalent in Norwegian law; the closest is 'selvstendig næringsdrivende'. However, this category also includes self-employed workers who also employ other workers, as well as self-employed vendors who sell products but do not perform work for a specified other. It should therefore be pointed out that independent contractors in Norway are equivalent to 'Selvstendig næringsdrivende' who perform work for other companies (or individuals) and do not have employees themselves. 'Selvstendig næringsdrivende' are registered with the Norwegian Tax Authority (NTA) as an enterprise. The legal form of this enterprise can be either a sole proprietorship or a type of stock company. Being a legal enterprise does not entail any of the same social rights and obligations that follow specifically from an employment relationship.

It is generally up to freelancers themselves to decide which legal status they want to acquire: non-employed wage receiver or enterprise. Anyone can register as an enterprise by following relatively simple steps, and there are no requirements regarding the type or scope of economic activity. However, there is an upper limit on the economic scope of the work that freelancers can perform before the NTA requires them to register as an enterprise instead of as a non-employed wage receiver. This upper limit is vaguely defined as when a business/revenue is of 'a certain scope' (NTA, n.d.). For instance, journalists can earn NOK 700,000, which is a fairly high income and well above the average income in Norway, and still be registered as a freelancer. However, contract workers operating with a revenue that the NTA deems to be relatively high, indicating a business of a certain scope, have to register as independent contractors.<sup>10</sup>

A recent development in the public's understanding of contract work in Norway is worth noting. Based on the proposal of a Norwegian Public Committee, the Ministry for Labour and

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<sup>10</sup> There are some legal and economic considerations behind this upper limit, as well as some legal and economic consequences from it, but these are very technical and not worth going into detail on here, as they have a minimal, if any, impact on the three studies in this thesis. One illustrative example of a consequence is that enterprises have to fill in their tax reports prior to the fiscal year, while non-employed wage receivers do so at the end of the fiscal year.

Social Affairs in Norway decided to implement changes in the terminology surrounding freelancers and independent contractors in Norway (Proposition 14 L [2022–2023]). Consequently, any worker who (i) does not employ someone else and (ii) works for someone else without being employed should be referred to as a ‘selvstendig oppdragstaker’. This term resonates far more with the term ‘independent contractor’ than does ‘selvstendig næringsdrivende’. The astute reader may notice that this new term combines the two categories ‘frilans og oppdragstaking [og personer som mottar honorarer’, which is the full category]’ and ‘selvstendig næringsdrivende’. The consequence of this will be interesting; hopefully, it becomes easier to measure freelancing in Norway. However, there will be no material changes for now, as the department pointed out (p. 32 in the proposition). Because the changes in terminology are yet to be implemented, this thesis uses the already-established terms.

#### ***2.4.4 Use of the terms ‘freelancing’ and ‘independent contracting’ in practice***

Besides the differences in the legal status of freelancers and independent contractors, the terms seem to be more favoured, respectively, in some different occupations. Journalists, writers, editors, and interpreters are typical examples of contract workers who refer to themselves as freelancers (Osnowitz, 2007, 2010), while contract managers (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020; Inkson et al., 2001) usually refer to themselves as independent contractors (see also Kitching & Smallbone, 2008, pp. 1-2). This suggests that occupational norms drive workers’ preferences for one term or the other. As McKeown (2015) stated, the names we use to describe ourselves as workers matter. Spreitzer et al. (2017, p. 480) suggested that contract workers in high-skill occupations often refer to themselves as freelancers, though this is not always the case, as demonstrated by contract managers, who are arguably considered more highly skilled workers than journalists.

#### ***2.4.5 When law and practice diverge***

It is worth discussing the case of ‘dependent’ contractors. Organizations have many incentives for hiring freelancers instead of employees, as discussed in Section 2.6.2. When such incentives are coupled with a sufficient power asymmetry between workers and companies, as well as unethical behaviour, this may result in ‘dependent’ contractors: workers who possess the legal status of freelancers but in practice work as employees and are treated as such by their, in legal terms, clients (Connelly & Gallagher, 2006; International Labour Organization (ILO), 2018). This means that organizations save on costs pertaining to social welfare and similar expenses while maintaining directive control of the work provided by the formally freelancing worker.

The scope of the (judicial, economic, and moral) problem that ‘dependent’ contractors represent seems to have grown with the onset of the gig economy (Countouris, 2019). A case in point is Uber, which allegedly treats its workers as employees while insisting on their legal status as independent contractors (Booth, 2020; Conger, 2020). While I do not discuss it further in this thesis,<sup>11</sup> the extent to which freelancers are actually *independent* contractors is undoubtedly an important dimension that is relevant to many of their experiences (Ashford et al., 2007; Wilkin, 2013).

## **2.5 How many freelancers are there?**

In this section, I present important statistics on the number of freelancers in different countries around the world. The focus is on Norway, as well as other countries where relatively reliable estimates of the number of freelancers are readily available in international journals, particularly the US and the United Kingdom (UK). However, these statistics have some limitations; therefore, before presenting them, it is worth noting some methodological issues when it comes to estimating the number of freelancers.

### ***2.5.1 Caveats when estimating the number of freelancers***

There are two key challenges when it comes to estimating and discussing the size of the freelance workforce. First, it can be difficult to estimate the number of freelancers within a country (Abraham et al., 2018; Kitching & Smallbone, 2008; Mas & Pallais, 2017; Van den Born, 2009). Following a change in 2017 in how workers in Norway should be classified, the number of freelancers (‘frilansere’ and ‘oppdragstakere’) has become easier to estimate using registry data from the NTA. However, independent contractors (‘selvstendig næringsdrivende’) do not show up in the same registries. This is because independent contractors (‘selvstendig næringsdrivende’) are not registered at the NTA with a level of detail that enables the distinction between freelancers registered as independent contractors and other types of enterprises. This makes it difficult – seemingly even impossible – to provide a reliable and accurate estimate of the number of independent contractors in Norway (Grünfeld et al., 2016). An alternative to registry data could be an estimate generated based on nationally representative surveys, but these surveys, at least in the European context, do not include freelancing as a separate category

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<sup>11</sup> I do not discuss this further in this thesis because research on freelancers’ experiences is lacking when it comes to the extent to which they choose to be in their current work arrangement (Wilkin, 2013), and this choice is not a theoretical or empirical focus in the three studies.

or do not distinguish between vendors and contract workers when measuring self-employed own-account workers (Kitching & Smallbone, 2008).

Second, different countries have different legislations and institutions that determine the nature of work arrangements, and what constitutes freelancing may differ from country to country (Burke, 2015; McKeown, 2015; Muhl, 2002). This further exacerbates the challenge of creating reliable, comparable estimates. These two caveats should be kept in mind when discussing estimates of the number of freelancers.

### ***2.5.2 Estimate of the number of freelancers in Norway***

Until 2017, freelancers were not a separate category in labour statistics in Norway, thus limiting our ability to estimate the number of freelancers in Norway prior to that year. In 2017, a new category was implemented, and it covered freelancers, ‘contractors’ (i.e., workers *not* registered as an enterprise), and other non-employed workers receiving a fee for their service. Some public institutions refer to all the workers in this category as freelancers (e.g., Statistics-Norway, 2020). However, some workers in this category would not be considered freelancers from a social science perspective; board members and individuals holding public office (i.e., politicians and some public servants) are chief examples. Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut way of delineating freelancers from the rest in this category. At the same time, one can assume that the number of board members and individuals holding public office remains relatively stable from year to year, barring major economic or political shocks.

Table 2 shows the number of freelancers in Norway in the years 2018–2021,<sup>12</sup> keeping in mind the caveats noted above. These statistics show that in 2021, 398,506 individuals had done at least one job that was registered in the NTA’s freelance category. This amounts to 12.6% of the Norwegian workforce, which totalled 3,160,873 workers in 2021. Table 2 also shows that the freelancing proportion of the workforce was down 1.6% in 2021 compared to 2018, meaning that 64,205 fewer individuals worked as freelancers in 2021. At first sight, this suggests that freelancing has become less relevant in Norway in recent years. However, the largest drop in the freelance workforce occurred in 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic hit, putting many companies *and* board directors out of business or on hold for more than one year. We can therefore assume that a large proportion of the decrease in individuals in the freelance category in 2020 resulted from a decline in the number of board directors. Moreover, when making inferences in this regard, we should look at trends beyond five years, as we do below

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<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Tatevik Harutyunyan and the Strategy, Organization and Performance group at the Department of Strategy and Management at NHH for sharing these statistics.

for freelancing in other countries. The overall decline from 2018 also conceals the fact that freelancing became more popular in many occupations, even if it became less popular in some occupations in which it had been historically common in Norway.

**Table 2.** Number of freelancers in Norway, 2018–2021

<b>Year</b>	<b>N freelancers</b>	<b>% of workforce</b>
2018	462,711	14.2
2019	454,074	13.6
2020	406,945	12.5
2021	398,506	12.6
<b>Change</b>	<b>– 64,205</b>	<b>– 1.6</b>

The following examples illustrate how some occupations have seen large drops in the number of freelancers in recent years, while other occupations have seen large increases – occupations that, at least in Norway, should have been somewhat unaffected by the pandemic. In 2018, there were 238 freelancing sheep shearers. This number decreased to 47 in 2021. Even more drastic in absolute numbers, the number of freelancing sheep watchers decreased from 2,416 in 2018 to 1,805 in 2021. Conversely, the number of freelancing accountants increased consistently from year to year, climbing from 111 freelancers in 2018 to 136 in 2021. Similarly, the number of freelancing doctors increased from 2,033 in 2018 to 2,439 in 2021; the number of freelancing nurses from 162 in 2018 to 358 in 2021; and the number of freelancing lawyers from 110 in 2018 to 483 in 2021. Table 3 summarizes the statistics discussed in this section.

**Table 3.** Summary of the number of freelancers in Norway

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Sheep shearers</b>	<b>Sheep watchers</b>	<b>Accountants</b>	<b>Doctors</b>	<b>Nurses</b>	<b>Lawyers</b>
2018	462,711	238	2416	111	2033	162	110
2019	454,074	161	2174	122	2143	267	309
2020	406,945	108	1939	129	2472	291	387
2021	398,506	47	1805	136	2439	358	483
<b>Change in % from 2018 to 2021</b>	<b>– 13.9</b>	<b>– 80.3</b>	<b>– 25.3</b>	<b>+ 22.5</b>	<b>+ 20</b>	<b>+ 121</b>	<b>+ 339</b>

### *2.5.3 Estimates of the number of freelancers around the (Western) world*

The most reliable estimate of the number of freelancers in the US in recent years is provided by Katz and Krueger (2016, 2019) (see also Mas and Pallais, 2017, who provide similar statistics). Katz and Krueger (2016, 2019) use data from the National Bureau of Economic Research, and they define freelancers and independent contractors as workers who obtain customers on their own to provide a product or service. Based on this, Katz and Krueger (2016, 2019) found that in 2015, there were 12.5 million freelancers in the US, representing 8.4% of the country's workforce, as well as the majority of the nonstandard workforce, which totalled 15.8% of the national workforce in 2015. It is also noteworthy that in terms of absolute numbers, freelancers were the nonstandard group of workers with the largest growth from 2005 to 2015 and that 94% of the net employment growth in the U.S. workforce from 2005 to 2015 came from the increase in nonstandard workers (Katz & Krueger, 2016, 2019).

Several researchers have attempted to estimate the freelance workforce in the UK, yielding varying results depending on which data and definition of freelancer they relied on. Applying a definition that distinguishes between those who classify themselves as freelancers and others working for themselves, Kitching and Smallbone (2008) found that there were 459,435 freelancers in the UK in 2008. Applying a slightly broader definition that included a select group of self-employed own-account workers, the same authors found that there were 1,429,982 freelancers in the UK in 2008. Comparing data from 1998 and 2008, the same authors found that the number of freelancers had increased by 15% to 20%, depending on which of the two definitions was applied. Additionally, applying the broader definition, this number had risen to 1.91 million freelancers in 2015, representing an increase of 84% since 1992 (Kitching, 2015). These 1.91 million freelancers made up 6% of the total workforce in the UK in 2015, which totalled 31.1 million workers. This means that there are more freelancers than workers in the public sector in the UK (Burke & Cowling, 2020). It is also worth noting that the total number of workers in the UK increased by 24% from 1992 to 2015 – that is, 60 percentage points less than the growth in the freelance workforce. Moreover, the increase in the number of freelancers in the UK developed quite linearly in the period from 1992 to 2015 (Kitching, 2015).

Though precise estimates are difficult to come by, scholars have noted the relatively large and/or growing proportion of freelancers in the workforces in Germany (Süß & Becker, 2013); France (Besten & Nakara, 2016); Italy (Lo Presti et al., 2018); the Netherlands (Van den Born, 2009); several post-Soviet countries (Shevchuk & Strebkov, 2015, 2021; Shevchuk et al., 2021); and, more generally, in the European Union economy (Fabo et al., 2017).

## **2.6 Why do workers and organizations engage in freelancing?**

Freelancing is a product of supply and demand; individuals supply companies with a product/service and, more generally, labour that they demand. In explaining why freelancing occurs, we therefore need to consider both sides of this supply-and-demand relationship. Note that we focus on the benefits that freelancing holds for individuals and organizations.<sup>13</sup>

### ***2.6.1 Benefits of freelancing for workers***

To date, the arguably most thorough exploration of why freelancers freelance (or ‘Why do contractors contract?’) has been conducted by Kunda et al. (2002). In their study, Kunda et al. (2002) provided insights into workers’ motivations, or ‘anticipated rewards’, for becoming freelancers. By far, the most mentioned factor was money, with 44% of the informants discussing this factor. The second most commonly mentioned factor was the prospect of developing new marketable skills, with 15% of the informants discussing this factor. These two motivational factors suggest that freelancers, at least in technical occupations, have an external motivation for freelancing. This also resonates with the fact that many employees engage in freelancing after being triggered to do so by negative events or situations beyond their immediate control (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Inkson et al., 2001).

Kunda et al. (2002) also uncovered factors that, while mentioned less frequently by the informants, suggest an internally based motivation for freelancing. In descending order in terms of the number of informants discussing them, these factors are autonomy at work (14%), control over time (12%), job variety (8%), and entrepreneurialism (6%). A unifying concept for these factors is an increased sense of control over one’s work situation.

Kunda et al. (2002) findings resonate with those of Inkson et al. (2001), which target interim/contract managers. Inkson et al. (2001) found that 40% of their informants were interim/contract managers at least in part because it gives them flexibility, variety, challenges, and autonomy and enables skill development. At the same time, 32% of their informants discussed more instrumental reasons, such as temporary ‘tiding over’ and extra income.

Similar findings were uncovered by Graver Knudsen and Røe Mathisen (2019), who surveyed freelance journalists in Norway. They found that professional liberty and professional opportunities are key motivational factors for freelance journalists, with 57% of their respondents identifying this as their chief reason for becoming a freelancer. External rewards

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, individuals and organizations do not always prefer freelancing and may not always derive benefits from it. The insights discussed in Section 2.4.5 – ‘When law and practice diverge’ – can be assumed to generally apply in such instances.



thus seem less relevant to journalists than to practitioners of some other occupations, suggesting some occupational differences in regard to which factors motivate workers to become freelancers.

Van den Born (2009) sampled freelancers from numerous occupations, including journalists and interim/contract managers but also lawyers, artists, human resource management professionals and more. Surveying this heterogeneous population of freelancers, Van den Born (2009) grouped freelancers into three categories based on their motivation for freelancing; the groups largely resonate with those of the other studies discussed in this section. The first group comprised freelancers who were motivated by the extra flexibility and improved work–life balance. The second group consisted of freelancers who were motivated by the challenge and financial reward of freelancing. The final group was made up of freelancers who were motivated by autonomy, more variety, and the delivery of products/services of a better quality. Beyond occupational differences, Van den Born (2009) found that gender represents a significant dimension: Females were more motivated than men by flexibility and work–life balance, and men more so than women by potential monetary rewards (Van den Born, 2009, pp. 160-161).

### ***2.6.2 Benefits of freelancing for organizations***

A number of theories have been used to explain why organizations hire freelancers; they include property rights theory, the knowledge-based view of the firm, the resource-based view of the firm, and transaction cost economics (Van den Born, 2009). Atkinson (1984) developed a seminal theoretical perspective wherein companies often have a preference for freelancing because it provides more flexibility than permanent employment. Atkinson (1984) discussed three types of flexibility. The first type is functional flexibility – that is, the (re)deployment of workers between activities and tasks. The second type is numerical flexibility – that is, a change in the number of workers at companies' disposal. The third type is financial flexibility – that is, control over pay and other employment costs. Viewed in light of Atkinson (1984) work, freelancers could increase companies' functional, numerical, and financial flexibility.

Beyond increased flexibility, Matusik and Hill (1998) discussed how using freelancers and other types of nonstandard workers can induce knowledge creation and consequently increase companies' competitive advantage. Broadly speaking, their arguments relate to the notion of functional flexibility, which Atkinson (1984) discussed. By temporarily internalizing freelancers, companies can internalize public knowledge which they do not yet possess. If this is done successfully and better than their competitors, and provided the company is able to

prevent the dissemination of their own private knowledge, it can increase its competitive advantage.

Using a human capital perspective, Lepak and Snell (1999) discussed how organizations should use freelancers. In their view, organizations should use freelancers (referred to as ‘contractors’ and ‘alliances’ in their article) when they need human capital (skills, values, knowledge, etc.) that is not of value to the company. Value is here understood as customer value, meaning what customers are willing to pay for and how much. This is regardless of the firm specificity of the human capital – that is, how tailored it is to a specific company. Conversely, when the human capital is valuable, companies should internalize this resource on a more permanent basis. In a later empirical study, Lepak and Snell (2002) found empirical support for these arguments, indicating that companies tended to operate based on the type of logic that Lepak and Snell (1999) presented.

Bridging and corroborating the views of Atkinson (1984) and Lepak and Snell (1999), Davis-Blake and Uzzi (1993) found that companies tend to use freelancers to increase their level of flexibility but not when they are in need of a stable pool of employees (i.e., a stable pool of human capital).

More recently, studies have explored not only why companies as an aggregate of interests turn to freelancing but also why managers do so. Reviewing various studies from Great Britain, Burke and Cowling (2015) found, among others, the following perceived and experienced benefits that managers can derive from the use of freelancers: They provide a source and conduit of innovation; enable business to manage entrepreneurial risk; liberate businesses from the limits of their internal resources; reduce barriers to market entry; and enable businesses to maximize performance. Bastesen and Ørjasæter (2020) uncovered similar motives among managers using freelancers in information technology occupations in Norway.

In a similar vein, Zadik et al. (2019) investigated which personal and work-related characteristics managers prioritize when hiring freelancers. Among the personal characteristics, the key categories were responsibility, reliability, and integrity (22%); adjustability, adaptability, and integrability (12%); and initiative, creativity, and curiosity (10%). Among the work-related characteristics, the key categories were specific and unique knowledge, professionalism, and extra added value (13%); expertise and related skills (7%); and business networks and connections (5%). (The astute reader may notice that managers’ reasons for hiring freelancers largely correspond to the abovementioned reasons for why companies do so.)

## 2.7 Research on freelancers' experiences

The aim of this section is to situate the research reported in the three papers in this thesis in the field of research concerned with freelancing and, by extension, NSWAs. I therefore focus exclusively on research on freelancers' experiences precisely because the primary theoretical and empirical foci in the three papers in this thesis are on freelancers' experiences.<sup>14</sup> Before I provide an overview of the research on freelancers' experiences, I explain the focus and structure of this overview.

Research articles on freelancers' experiences are published in various fields, and the research is of varying quality (Caza et al., 2022; Cropanzano et al., 2022). To obtain an overview of this literature, I rely on three articles produced by Ashford and colleagues (Ashford et al., 2018; Caza et al., 2022; Cropanzano et al., 2022), with Ashford et al. (2018) being the most relevant and I rely on this article to structure the discussions that follows. These three articles contain comprehensive reviews of the literature on freelancers' experiences, have been published in top-tier journals, and discuss high-quality research on freelancers' experiences from various fields of research.

It is worth noting that these three articles focus on gig-working freelancers. There is no clear theoretical or empirical distinction between gig-working freelancers and non-gig-working freelancers (Caza et al., 2022; Cropanzano et al., 2022); however, a rule of thumb is that gig-working freelancers primarily take short-term jobs, sell their services directly to the market (i.e., individuals) instead of organizations, and some of whom are exposed to algorithmic management (Ashford et al., 2018, p. 24). Because of these typical features of gig-work, there are reasons to believe that gig-working freelancers have some experiences that differ from those of freelancers who do not engage in gig-work.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, most of the experiences discussed in these articles are applicable to freelancers more generally, as is evident by the research articles they reference to in their literature reviews (Ashford et al., 2018; Caza et al., 2022; Cropanzano et al., 2022), and I focus on these experiences.

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<sup>14</sup> For a review of the organizational-level outcomes of freelancing, see Flinchbaugh et al. (2020).

<sup>15</sup> As Ashford et al. (2018) pointed out, career path uncertainty and work transience are particularly relevant to freelancers who take short-term jobs and are exposed to algorithmic management, two aspects that commonly characterize the work life of gig-working freelancers but not necessarily freelancers in general. Because this thesis is concerned with the experiences of freelancers who perform work for organizations, I therefore refrain from discussing these two structural dimensions.

### ***2.7.1 Freelancers' experiences***

From the work of Ashford and colleagues, we learn that freelancers' experiences differ from employees' with regard to three multifaceted and complex dimensions: (i) financial instability and job insecurity, (ii) autonomy, and (iii) physical and relational separation (Ashford et al., 2018). The three dimensions themselves represent common experiences among freelancers. This means that freelancers generally score higher on each dimension than employees do, in the sense that they have, for instance, more autonomy. At the same time, these dimensions also structure the lives of freelancers in the sense that they shape their work–life and give rise to other experiences (Ashford et al., 2018).<sup>16</sup> For example, autonomy can have a large influence on work–life balance (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019). Next, I discuss each of these dimensions, the experiences they represent, and some of the key experiences that they can give rise to. In addition to the work by Ashford and colleagues, I draw on insights from exemplar empirical articles that aptly demonstrate how differences along the three dimensions can manifest in freelancers' lives.

### ***2.7.2 Financial instability and job insecurity***

Financial instability and job insecurity are an inherent part of many freelancers' lives, and Ashford et al. (2018, p. 25) described this as a key defining attribute of freelancing. Employees generally know that they will have a job in the coming months and, often, years. This is not usually the case for freelancers, many of whom therefore experience a high level of income volatility (Cropanzano et al., 2022). Many freelancers describe living their lives close to the economic edge (Ashford et al., 2018) and worrying about their finances (Caza et al., 2022). Of course, some freelancers are highly paid, compared to both their freelancing and employed peers, but studies show that they also have unwanted periods of downtime and that they experience stress because they take on too much work in an effort to safeguard against the unwanted downtimes (Caza et al., 2022); this impacts, among other things, their work–life balance (Evans et al., 2004). Testifying to this, Inkson et al. (2001) found that the two most common personal problems of being an interim/contract manager were financial insecurity and a discontinuity of assignments. Thus, even among comparatively highly paid freelancers, financial instability and job insecurity are endemic.

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<sup>16</sup> Another way to describe these three dimensions is that they are sometimes considered outcomes of freelancing and are at other times viewed as antecedents of other experiences.

### ***2.7.3 Autonomy***

Freelancers retain directive control of their work. This means that they can, in general, decide when to work and how to do their work. On top of this, they are (in theory) free to decide who to work for and what work to do. This means that freelancers have a high level of autonomy, which is herein understood as a job situation in which the outcomes depend more on the individual's own efforts than on, for instance, on those of a boss or on a job manual (Ashford et al., 2018). In fact, many individuals become and remain freelancers to attain a high level of autonomy (Kunda et al., 2002). Of course, the autonomy is far from absolute. In practice, the contract that freelancers enter into sets the boundary for their autonomy (Ashford et al., 2018). Many freelancers also operate in a 'buyer's market', meaning that they have to take the jobs they can get and clients dictate the terms of the contract. This is particularly true for freelancers operating on or through online platforms, for which a growing body of literature is documenting how algorithmic management in practice imposes strict and narrow boundaries on freelancers' autonomy (Cropanzano et al., 2022; Vallas & Schor, 2020). In line with these observations, several scholars have pointed to an autonomy paradox (see Shevchuk et al., 2019) and the 'rhetoric and reality of flexibility' (Barley & Kunda, 2004, pp. 241-243), referring to the discrepancy between formal and actual degrees of autonomy. Indicative of such a discrepancy, Mathisen (2017) interviewed 15 freelance journalists in Norway and uncovered that many of them experienced tension between a sense of autonomy and freedom on the one hand and the constraints of income security on the other hand. Nevertheless, a high level of (formal) autonomy characterizes many freelancers' work lives (Ashford et al., 2018; Caza et al., 2022).

### ***2.7.4 Physical and relational separation***

The final structural dimension of work that differentiates freelancers' experiences from employees' is physical and relational separation. Freelancers work alone more often than employees and are often physically separated from colleagues. It is also well documented that many freelancers experience a relational distance between themselves and colleagues – both employees and freelancing peers (Ashford et al., 2018). Many freelancers report feeling isolated (Ashford et al., 2007) and like 'perpetual strangers' (Kunda et al., 2002) and being met with hostility in the companies they temporarily work for (Inkson et al., 2001). As Osnowitz (2010) pointed out in her ethnographic study of freelancing writers in the US, their very work arrangement enforces status distinctions between freelancers and employees. Very often, freelancers are considered part of the 'out-group', whereupon numerous psychological mechanisms come into play at the detriment of freelancers' social relations with employed

colleagues (Cropanzano et al., 2022). Some studies have also found that freelancing peers keep each other at an arm's-length distance (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Osnowitz, 2010). Illustrating freelancers' relational challenges and the subsequent experiences to which they give rise, Petriglieri et al. (2018) described the 'agony' (p. 131) many freelancers go through. A key finding in their study is that absent the social environment found in organizations, many freelancers become lonely. To compensate, they develop more personal, as opposed to professional, networks, in turn creating a more personalized and precarious work identity, which gives rise to emotional tensions (Petriglieri et al., 2018).

### ***2.7.5 Empirical limitation in the literature on freelancers' experiences***

The literature on freelancers' experiences suffer from one important empirical limitation. Much of the research describing freelancers' experiences is of a qualitative nature (Cropanzano et al., 2022) (some exemplary qualitative work has been conducted by Barley & Kunda, 2004; Inkson et al., 2001; Osnowitz, 2010), though some quantitative work has been produced in recent years (e.g., Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Lo Presti et al., 2018; Shevchuk & Strebkov, 2021; Van den Born & Van Witteloostuijn, 2013). What characterizes both streams of research is that most empirical studies sample exclusively from freelancers (and, in some cases, their clients). In other words, empirical studies comparing freelancers' experiences with employees' are difficult to come by, as documented by Ashford et al. (2018), Caza et al. (2022), and Cropanzano et al. (2022). I should emphasize that this lack of empirical comparisons in the literature on freelancers' experiences is not a shortcoming of a given study; however, as the literature accumulates without it, this lack of empirical comparisons limits our ability to make inferences regarding freelancers' experiences.

### ***2.7.6 Theory limitations in the literature on freelancers' experiences***

The literature on freelancers' experiences also has some theory limitations. More generally, theories in organization scholarship have been developed with a different era in mind; an era where NSWAs were less prevalent than they are today, and organization theories have yet to sufficiently capture the experiences of individuals spending substantial periods of their work lives in the job market (Ashford et al., 2018; Barley et al., 2017; Cappelli & Keller, 2013). Focusing more specifically on literature with high relevance to the studies making up this thesis, we see the following shortcomings noted by Ashford and colleagues.

First, we know that freelancers are often awarded lower status and prestige than employees, yet we have limited research on what relationships look like when freelancers join

a pre-existing work group and how they adapt to intra-organizational dynamics (Cropanzano et al., 2022, p. 505) (I address this need in Study 1).

Second, a great deal of qualitative work has explored how freelancers' craft their identities, giving rich insights into individual experiences. However, to better understand how freelancers develop and maintain their identities, we are left with a need for quantitative investigations (Cropanzano et al., 2022) (I address this need in Study 2).

Third, freelancing (in theory) offers more autonomy than employment. However, there may be dark sides to autonomy and, more broadly, the freedom that comes with freelancing, which research has yet to explore fully. More specifically, the freedom that formally accompanies freelancing can induce stress and other negative psychological experiences, though more research, particularly of a quantitative nature, is needed to investigate this topic (Cropanzano et al., 2022) (I address this need in Study 3). How the studies that make up this thesis address these needs is discussed in Section 4.

### **3. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN EXAMINING FREELANCERS' EXPERIENCES**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this section, I discuss the methodological considerations on which this thesis is founded. I focus on considerations not explicitly addressed in the three papers that make up this thesis. I begin by discussing the main purposes of the three studies in this thesis. I discuss this to make the studies' purposes explicit and because other methodological considerations are tied to their purposes. In Section 3.3, I discuss important factors to consider when sampling freelancers. In this section, I also describe how participants were sampled for the data-gathering processes in Study 1 and in Studies 2 and 3, respectively. In Section 3.4, I discuss matters pertaining to generalizability. Thereafter, in Section 3.5, I discuss important considerations regarding measuring freelancers' experiences. In Section 3.6, I discuss the philosophy of science that I adhere to. Finally, in Section 3.7 I discuss the ethical considerations that were taken into account prior to and during the three studies.

#### **3.2 Exploring and describing freelancers' experiences**

To provide new insights into freelancers' experiences, the studies in this thesis explore freelancers' experiences (Study 1), and describe them and how they differ from employees' (Studies 2 and 3). In other words, these studies do not seek to estimate the causal influence that freelancing can have on workers' experiences; this would require longitudinal data, instruments for regression analysis, or other advanced approaches that are needed when using observational cross-sectional data. I also discuss in the methodological and/or limitation sections of the three papers that causal inferences are outside the scope of the studies the papers report. Therefore, having pointed this out here and discussed it in the papers, I do not engage in any further discussion of matters explicitly pertaining to causality in this thesis summary. In line with this choice, besides discussing the measurement of freelancers' experiences, I do not address internal validity further.

#### **3.3 Sampling freelancers**

As Shevchuk and Strebkov (2021) discussed in depth, researching freelancers in a quantitative manner poses serious methodological challenges because they belong to a hard-to-survey population. There are several reasons for this, some of which have already been addressed. One challenge is that national statistical offices and established nationwide surveys using random probability sampling rarely provide detailed information about individuals who freelance. A



second challenge is that sampling through companies, the useful go-to approach for sampling employees, rarely works in the case of freelancers because they rarely have long-term connections with a company, and it is rare to obtain a sufficient sample size of freelancers in one company. A third challenge is that although freelancers represent a significant share of the workforce and increasingly so in many countries around the world, they still represent a minority, which also makes it difficult to obtain a sufficient sample size. A fourth challenge is that online platforms for freelance work rarely provide access to their membership databases or other data. A fifth challenge is that the population of freelancers comprises a very heterogeneous group of individuals, and this heterogeneity needs to be accounted for (Davis et al., 2014; Shevchuk & Strebkov, 2021; Shevchuk et al., 2019).

To overcome these challenges, I sampled freelancers with the aid of a LMI for contract managers and two labour unions – Norsk Journalistlag (NJ) and Norsk Kritikerlag (NK) – for journalists. With the assistance of the LMI, I was able to obtain a sample of 21 contract managers, all of whom I interviewed for the first study. With the assistance of NJ and NK, I was able to sample from the vast majority of the population of journalists in Norway. According to its own estimates (corroborated by my own), NJ represents more than 90% of journalists in Norway. This approach resulted in a total sample of 1,860 respondents, including 222 freelancing journalists (though the usable samples for Studies 2 and 3 were smaller than this).

The excellent assistance from the LMI, NJ, and NK had several benefits when it came to sampling freelancers. Notably, the two occupations I sampled from are theoretically interesting and empirically relevant. Contract managers represent around 10% of the freelancers in the US<sup>17</sup> (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020) and often have a significant influence in and on the companies they work for. However, their experiences remain understudied, even though scholars have paid increasing attention to them in recent years (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2020). Journalists are highly skilled workers in a high-status occupation. An important feature of journalism is that it is an occupation in which freelancing has been common for many decades (Gynnild, 2005). Examining the experiences of freelancing journalists can therefore shed light on how the experiences of workers in other occupations may manifest if freelancing becomes more common and widespread in these occupations. However, studies of freelancers have disproportionately focused on those in technical occupations

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<sup>17</sup> Because of the reasons discussed in Section 2.5, it is not possible to estimate the relative or absolute population of contract managers in Norway.

(Anderson & Bidwell, 2019), and studies on journalists are difficult to find in the organization theory literature.

Beyond providing access to practitioners of two interesting occupations, the assistance from the LMI, NJ, and NK had more pragmatic benefits. First and foremost, it provided me with sufficient sample sizes for one qualitative and two quantitative studies. Sampling from two specific occupations also reduced ex ante the heterogeneity that needed to be accounted for in the three studies. In other words, the assistance from the company and both unions enabled me to overcome challenges that are endemic to sampling from freelancers. That said, the generalizability of these samples is worth discussing.

### **3.4 Generalizability**

This section discusses the generalizability of the samples and the related experiences explored and described in Studies 1, 2 and 3. The focus in this discussion is on freelancers, although the discussion also applies to the employees included in Studies 2 and 3. There are four factors in particular<sup>18</sup> that could challenge the generalizability of the findings in the studies that make up this thesis: selection effects, occupational differences, the research context, and sample sizes.

#### **3.4.1 Selection effects**

Regarding selection effects, there are push and pull factors that drive workers to become freelancers (Van den Born & Van Witteloostuijn, 2013). The exposure to and influence of these push and pull factors vary from individual to individual. While no studies have explicitly investigated selection effects in the case of freelancers, numerous studies have found that the self-employed and entrepreneurs, individuals who are comparable to freelancers in several respects, are exposed to numerous selection effects (Dawson & Henley, 2012; Kirkwood, 2007). This means that the population of freelancers is likely different from the population of non-freelancing individuals. Consequently, it is difficult to say whether the experiences of current freelancers would be valid for non-freelancing individuals were they to have been freelancers in a counterfactual reality. Put differently, the experiences studied in this thesis may not apply to individuals other than those who, for whatever reasons, actually do freelance.

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, other factors could have been discussed as well; however, the discussion of these four factors conveys the overall challenge of generalizing the findings in the three studies. I also believe that the overall conclusion is applicable even when other factors are considered as well.

### ***3.4.2 Occupational differences***

Next, countless institutions beyond work arrangements influence workers' experiences. Their occupation is key in this regard (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019). Once someone enters an occupation, they are exposed to its institutional features, such as norms and cultural templates, which shape individuals' experiences (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Scott, 2014). This means that the experiences of a freelancing journalist, for example, will often differ considerably from those of a contract manager. This can limit the extent to which the experiences of freelancing practitioners in one occupation can be extrapolated to those in another. That said, the mechanisms that arguably drive the outcomes examined in Studies 1, 2, and 3 are likely applicable to freelancers more generally. The findings should therefore, at least to some extent, apply to a broader freelance population. This point is discussed in more detail in the respective papers.

### ***3.4.3 Research context***

The research reported in this thesis was conducted in Norway, and the participants were freelancers and employees (predominantly<sup>19</sup>) working in that country. Two features of the Norwegian work context should be considered, as they can affect some of the experiences of the freelancers studied in this thesis: the Norwegian welfare state and the Work Environment Act.

Compared to most other countries, Norway has a generous welfare state (Andersen et al., 2014; Kuhnle & Kildal, 2005), which implies that Norwegian residents/citizens receive comparatively high financial support from the state if need be. With this welfare regime in place, freelancers in Norway may experience less financial insecurity than freelancers in many other countries. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that financial well-being is a relative experience – that is, an experience that follows from an assessment of one's own previous income and comparable peers' current income (Brüggen et al., 2017). This means that we can expect freelancers in Norway to assess their financial security based on their previous financial security and that of their professional peers. The extent to which freelancers in Norway experience less financial insecurity than freelancers in other regions is therefore uncertain, but this possibility should be kept in mind.

The Work Environment Act is a Norwegian set of regulations that provides employees with strong rights at work and a high level of decision-making involvement in Norwegian

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<sup>19</sup> A few of the contract managers interviewed in Study 1 had taken jobs abroad.

companies. The Work Environment Act also imposes solid boundaries regarding the maximum number of working hours (generally 37.5 hrs per week) and requirements for the physical, psychological, and social working conditions to which employees are entitled (Brandth & Kvande, 2019; Hernes, 2006). One possible consequence of this is that employees in Norway have a better work–life balance than employees in many other regions (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015). However, freelancers in Norway are not covered by all the regulations in the Work Environment Act. In particular, there is no limit to the maximum number of hours they can work. The difference between freelancers’ and employees’ work–life balance may therefore be greater in Norway than in some other countries. That said, I found a positive relationship between working hours and work–life balance in Study 3. Because this result is likely explained by occupational characteristics, as discussed in Paper 3, this result indicates that the Norwegian context is likely not so relevant for the generalizability of the results in Study 3.

#### **3.4.4 Sample sizes**

Regarding sample size, the 21 informants, and, more overall, the qualitative research design of Study 1, do not enable statistical generalization. That said, it is possible to theoretically generalize the findings from Study 1 to some extent. In short, this study describes the different on-the-job challenges that contract managers experience and their attempts to overcome them. While no challenge was universal in the sense that every informant had experienced it, every challenge was widespread in the sense that the majority of the informants had experienced it, which suggest that the reported challenges are common to contract managers. Importantly, the findings in Study 1 rests on a theoretical perspective wherein contract managers are considered ‘outside insiders’ (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2020). This perspective draws parallels to the highly validated social identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000), whereby the formation of in- and out-groups has wide-reaching implications for the relations between and experiences of those in the in-group (employees) and those in the out-group (contract managers) (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Moreover, while I uncovered some new experiences and behaviours in this study, several of the experiences are corroborated by findings in previous studies (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021; Inkson et al., 2001), testifying to at least some external validity for Study 1. In short, while I make no claim to the statistical generalizability of Study 1, several factors indicate at least some potential for theoretical generalization.

The sample sizes in Studies 2 and 3 are 1,031 n and 1,186 n, respectively. According to data from the NTA, there were 7,919 active journalists in Norway in 2019. Using a sample size

calculator informs us that with a population of 8,000, the sample size should be at least 367 n, with a confidence level of 95% and the margin of error at 5%. The sample sizes are thus large enough to statistically generalize to the population. One important drawback, however, is that the samples are not a result of probability sampling; this could limit the representativeness of the two samples. At the same time, as I discuss in the papers reporting Studies 2 and 3, when comparing demographic data from the sample and the population (using data from the NTA) we find that the samples do correspond to the population of journalists in terms of several demographic features. This suggests that the results can be statistically generalized – at least to a Norwegian population.

### **3.5 Measuring freelancers' experiences**

A survey questionnaire was developed to measure certain experiences among the participants involved in Studies 2 and 3. The extant measures developed to investigate workers' experiences in organization theory are generally formulated with employees in mind (Bergman & Jean, 2016; Caza et al., 2022). Specifically, these measures assume or make explicit references to structural or relational features of organizational life, such as bosses, work groups, subordinates, or workplace contexts; these are features that seldom apply to freelancers on a consistent basis (Caza et al., 2022). One illustrative example is the concept of organizational identity and measures developed for this construct, which generally presumes a long-term affiliation with a given company. Quantitative investigations of freelancers' experiences should use measures or investigate experiences that do not imply permanent or long-term membership in a given organization. Hence, such considerations were made prior to and during the development of measures for Studies 2 and 3, and none of the measures used in these studies presume the existence of a long-term membership in a given organization.<sup>20</sup>

For Study 1, to explore the experiences of the freelancers that participated in this study I relied on an inductive approach that provided rich accounts of these experiences. Hence, with the intention of grounding the findings inductively in the experiences of the participants, Study 1 required fewer ex ante considerations with regards to the measurement of freelancers' experiences than Study 2 and 3. Instead, how to interpret the rich accounts provided by the participants represented a key methodological consideration in Study 1, and I kindly refer the reader to the methodological section of Paper 1 for a discussion of the approach I took to do so.

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<sup>20</sup> The measures used in case of mediating variables have important limitations, particularly in Study 3. Because these limitations are discussed in Papers 2 and 3, I do not address them in this thesis summary.

### 3.6 Philosophy of science framework

This thesis is composed of one qualitative and two quantitative studies – that is, one inductive and two deductive studies.<sup>21</sup> Such studies generate knowledge in different ways and are sometimes viewed as belonging to different philosophies of science camps – typically (social) constructionism or interpretivism for qualitative/inductive studies and positivism for quantitative/deductive studies (Moses & Knudsen, 2012). These camps have some conflicting views, and adherence to one of these could be considered paradoxical when qualitative and quantitative studies are combined in one thesis. With this in mind, I believe it is worthwhile to elaborate on the philosophy of science camp to which I adhere: scientific realism.

#### 3.6.1 *Scientific realism*

Scientific realism is a philosophy of science that was developed in response to realism. The core tenet of realism and its offspring scientific realism is that there is in fact a reality. Following Godfrey-Smith (2003), a reasonable step beyond this core tenet is ‘common-sense realism naturalized’, which Godfrey-Smith (2003, p. 176) explained as follows:

We all inhabit a common reality, which has a structure that exists independently of what people think and say about it, except insofar as reality is comprised of, or is causally affected by, thoughts, theories, and other symbols, and except insofar as reality is dependent on thoughts, theories, and other symbols in ways that might be uncovered by science.

More plainly, common-sense realism naturalized states that there is a reality that exists independently of human thought, though some parts of reality can be influenced by human agency.

Common-sense realism naturalized represents the first of two statements of scientific realism, in keeping with the view of Godfrey-Smith (2003). The second statement is as follows: ‘One actual and reasonable aim of science is to give us accurate descriptions (and other representations) of what reality is like. This project includes giving us accurate representations of aspects of reality that are unobservable’ (Godfrey-Smith, 2003, p. 176). In other words,

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<sup>21</sup> I kindly refer the reader to the three papers for specific information on why qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilized in the respective studies. See also Section 4 in this thesis summary, in which I discuss how the qualitative and quantitative approaches enabled theoretical and empirical contributions.

through research, we can describe reality, though the accuracy of our descriptions varies depending on how observable the aspect of reality we research is and how fitting the research instruments are for describing a given aspect of reality.

Several important implications follow from adherence to scientific realism. First, scientific realism acknowledges thoughts and other subjective experiences as part of reality. Second, there are different ways to explore reality; there is no universal recipe to follow nor methods to apply when exploring reality; however, some methods are more suited for exploring some parts of reality than others. Third, reality can be described in different ways – for example, through the use of words or images (Godfrey-Smith, 2003). Based on this, one realizes that inductive and deductive studies have value in themselves and in tandem.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Research in the social sciences has ethical aspects that are important to consider, particularly when gathering primary data from individuals, as I have done. Participants in research projects may not always understand what they agree to prior to participating in the project, they may share sensitive or even confidential information about themselves or others, and they may be negatively influenced by their participation in the research project (Briggle & Mitcham, 2012; Zyphur & Pierides, 2017).

I took several steps to maximize the ethical character of the three studies in this thesis. I contacted the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) prior to my data-gathering processes to get these processes approved. To obtain approval, researchers must agree to adhere to numerous measures stipulated by the NSD, including, among other conditions, which data can legally be gathered, how the data should be gathered, how the data should be stored, who the data can be shared with, and what should be done with the data after the research project/study has been completed. In addition, the NSD has created a template for how to inform participants about the nature of the research project in a manner that is understandable to laypeople. This template also informs participants about their legal rights, such as the right to withdraw from the project at any moment without having to provide an explanation and the right to have their personal data removed from the project. The NSD's procedures and principles were followed to the letter, and the two data-gathering processes and their related studies were approved by the NSD.

Three external actors (LMI, NJ, and NK) assisted with data gathering. These actors facilitated the data gathering by forwarding mail from us (my main supervisor and me) to members in their databases. However, this was the extent of their involvement in the data

gathering, and they will not be given access to data containing personal information. The LMI who assisted with Study 1 was naturally concerned about the well-being of the members in their database, as were the members of the two labour unions who facilitated the second data-gathering process. The questions used in the interview guide and the survey questionnaire were therefore inspected by the external actors involved in the given research project, and we would have been denied access to their members if we had intended to gather information that was considered too sensitive or in any way damaging.

The results of the three studies have also been presented at seminars and conferences for interim managers and journalists in Norway. Specifically, the results for the first study, which focused on contract managers' experiences, have been presented on two occasions to contract managers in Norway, many of whom were participants in Study 1. The results for Studies 2 and 3 were presented to and discussed with freelance journalists at a national conference for NJ members. No participant expressed any form of dissatisfaction on these occasions.<sup>22</sup> Quite the contrary, many expressed their satisfaction with the research process in which they had been involved.

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<sup>22</sup> One journalist expressed in a 3 A.M. email that he was dissatisfied with the technical solutions used for the online survey questionnaire and wanted his response to be deleted. His request was granted.



## 4. OVERVIEW OF THESIS PAPERS

This thesis is composed of three papers titled “‘I Do Not Say Anything About Me Being a Contract Manager’”: Contract Managers and Their On-the-Job Challenges’, ‘I Am Not an Employee; Am I Then a Professional? Work Arrangements, Professional Identification and the Mediating Role of the Intra-Professional Network’, and ‘Free to Have Imbalance: Freelancers’ Work–Life Balance and the Mediating Role of Three Key Work Facets’. In this section, I provide an overview of each paper, including its topic, method, results, and discussions. I also discuss how each paper, as well as how they in combination, contributes to the literature on freelancers’ experiences, and their implications for future research and practice.

### 4.1 Paper 1: “‘I Do Not Say Anything About Me Being a Contract Manager’”: Contract Managers and Their On-the-Job Challenges

Contract management, whereby independent contractors perform managerial work for companies, has become a widespread arrangement (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2021; Younger, 2022). Although theory suggests that contract managers can have a positive impact on and in companies, research has documented that contract management is associated with several negative organizational outcomes (Ballinger & Marcel, 2010; Bangert et al., 2022; Intintoli et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2022). This discrepancy between the theoretical promise of contract management and documented organizational outcomes suggests that contract managers face on-the-job challenges that differ from those faced by employed managers and impact their ability to exert a positive influence on and in companies. Two studies have documented that contract managers face a certain set of on-the-job challenges, but these studies either provide a superficial report on some of these challenges (Inkson et al., 2001) or an in-depth account of one on-the-job challenge (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021).

In my first paper, I sought to further our understanding of contract managers’ on-the-job challenges and how they attempt to overcome them. To do so, I explored the experiences of 21 contract managers through 32 interviews. The starting point for this exploration is the strong theoretical tension inherent in contract management (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021; Inkson et al., 2001), which is a product of independent contractors, who are by definition organizational outsiders, working as managers, who are typically conceived of and expected to be organizational insiders. This tension implies that contract managers are ‘outside insiders’ (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019).

The exploratory research reported in Paper 1 uncovered the following four on-the-job challenges common to contract managers: communicating contract status and contract period, being quick off the mark, finding the right level of integration, and attaining authority. This first finding is novel to the literature on contract management, which either neglects to consider how contract managers present themselves or presumes that employees are aware of their contract status and the duration of their stay (Anderson & Cappelli, 2021). The literature on contract management has already uncovered that it can be difficult for contract managers to integrate into client companies (Inkson et al., 2001); however, this is the first study to uncover that they themselves also seek to limit the extent of their integration. The fact that contract managers struggle to attain authority and experience and need to be quick off the mark has already been acknowledged in the extant literature (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021; Inkson et al., 2001). For this first challenge – attaining authority – I provided a novel perspective that was fitted to contract managers in positions/functions that are equivalent to those of managers in normal (i.e., not project or specialized) positions. For the second challenge – being quick off the mark – I provided a richer account than hitherto available regarding why they have to be quick off the mark and how they attempt to do so. I also provided descriptions, rooted in the experiences of my informants, of how contract managers can attempt to overcome the other three challenges reported in this paper.

#### **4.2 Paper 2: I Am Not an Employee; Am I Then a Professional? Work Arrangements, Professional Identification and the Mediating Role of the Intra-Professional Network**

Qualitative studies (Cross & Swart, 2021; Maestripietri, 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2018) have found that freelancers develop a multiplicity of work identities that are often of a fluid or precarious nature and more personal rather than social. Two of these studies theorize, in short, that these identity outcomes are a consequence of adhering to a market logic (Cross & Swart, 2021; Maestripietri, 2019), while one paper theorizes that they are largely outcomes resulting from the more personal, as opposed to professional, networks that freelancers tend to develop (Petriglieri et al., 2018). The results of these studies indicate that freelancing is detrimental to individuals' professional identification – that is, their sense of oneness with a social work identity rooted in a professional community – but they are unable inform us of whether freelancing is actually more or less conducive to professional identification than employment.

In my second paper, I investigated the relationship between work arrangements – specifically freelancing and permanent employment – and professional identification. When doing so, building on insights from Petriglieri et al. (2018), among others, I paid particular

attention to how workers' intra-professional network sits at the nexus of this relationship – that is, as a mediator. The theoretical framework was rooted in social identity theory, and hypotheses were developed with this framework in mind and based in insights developed by extant relevant studies. The sample in this study consisted of 1,031 journalists, including 113 freelancers, who responded to a questionnaire that my colleagues and I developed. I employed structural equation modelling to test the hypotheses.

The results challenge the theorization that Maestriperi (2019) and Cross and Swart (2021) developed. I found no direct relationship between work arrangement and professional identification, indicating that freelancing is not more or less conducive to professional identification than permanent employment. In the paper, I propose three explanations for this outcome, building on the theorization of Maestriperi (2019) and Cross and Swart (2021): (i) a market logic is not detrimental to professional identification; (ii) a market logic is detrimental, but other aspects accompanying freelancing promote professional identification and thus counteract the negative influence of a market logic; (iii) a market logic and life in the market are detrimental to professional identification, but so is life in organizations, as it is often accompanied by possibly detrimental logics, such as managerialism and bureaucratization.

The results from the mediation analysis support some aspects of the theorization found in Petriglieri et al. (2018): One aspect of workers' intra-professional network, that is, the density of it, do mediate the relationship between their work arrangement and professional identification. As an important contribution to the theorization developed in Petriglieri et al. (2018), it is the nature of the relationship – that is, the density – between professional peers, and not how many professional peers someone knows, that matters for their professional identification.

### **4.3 Paper 3: Free to Have Imbalance: Freelancers' Work–Life Balance and the Mediating Role of Three Key Work Facets**

A distinguishing feature of freelancing is that workers retain directive control of their work (Cappelli & Keller, 2013), which also means that they have a greater personal responsibility for maintaining their own work–life balance (Annink et al., 2015; Kelliher et al., 2019). A common finding in studies exploring freelancers' work–life balance is that they struggle to maintain such balance (Davis et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2004) and, specifically, that 'work always wins' (Gold & Mustafa, 2013, p. 197). A shortcoming of the extant literature on freelancers' work–life balance, however, is that few studies empirically compare the experiences of freelancers with those of permanent employees. To my knowledge, Anderson and Bidwell (2019) were among

the first to do so, and they found no significant difference; however, they called for further studies, as their sample consisted of managers, who are expected to generally have low levels of work–life balance.

In my third paper, I investigated the relationship between work arrangements – specifically freelancing and permanent employment – and work–life balance. I incorporated three key work facets as mediating mechanisms – that is, work-scheduling autonomy, job income security, and collegial support – and investigated how these facets mediate the aforementioned relationship. The general assumption in the work–life balance literature is that these three facets function as resources that promote work–life balance (Brough et al., 2020). However, some studies have demonstrated that these presumed-to-be resources can in fact function as costs to work–life balance (Brett & Stroh, 2003; Mazmanian et al., 2013), particularly in high-status occupations (Schieman & Glavin, 2016; Schieman et al., 2006). Building on these two competing streams of literature, I contrasted a resource perspective with a perspective referred to as the ‘stress of higher status’ perspective. The sample in this study consists of 1,189 journalists – that is, practitioners of a high-status occupation – including 118 freelancers. Regression analysis and Hayes’s approach to mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017) were used to test the hypotheses.<sup>23</sup>

The results showed a significant and negative relationship between freelancing and work–life balance. This outcome corroborates several qualitative study findings that freelancers struggle to maintain a work–life balance (Annink et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2004; Gold & Mustafa, 2013; Shevchuk et al., 2019). Building on insights from several of these studies (e.g., Evans et al., 2004; Gold & Mustafa, 2013), although I do not incorporate these mechanisms into this study, I argue that the ‘shadow of the future’, coupled with ‘client colonization’, drives this outcome. In other words, freelancers’ dependency on current clients for landing future jobs drives them to prioritize their clients’ needs ahead of their own work–life balance.

Regarding the role of work-scheduling autonomy, job income security, and collegial support, the results unequivocally support the ‘stress of higher status’ perspective. That is, the three facets are all negatively and significantly associated with work–life balance, indicating

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<sup>23</sup> Note that I used a regression-based approach for mediation analysis in the study reported in this paper, while I used a structural equation modelling approach for the study reported in Paper 2. I kindly refer the reader to Appendix A for further details on my motivation for using a regression-based approach and for a discussion of why this approach was suitable for Study 3.

that journalists (strive to) acquire these facets to the detriment of their work–life balance.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, these three facets all mediate the relationship between work arrangement and work–life balance, and, interestingly, freelancers’ comparatively lower levels of job income security and collegial support are actually a blessing in disguise in terms of their work–life balance. Put differently, freelancers have lower levels of job income security and collegial support than their employed peers. The results from Study 3 inform us that if freelancers were to make the efforts needed to attain job income security that is on par with that of their employed peers and were they to acquire the same level of collegial support, they would have an even lower work–life balance than they already do.

#### **4.4 Contributions to the literature on freelancers’ experiences**

The papers in this thesis make several contributions to the literature on freelancers’ experiences. Several of the findings uncovered in Study 1 – for instance, the fact that some contract managers implicitly and explicitly present themselves as employed managers – are novel to the literature on contract management. For on-the-job challenges already noted in the extant literature, I provide novel perspectives and enrich our understanding of these – for instance, that contract managers actively focus their role in the company to be quick off the mark in their jobs. Overall, the findings in Study 1 add to the literature on freelancers’ experiences regarding their relationships with their organizational colleagues. It is well documented in this literature that freelancers, including contract managers (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021), have an organizational outsider status and are often treated as outsiders. In addition, I found that some contract managers act as outsiders by seeking to limit their integration into client companies, which is potentially advantageous for the companies and for the managers that succeed them. Beyond enriching the literature on freelancers’ experiences, by exploring the experiences of contract managers, I also expand this literature, which has predominantly focused on freelancers in technical occupations (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019).

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<sup>24</sup> As a robustness test (not reported in the paper) of the unequivocal support for the stress of higher status perspective, I investigated the interactions between work arrangement and each of the three facets (i.e.,  $X * M_{(1-3)}$ ). The aim of doing so was to determine whether the facets play a different role for freelancers than for employees. For instance, it could be that job income security is negatively related to the work–life balance of freelancers but not to that of employees. The only significant interaction was between work arrangement and collegial support, whereby collegial support was negatively related to work–life balance in both cases, but more so for freelancers than employees. It is therefore safe to conclude that the three work facets are negatively associated with work–life balance for both permanent employees and freelancers, at least in the case of journalists in Norway.

Paper 2 contributes to the literature on freelancers' experiences by enhancing our understanding of how freelancers, compared to permanent employees, experience their psychological connection to their profession. As discussed in Section 4.2, some of the empirical evidence resulting from Study 2 serves to corroborate and nuance the theorization found in the extant literature on freelancers' experiences, while some of the evidence challenges the theorization in this literature. Overall, Study 2 adds to the literature on how work arrangements, and specifically freelancing, can shape individuals' psychological connection to their profession and demonstrates the importance of considering individuals' intra-professional networks, particularly the density of such networks.

Finally, Paper 3 contributes to the literature on freelancers' experiences by enhancing our understanding of how they experience their work–life balance. This psychological experience has intrinsic importance and significant consequences for other experiences, such as stress and physical well-being. Arguably, there are two key theoretical contributions in Paper 3. Demonstrating that freelancers experience a worse work–life balance than employees is important, as it serves to corroborate the extant theorization in the literature on freelancers' experiences; this literature is also predominantly of a qualitative nature and lacks empirical comparisons with employees. Additionally, incorporating key work facets as mediators serves to enhance our understanding of the mechanisms involved in reducing and promoting freelancers' work–life balance. It is also worth noting that Paper 3 makes an important contribution to the literature on work–life balance by demonstrating that key work facets can be negatively correlated with work–life balance in a high-status occupation, counter to common assumptions found in this literature.

The papers considered collectively also offer valuable contributions to the literature on freelancers' experiences. Specifically, the three papers examine freelancers' relations to their colleagues, that is, their organizational colleagues in Paper 1 and their professional colleagues in Paper 2 and 3, albeit with a varying emphasis. The findings of Paper 1, along with the results presented in Paper 2 and 3, indicate that freelancers' relationships with their colleagues are not equivalent to those of their employed peers. Their formal work status as freelancers seem to create an informal status difference which, in the case of contract managers, gives rise to a particular set of on-the-job challenges, while for journalists, it reduces freelancers' level of professional identification and, interestingly, relate to an improved work-life balance compared to that of employees. This common thread across these three papers underscores the importance of work relationships for freelancers.

In addition, the papers demonstrate that freelancing is a work arrangement that relates not only to how individuals engage with their job; it extends to encompass a broader range of experiences, including how individuals perceive themselves (Paper 2), present themselves to others (Paper 1), and navigate the boundary between their work-life and personal life (Paper 3). In essence, when examined collectively, these three papers reveal that work arrangements are important structures that have the potential to shape individuals' perception of themselves and their perception of the world around them.

The papers also share a common focus on illuminating the trade-offs that can come with freelancers' comparatively large freedom to, formally, decide how, when and for whom to work. Paper 3 adeptly showcase one such potential trade-off, as captured in its title; Freelancers are 'Free to have [work-life] imbalance'. Additional trade-offs associated with freelancers' (formal) work-life freedom are identified in Paper 1 and 2, including challenges in attaining authority and relatively lower density of intra-professional networks. A richer understanding of the trade-offs in freelancing equips us as organization scholars to better describe freelancers' experiences.

In sum, the three papers contribute to the literature on freelancers' experiences by providing new perspectives, expanding the scope of inquiry to different occupational groups, validating existing theories, challenging assumptions, and emphasizing the role of work arrangements, social networks, and work facets in shaping freelancers' experiences.

#### **4.5 Implications for future research**

The three papers and the empirical limitations of the studies open up several avenues for future research on freelancers' experiences. Paper 1 reports the findings from a qualitative inductive study. Future studies could investigate how widespread the on-the-job challenges reported in Paper 1 are, the boundary conditions of these challenges, and their antecedents and outcomes. For instance, research could investigate in which contexts contract managers decide to present themselves as employed managers and the resulting interpersonal and organizational outcomes from this. Additionally, longitudinal studies investigating contract managers' experiences could provide valuable insights. It would be interesting to see whether, over time, contract managers become more capable of dealing with the on-the-job challenges reported in Study 1 or whether these challenges are more or less inevitable consequences of the tension between management and independent contracting.

Paper 2 provides valuable insights with regard to the differences between freelancers' and employees' professional identification and intra-professional networks. However, these

insights are based on correlational data. Future studies could strengthen or challenge these insights through the use of longitudinal or more nuanced data and complex empirical strategies (e.g., instrumental variable regression analysis or a coarsened exact matching procedure). Future studies could also investigate the extent to which freelancing practitioners of other semi-professions (e.g., teachers, nurses, and social workers) and more traditional professions (e.g., lawyers, doctors, and accountants) experience a professional identification that differs from that experienced by employed practitioners of these professions. Finally, important contributions could come from future studies designed to tease out which, if any, institutional logics (professional, market, or organizational) promote or negate freelancers' professional identification.

Several of the implications for future research from Study 2 apply to Study 3, given that these studies share some empirical limitations. Researchers could use longitudinal data to estimate a causal relationship between freelancing and work–life balance. Interesting results could also come from quantitative studies investigating whether and how freelancers become more capable of promoting and maintaining a work–life balance as their experience with freelancing accumulates. Future studies could also explore whether freelancers are more capable of maintaining a desired work–life balance in some occupations than in others and, if so, why. Anderson and Bidwell (2019) found no difference between contract managers' and employed managers' work–life balance, while I found that freelance journalists experience a worse work–life balance than employed journalists. These different results suggest that occupations are in themselves important institutions that could mediate or moderate individuals' work–life balance.

#### **4.6 Implications for practice**

The three papers make several practical contributions to the different practitioners involved in freelancing. Neither the literature on freelancing nor the management literature currently has much to say about how to facilitate the work of contract managers, leaving practitioners involved in contract management without evidence-based guidelines. In Paper 1, I provide contract managers, their clients, and LMIs involved in contract management with valuable guidelines by documenting four common on-the-job challenges and how contract managers attempt to overcome them. A key contribution, I believe, follows from documenting that there are different ways of communicating contract managers' contract status, and different options will likely have varied outcomes. Another important contribution comes from shedding light on the need for support from clients to promote contract managers' managerial authority.



Clients would be wise to provide this support from the start of the contract management job, for instance, through a town hall meeting.

Life in the job market can be solitary and psychologically challenging (Cross & Swart, 2022; Petriglieri et al., 2018). Arguably, for practitioners, the primary takeaway from Study 2 is that professionals and professional associations should facilitate positive relationships among freelancers and between freelancers and employees to induce greater intra-professional network density. This could nurture a stronger psychological connection between freelancers and their profession. Given that professionals' identification with their profession is a prerequisite for the survival of professions beyond a nominal category and that identification fosters well-being, this could benefit freelancers and professions alike.

For practitioners, the key takeaway from Study 3 is that freelancers are more exposed to a suboptimal work–life balance than employees. ‘Client colonization’ (Gold & Mustafa, 2013) in combination with the ‘shadow of the future’ (Evans et al., 2004) are mechanisms that in tandem likely drive this outcome. The shadow of the future is an inherent feature of life in the market, and referrals and references serve as valuable job market mechanisms. However, client colonization can often be avoided. Given that freelancers, particularly those in high-status occupations, provide valuable knowledge, services, and products to companies, it is in all parties' long-term interest to avoid client colonization and aid freelancers in attaining an optimal work–life balance.

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## Appendix

### A) Motivation for using a regression-based approach in Study 3

My motivation for applying a structural equation modelling approach in Paper 2 was that when conducting mediation analyses, this approach has several advantages over a regression-based approach (Mehmetoglu, 2018). However, a common response from colleagues and attendants at conferences was that structural equation modelling speaks to a smaller audience in the organization theory literature and particularly in its sub-streams concerned with management and human resources. I therefore applied a regression-based approach in Study 3.

This decision was also motivated by my reading of Hayes (2017), who pointed out that a structural equation modelling approach has no advantage over a regression-based approach in the case of mediation models with one mediator (Hayes, 2017), although this applies to situations with observed variables rather than latent constructs. In the third study, I therefore treated work–life balance as an observed variable rather than as a latent construct. This decision was supported by the variable receiving a satisfactory Cronbach’s Alpha score (.73) and satisfactory goodness-of-fit scores from a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (not reported in Paper 2<sup>25</sup>), indicating that no modifications of how the variable was measured were needed.

As a robustness check for the results from the regression-based approach, I ran a structural equation model analysis, wherein I modelled the dependent variable as a latent construct. In this analysis, I included only the independent variable, the three mediating variables, and the dependent variable. The advantage of this more selective model was that it yielded a sample with ~40% additional freelancers (n =160) compared to the full model (n =118) and ~25% additional permanent employees (n =1,301 compared to n =1,048). As seen in Table 4, the results of this analysis corroborate those from the regression-based approach, which are reported in Paper 3.

The estimator for this structural equation modelling was a maximum likelihood estimator. A bootstrap estimation procedure with 10,000 replications was used for the estimation to calculate 95% confidence intervals. The bootstrap confidence intervals are biased corrected. The coefficients are rounded off to two decimals. The variable denoting the work arrangement is scored as follows: permanent employment = 0; freelancing = 1.

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<sup>25</sup> The CFA for the construct building on the same four items used for the observed dependent variable in Study 2 resulted in the following goodness-of-fit scores: CFI = .997 (>.930); TLI = .990 (>.900); RMSEA = .039 (<.08); PCLOSE = .663 (>.05); SRMR = .013 (>.08). The chi-squared score was suboptimal, although this is expected in a sample with more than 200 observations (my sample included more than 1,000) (Kline, 2015; Ringdal & Wiborg, 2017).



**Table 4.** Structural equation modelling results

Independent variables (dependent variables in italics in second column)	Path coefficient	SE	Boot BC CI	
			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
	<i>Work-life balance</i>			
Work arrangement	-.48***	0.08	-.65	-.32
Work-scheduling autonomy	-.08***	0.01	-.11	-.04
Job income security	-.19***	0.03	-.25	-.13
Social support	-.08***	0.08	-.13	-.02
	<i>Work-scheduling autonomy</i>			
Work arrangement	1.20***	0.09	1.02	1.37
	<i>Job income security</i>			
Work arrangement	-1.57***	0.09	-1.74	-1.39
	<i>Social support</i>			
Work arrangement	-0.72***	0.07	-.87	-.58

## B) Interview guide\* used for second round of interviews in study 1

### Background

1. Can you describe your experience with Interimleder AS?
2. Can you describe your most recent job?
3. Can you describe your previous jobs?
4. Can you describe your career?

### Motivation for contract management

5. Why did you become a *contract* manager?
6. Why did you say 'yes' to your first contract management job?
7. Why did you say 'yes' to your most recent job?
8. Which intermediaries do you use?
9. Contract directly with clients?
10. Have your motivations for being a contract manager changed with time?

### Reasons for using intermediary

11. How do you get contract management jobs? In case of most recent job?
12. Why do you use Interimleder AS/an intermediary?
13. How did your relationship with Interimleder AS arise?
14. Can you describe the process from hearing about a given job till landing that job?

### On the job

15. Why have companies hired you as *contract* manager?
16. Describe a typical contract management job (mandate, length, tasks)?
17. How do you orient yourself on the job?
18. What is unique about being a contract manager compared to an employed manager? Advantages? Disadvantages?
19. As previous question, but compared with consultant?
20. Feedback on your performance from clients? From intermediary?

### On-the-job relations

21. In your most recent job, how was relations to: A) client(s), B) employees, C) did A and B change over time, and D) was this experience typical/representative?
22. Do you get the necessary authority from: A) client(s), B) employees and C) external actors?

### Relations to intermediary

23. How is your relationship with Interimleder AS while on the job (frequency, nature, consequences)?
24. What are your experiences with Interimleder AS prior to and after a given contract management job?

25. Getting a job through an intermediary, does that affect how you execute the job?

### **Social network**

26. Do you have relations with other contract managers?
27. Is your social network important to you for finding jobs?
28. Do you draw on your social network to execute jobs?

### **Professional development**

29. Beyond the work itself, do you spend time developing your skills as a contract manager? Which skills do you focus on, if so?

### **The future**

30. What is your plan for the coming years, employment or independent contracting?
31. What would you do if you could choose freely?
32. Do you have a long-term plan for your career?

### **Concluding questions**

33. Anything about being a contract manager we have not addressed?
34. Any questions for us?
35. Can we contact you later if need be?
36. Can we use information about you found online in an anonymized manner?

\*Note that the guide is here translated from the original Norwegian guide. The guide reflects the topics we discussed in the interviews, though we emphasized some topics (e.g., on-the-job relations) and paid less attention to others beyond asking basic questions.

## THESIS PAPERS

### Submission status

#### Paper 1

Flatøy, C. **“I Do Not Say Anything About Me Being a Contract Manager”**: Contract Managers and Their On-the-Job Challenges.

- In first round of review at *European Management Journal* (ABS 2) (submitted 09.05.2023).
- Accepted and presented at 37th Workshop on Strategic Human Resource Management arranged by European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management (EIASM), April 2022.
- Different versions of the paper presented at internal seminars at institute of Strategy and Management (SOL) and department of Applied Science (SNF) at the Norwegian School of Economics.
- Presented at two Interim Management Conferences arranged by Interimleder AS, January 2022 and August 2022.

#### Paper 2

Flatøy, C. **I Am Not an Employee; Am I Then a Professional? Work Arrangements, Professional Identification and the Mediating Role of the Intra-Professional Network.**

- In second round of review at *Journal of Professions and Organization* (ABS 2) (re-submitted 17.04.2023)
- Accepted at the 20th ISA World Congress of Sociology, June 2023.
- Earlier version of the paper accepted and presented at the 19th International Labour and Employment Relations Association (ILERA) Conference, June 2021.
- Opinion piece based on this study accepted and published in the primary outlet for journalism in Norway ‘M24.no’, March 2023  
(<https://m24.no/christer-a-flatoy-debatt-frilans/vi-ere-frilansjournalister-vi-med/591936>).

#### Paper 3

Flatøy, C. **Free to Have Imbalance: Freelancers’ Work–Life Balance and the Mediating Role of Three Key Work Facets.**

- In first round of review at *Personnel Review* (ABS 2) (submitted 16.02.2023)
- Accepted and presented at 39th European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) Conference, July 2023.
- Accepted at the 83rd Academy of Management (AOM) Conference, August 2023.
- Accepted at the 23rd European Academy of Management (EURAM) Conference, June 2023.
- Opinion piece based on this study accepted and published in the primary national outlet for research in Norway ‘Forskning.no’, March 2023  
(<https://forskersonen.no/arbeidsliv-fritid-kronikk/ikke-koloniser-frilansere-sin-fritid/2163733>)

# Paper 1

**Title:** “I Do Not Say Anything About Me Being a Contract Manager”: Contract Managers and Their On-the-Job Challenges.

**Author:** Flatøy, C.

**Under review at journal:** *European Management Journal*.

**Abstract:** Contract management, whereby independent contractors perform managerial tasks for client companies, is a widespread arrangement in many countries. Research suggests that contract managers can have a large and important influence on client companies; however, they often struggle to do so in practice and may actually have a negative impact on companies. We therefore need an improved understanding of how contract managers can succeed at their jobs. In this paper, we explore the on-the-job challenges that contract managers face and how they attempt to overcome them. To do so, we use an exploratory research approach and analyse interviews with 21 contract managers. Four challenges are uncovered, along with different actions that the managers take to address them. Our findings enrich the extant literature on contract management by adding to and nuancing our understanding of contract managers’ on-the-job experiences. The findings also provide practical guidelines for practitioners involved in contract management.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contracting has become an increasingly popular alternative to employment (Cappelli & Eldor, 2023; Katz & Krueger, 2019), and recent years have seen this trend extend to the core of organizations: management. In the United States, approximately one million independent contractors perform managerial work for companies that hire them (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Katz & Krueger, 2019). These companies are of varying types and sizes (Ballinger & Marcel, 2010; Mooney et al., 2017). Similar patterns are found across Europe, where contract management has been a more long-standing practice than in other regions (Anderson & Cappelli, 2021; Bruns & Kabst, 2005; Selby, 2022).

Contract management represents a strong theoretical tension (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2021). As independent contractors, contract managers are expected by law to keep an arm's-length distance from their clients, and vice versa. Contract managers also have no history in client organizations, and their stay has a predefined end date. As managers, contract managers are expected to supervise employees, administer core organizational processes, set the organization's direction through strategic planning, and generally engage in tasks that characterize managerial work. Put differently, contract managers are "outside insiders" (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019, p. 1000); they are not part of the organization but are expected to function as if they are (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2021).

As can be expected from this theoretical tension, research has documented that the on-the-job challenges that contract managers experience differ from those that employed managers face; they include hostility from others (Inkson et al., 2001) and difficulty attaining power (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021), which impact their capacity to function as managers. However, these studies either focus on one particular challenge – that is, attaining power (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021) – or list some without elaborating on them or on how contract managers attempt to overcome them (Inkson et al., 2001). Moreover, previous studies have focused on project managers (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021) or managers with highly specialized skills and functions (Inkson et al., 2001). Our understanding of the experiences of contract managers who have similar functions to those of employed managers therefore remains limited (Woods et al., 2020).

We seek to contribute to the literature on contract management by addressing these gaps. To do so, we explored the following research question: Which on-the-job challenges do contract managers face, and how do they attempt to solve these challenges? By on-the-job challenges,

we refer to the challenges contract managers face at the companies that hire them. We focused specifically on challenges that are common to contract managers and unique in the sense that they differ in form or intensity from those common to (employed) managers generally. Using an inductive approach, we conducted 32 interviews with 21 contract managers, the vast majority of whom enter executive/director positions at the companies they work for and have similar functions to those of employed managers.

We contribute to the literature on contract management by documenting hitherto neglected experiences and behaviours among contract managers. One such behaviour is some contract managers' portrayal of themselves as employed managers. This behaviour can serve as an important antecedent to (inter)personal and organizational outcomes. We also enrich this literature by providing new perspectives on findings uncovered by previous studies. To illustrate, we find that contract managers not only have more focused roles than employed managers tend to have (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019) but also actively focus their roles in the company. They do this by limiting which tasks they focus on and by focusing more on tasks than on relationships. These insights can, in themselves and through the research they hopefully inspire, reduce the discrepancy between the promise that contract management holds (Mooney et al., 2012) and the suboptimal organizational outcomes that are common in actuality (Ballinger & Marcel, 2010).

The paper proceeds as follows. We review the literature on contract management, including what contract management is, why companies hire contract managers, and insights from research on the organizational outcomes of contract management. We also discuss contract managers' organizational status as outside insiders, and the extant research on contract managers' on-the-job challenges. In the third section of this paper, we elaborate on the methodological approach we used to explore the research question, including the research setting, sample, data, and analytical approach. In the fourth section, we present the four overall findings. The fifth section discusses these findings and their theoretical and practical implications. This study's limitations are also discussed, and promising venues for future studies are described. The sixth section concludes the paper.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Contract management**

Contract management is a nonstandard work arrangement whereby an independent contractor enters a managerial position for a temporary, usually predefined period (Anderson & Bidwell,

2019). The arrangement is sometimes referred to as interim management in the case of contract managers hired for executive/director positions (Woods et al., 2020). Contract management seems to have originated as a distinct and explicit nonstandard work arrangement sometime during the late 1980s (Goss & Bridson, 1998), and some described it as having become a “permanent feature of the workplace” in the early 2000s (Vousden, 2002, p. 120). Today, more than a million contract managers are spread across the US and Europe (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Selby, 2022) performing managerial work for big and small public and private companies across the spectrum of industries (Ballinger & Marcel, 2010; Bruns & Kabst, 2005).

An important feature of contract management, differentiating it from management consultancy, is that contract managers are formally imbued with the authority that accompanies their managerial positions (Anderson & Cappelli, 2021; Bruns & Kabst, 2005). In other words, contract managers are, for all intents and purposes, managers in a company if only for a temporary period.

Companies hire contract managers for two reasons (Mooney et al., 2012). The first is that they need someone to perform the managerial work that they cannot find an employed manager to undertake. This managerial work generally entails gap management, whereby contract managers step into a managerial role and perform generic managerial tasks until the company can hire a permanent manager, though some contract management jobs involve tasks related to crisis management, turnarounds, and change management (Woods et al., 2020). The second reason is that managerial work is by nature temporary – typically project management. Contract managers in project management positions often engage in generic managerial tasks and sometimes in change management, product development, and so on; however, their mandate is often narrower and more specific than that of contract managers in other positions. In any case, contract managers provide companies with numerical and functional flexibility that can enhance the companies’ competitive advantage (Isidor et al., 2014; Mooney et al., 2013), at least in theory.

Though research on the organizational outcomes of contract management is scarce (Rubin & Ohlsson, 2022; Woods et al., 2020), available research suggests that it rarely unleashes its theoretical potential. Ballinger and Marcel (2010) found that companies that hire contract managers subsequently perform worse financially than companies that do not hire them. Intintoli et al. (2014) found similar evidence, though mainly in cases in which a contract manager replaced a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who left voluntarily. Wu et al. (2022) found that hiring contract managers as CEOs leads to less research- and development investment and reduces the short- and long-term returns for investors. Finally, according to Bangert et al.



(2022), contract managers in Chief Financial Officer (CFO) positions underinvest compared to employed CFOs, suggesting that companies with contract managers in key managerial positions, as Wu et al. (2022) also concluded, do not develop the company but, rather, focus on maintaining it.

It is worth emphasizing that the empirical evidence indicates that contract managers do strive to improve organizational outcomes (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021; Inkson et al., 2001). As they are exposed to the “shadow of the future” (Evans et al., 2004), whereby satisfying current clients lands them future clients, contract managers’ interests naturally align with those of their clients (Inkson et al., 2001). The discrepancy between the theoretical promise and the organizational outcomes of contract management documented in research therefore suggests that the on-the-job challenges that contract managers face differ from those that employed managers experience and reduce the former’s capability to exert a positive influence on organizational outcomes. We therefore need to understand what these challenges are and how contract managers can act to overcome them.

## **2.2 Outside insiders and their on-the-job challenges**

Scholars have explored the experiences of contract managers through the following lenses: psychological contract theory (Inkson et al., 2001), matching theory of employment (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019), and social power theory (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021). Despite looking through different lenses, scholars arrive at the same theoretical tension inherent in contract management; a theoretical tension we used to interpret our findings in light of: contract managers are “outside insiders” (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019, p. 1000), “short-term outsiders” (Inkson et al., 2001, p. 261), and “organizational outsiders” (Anderson & Cappelli, 2021, p. 2).

As managers, who are typically not only organizational insiders but are also at the core of organizations, contract managers are expected to engage in the broad set of tasks that characterize managerial positions (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019). Importantly, management is by nature an interdependent function that is heavily dependent on the actors involved in the different management tasks (Mintzberg, 2009). A general assumption in the management literature is therefore that, to have an optimal influence on their company, managers have to be, be viewed, and be treated as organizational insiders – that is, long-term/permanent members (Anderson & Cappelli, 2021).

As independent contractors, contract managers are by definition organizational outsiders (Anderson & Cappelli, 2021; Barley & Kunda, 2004). This status exposes them to several mechanisms that distance them from the companies they work for (Anderson & Bidwell,

2019). The first is legal, as independent contractors are expected to keep an arm's-length distance from their clients, and vice versa. In other words, there is a legal limit to how interdependent independent contractors and the companies they work for can become (Barley & Kunda, 2004). Second, as a rule, independent contractors have no history with the client companies they work for, implying that they have no relationships there that they can rely on to facilitate their managerial work. Third, their lack of organizational history also implies that they do not have company-specific knowledge, which challenges their ability to exert a positive influence on and in client companies. Fourth, operating in tandem with the second and third mechanisms, contract managers will be only temporarily involved in client companies, something their temporary colleagues are aware of (Anderson & Cappelli, 2021), which limits their opportunity to develop social relationships and company-specific knowledge (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021; Inkson et al., 2001).

Two studies have explored contract managers' on-the-job challenges. Inkson et al. (2001) interviewed 50 contract managers working in New Zealand, most of whom were highly specialized and accountants. Inkson et al. (2001) had a broad focus, exploring how contract managers understand their psychological contract and career. Numerous findings are reported, including the following on-the-job challenges: "Not part of client company, unfamiliar with it, hostility from others," "Lack of clear briefs from clients," "Lack of commitment by/recognition in the client company," and "Lack of familiarization time" (Inkson et al., 2001, pp. 275-276). Based on these and other findings, Inkson et al. (2001) labelled contract managers as "loners" and as individuals who pass through organizations without "touching the sides" (p. 275), thereby implying that their ability to have an impact on and in companies is tied to their ability to overcome these challenges.

The second study, conducted by Anderson and Cappelli, was reported in a published paper (2021) and in a more extensive working paper (2020). Employing the conceptual framework developed by French et al. (1959), Anderson and Cappelli (2020, 2021) focused on how contract managers attain power in client companies. They found that for contract managers, attaining power based on their given managerial position is a key on-the-job challenge that follows from their status as organizational outsiders. To counter this on-the-job challenge and exert influence, the participants in their study had primarily turned to their expertise – their high levels of skills and knowledge – as a base for their power. Somewhat paradoxically, this expert power base is enabled by contract managers' status as organizational outsiders, meaning that they are objective actors who are comparatively independent of other actors in the company (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020; French et al., 1959). Some also "borrowed"

(2020, p. 26) power from the client who hired them (typically whomever they reported to), though this was a less popular alternative and was viewed as a last resort that hindered rather than facilitated their ability to exert influence.

While providing us with valuable insights into contract managers' on-the-job challenges, the two studies leave room for further inquiry into the matter. Inkson et al. (2001) reported four on-the-job challenges but did not elaborate beyond reporting how frequently these challenges were mentioned. Conversely, Anderson and Cappelli (2020, 2021) provided a thorough account, but only of one on-the-job challenge. In addition, Anderson and Cappelli (2020, 2021) sampled from project managers, while Inkson et al. (2001) sampled primarily from contract managers with a highly specialized skill set and function, which limits our understanding of the on-the-job challenges that contract managers in other managerial positions (CEOs, CFOs, Human Resource (HR) directors, etc.) face. Therefore, the need for a detailed account of the on-the-job challenges that contract managers face and how they attempt to overcome them largely remains. We addressed this need in this study by exploring the experiences of contract managers in (primarily) executive/director positions, as described next.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

Few studies have explored contract managers' on-the-job challenges. Moreover, we believed that these studies uncovered only some on-the-job challenges that contract managers experience and provided only a partial account of several of these. Therefore, we decided to employ an exploratory approach to uncover new challenges and further details of these and already-uncovered challenges. We elaborate on the details of this exploratory approach in this section.

#### **3.1 Research setting**

The setting of our study is, in broad terms, the Norwegian market for contract management. We sampled informants with the assistance of the largest labour market intermediary (LMI) exclusively dedicated to contract management in Norway. While contract management is less widespread in Norway than in many other countries, such as the United Kingdom (Selby, 2022) and Germany (Bruns & Kabst, 2005), it has, according to the LMI that assisted with this study, become more widespread, particularly over the last 5 years, and several LMIs have been founded to tap into the Norwegian market for contract management. Of the contract managers that the LMI that assisted with this study mediated in 2021, 31% were CEOs/directors, 26% were CFOs/financial directors, 29% were managers in different support functions (e.g., Chief

Operating Officers (COOs), HR directors, and Chief Commercial Officers (CCOs) and Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) director), 10% were line managers, and 5% were project managers. One in five were female.

### **3.2 Sample**

For this study, we recruited all 21 informants through one LMI that focused on the more general (executives/directors) as opposed to specialized (e.g., specialized accountants) management segment. Our sampling criterion was that informants should have had a contract management job within the 12 months preceding the interview date, which reduced recollection issues. We contacted all the managers that the assisting LMI mediated over the last 12 months, and of these ~50 individuals, 21 agreed to participate in our study. Descriptive information, such as the positions they usually take as contract managers and their years of experience as employed managers and contract managers, is found in Table 1. We used information from their interviews and LinkedIn profiles (having been permitted to do so during the interviews) to obtain descriptive information about our informants.

Regarding position and gender, the proportions in our sample correspond to those found in the population that the LMI that assisted with this study mediated in 2021. We categorized the informants based on the positions they usually took or, in a few cases, how they described themselves. For instance, Mark had had two contract management jobs: purchasing director and project manager. Because Mark used the title “project manager” to describe himself, so did we. All the informants exclusively or primarily worked onsite, though some had periodically worked from home in recent years owing to COVID-19 restrictions. Regarding supervisory responsibilities, every CEO had them, every CFO usually had them, executives and directors in support functions sometimes had them, while the two project managers did not have them (Mark had such responsibilities in his job as a purchasing director). Compared to the samples found in previous studies of contract managers’ experiences (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021; Inkson et al., 2001), this sample is unique because the contract managers have functions that are similar to those of equivalent employed managers. One informant, Saul, demonstrated this equivalence as follows: “As a contract manager, you do not play the part. You go all in; you’re in charge of everything that comes with the [CEO] position.” This similarity enables us to explore the on-the-job challenges that differences in employment status, as opposed to differences in work and responsibilities, can give rise to in the case of contract managers.

It is worth emphasizing that all of our informants had extensive experience as employed managers prior to becoming contract managers. Specifically, all the informants had been managers employed in positions that were equivalent to or higher than those they took as contract managers. Most had also worked as employed managers in a similar industry/ies and often a similar company/ies as they did as contract managers. Extensive prior experience is what enables independent contractors to land jobs (Barley & Kunda, 2004), and contract managers are no exception (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Inkson et al., 2001). Importantly, this prior experience formed the backdrop against which our informants compared their experiences as contract managers.

### **3.3 Data**

Our data consist of interview transcripts. We conducted a total of 32 interviews in two rounds. In the first round, we interviewed 11 contract managers to get a broad overview of the on-the-job challenges common to them. A typical question was “Can you describe how it is to work as a contract manager in a client company?” In the second round, we reinterviewed these 11 informants and added 10 additional ones. This second round served several purposes. First, it enabled us to learn more about the challenges uncovered in the first round. Second, it enabled us to focus explicitly on how our informants had attempted to overcome the challenges uncovered in the first round of interviews, as well as the on-the-job challenges that emerged during the second round. Third, the second round enabled us to ensure that we reached theoretical saturation. A typical (follow-up) question in this second round was “How do you deal with this challenge?”

The interviews in both rounds lasted, on average, 1 hr, with the shortest lasting 30 min and the longest lasting 2 hr. Every interview was transcribed verbatim, resulting in 350 pages of single-spaced transcripts in font size 12. The NVivo v.12 software was used to organize the data and facilitate the analysis.

### **3.4 Analytical approach**

We used an inductive approach, moving iteratively back and forth between the data gathering, data analysis, and writing up of our findings (Murphy et al., 2017). We generally had broad and open-ended questions during the first round of interviews and generally more targeted and specific questions in the second. Towards the end of the second-round interviews, we tested and verified our impressions with our informants, which served to corroborate some impressions and reject others.

**Table 1.** Sample characteristics

Number of informants	Externally hired contract managers: 21
Informants' genders	Female: 5 Male: 16
Informants' ages	Average: ~55 years Highest: 60–70 years Lowest: 42 years
Years of managerial experience	<u>As employed manager</u> Mode number: ~15 years Least: 5 years Most: 30+ years  <u>As contract manager</u> Mode number: ~5 years Least: > 1 year Most: ~15 years
Number of jobs as contract manager	Total: 79 Average: ~4 Least: 1 Most: 12
Contract durations reported	Average: 6 months Shortest: 3 months Longest: 26 months
Informants' typical positions as contract managers	CEO/director: 9 CFO/financial director: 4 Managerial stab: 6 Project manager: 2

We coded the data during and after each round of interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). We read through every line of text from the transcripts and employed line-by-line coding. During this process, we searched for statements related to on-the-job challenges, how our informants had dealt with them, and what they described as the reasons for them. Our coding scheme consisted of a priori codes (e.g., “authority”) and, where the extant literature did not offer suitable options, in vivo codes (e.g., “quick off the mark”). To facilitate an overview, we sorted the data into two levels: “on-the-job challenge” on the higher level and related “reason(s) for the on-the-job challenge” and “actions taken to overcome the on-the-job challenge” on the level below. A levelled version of our coding scheme can be seen in Table 3.

After coding the data for each informant, we compared the codes across the different informants to arrive at the on-the-job challenges that were considered common to contract managers. We kept only those codes that several informants corroborated. For every on-the-job challenge discussed below, 13–16 informants – that is, the majority – had discussed it. A smaller number shared insights into how they had attempted to overcome a given challenge simply because not every informant had experienced a given challenge or found ways to deal with it; however, in every case, at least five informants had discussed one or more ways of acting to overcome a given challenge.

## 4. FINDINGS

Our exploratory study uncovered four on-the-job challenges that were common to contract managers, keeping in mind that we explored on-the-job challenges that were unique to contract managers, as opposed to more generic management challenges. The challenges we uncovered were communication of the contract status and contract period, being quick off the mark, finding the right level of integration, and attaining authority. Below, we document these findings, how the informants acted in their attempts to overcome these challenges, and the reasons they identified for a given challenge.

### 4.1 Communication of the contract status and contract period

Shortly before or after they enter a given job, contract managers have to introduce themselves to their temporary colleagues, which we learnt represents an on-the-job challenge. In cooperation with the clients who hire them, contract managers have to decide whether to

introduce themselves as a contract manager or as an employed manager and, if the former, whether they will also disclose the contract period. Several informants remarked that their option had consequences for their impact on and in a company.

**Table 2.** Details of our informants

<b>Informant* (no. of contract jobs)</b>	<b>Typical position</b>	<b>Supervision responsibility in typical position</b>
John (2)		
Mike (6)		
Thomas (2)		
Sebastian (1)		
Sam (2)		
Elizabeth (6)	CEO	Always
Franz (3)		
Isaac (6)		
Martha (12)		
Saul (3)		
Jonas (4)		
George (6)		
Hank (6)	CFO	Usually
Sophie (3)		
James (1)	COO	
Karen (3)	CCO	
Lars (6)	HR director	Sometimes
Selene (1)	HSE director	
Lucas (3)	Purchasing director	
Mark (2)	Project manager	Never
Simon (1)		

\*Note that all the names reported in this paper, including the company names, are pseudonyms.



George was the first informant to point out that some contract managers do not introduce themselves as contract managers. This is evident in the following statement, in which he described his approach when entering client companies:

I do not say anything about me being a contract manager. Not at all. I do not see the point in that.

But George was not the only informant who had refrained from disclosing his contract status and implicitly or explicitly presenting himself as an employed manager instead. Sam elaborated on his experience during his most recent job:

Interviewer: How were you presented to the organization?

Sam: I was presented as a new CEO. So I was not introduced like “Oh, he’s just here as a spare daddy – someone who is here to be a daddy for a short period and then you get a new daddy or you’ll be sent to the orphanage.” I was presented as a permanent solution.

When asked to elaborate on why he introduced himself as a permanent CEO, Sam responded as follows:

I think it is safe to conclude that getting a contract manager triggers a different set of responses in a company than getting an employed manager. So that could advocate for, in some cases, not emphasizing the temporariness of the arrangement.

While not taking matters as far as introducing themselves as employed managers, other informants had presented themselves as contract managers but, not emphasizing the temporariness of the arrangement, had refrained from revealing the duration of their intended stay at the company. Jonas’s statement below describes how he sometimes implicitly presents himself, in tandem with clients, as an employed CFO, and at other times as a contract manager, though he refrained from informing his colleagues about the end date of his contract:

Sometimes I have been introduced simply as “the new guy.” And then people have thought that it was a permanent solution. One time, I signed a contract lasting six months, and then we didn’t communicate that [end date]. Actually, it is pretty rare that the end date is communicated.

The informants typically pointed to uncertainty regarding the duration of contracts as a reason for not communicating this to their temporary colleagues. Most saw the end date as a formality because their general experience was that contracts were extended, but two other reasons were also mentioned. First, like John below, several informants commented that hiring a contract manager created uncertainty amongst external actors, such as suppliers, customers, and investors, depending on the company.

Interviewer: Nobody external to the company knew you were a contract manager?

John: Not at my second job. But I did not interact much with customers. Actually, now that I think about it, not in my first job either. And I know that informing them, customers, and suppliers – perhaps especially customers – would be a disadvantage. Because a contract manager represents discontinuity, and the customers are not stupid. They realize that if there are changes in the top management, there is likely something going on. So I try to downplay that fact [contract status].

Similarly, several informants had either concealed their contract status or downplayed the temporariness of the arrangement to avoid creating uncertainty inside the company. When asked why he concealed his contract status at his previous job as a purchase director, Mark responded as follows:

Hiding something like that, at least over time, is not smart. But it depends a lot on the situation you enter into. If things are very rough at the time, and the employees have more than enough to think about, it is not smart to communicate that [you are a contract manager]. You have to create stability in the organization. The organization is what matters.

As Sam pointed out, based on their experiences, contract managers trigger a set of responses that differ from those elicited by newly employed managers; consequently, many

informants considered it a challenge to communicate their presence at client companies and had opted not to communicate their contract status. That said, though they acknowledged the potential downsides of doing so, the majority still opted to introduce themselves as contract managers, and if their temporary colleagues asked about it, they communicated the intended duration of their stay at the company.

It is worth noting that the project managers we interviewed – Mark, in his second contract management job, and Simon – pointed out that it would be futile for them to conceal their contract status, as the project management positions were by definition temporary. Put differently, the challenge of communicating their contract status is far less relevant for project managers than for managers at higher levels in client companies.

#### **4.2 Being quick off the mark**

According to the majority of our informants, the primary on-the-job challenge of being a contract manager is the need to be quick off the mark. Clients hire contract managers either to take care of a particular set of tasks that usually require immediate attention or to fill in at short notice for someone who has disappeared from the company. Contract managers are therefore expected to be fully operational from day one. Such a promise from contract managers is often what lands them a job. Karen described this challenge as follows:

Well, you have to deliver right away because, if you don't, they can get rid of you quickly. And you have to deliver all the time; otherwise, the client can get rid of you. It is a high-risk situation. If you do not deliver and do not deliver high quality, they can get rid of you within ten days – out the door.

She further demonstrated how contract managers have to be quick off the mark:

You are not redundant [as a contract manager], to put it that way. And you have to be operational right away. As I say, you don't have ninety days [referring to her typical onboarding period as an employed manager]. You have nine days. Or not even that. Action . . . you have to deliver fast. Get ahead of the situation.

Several informants pointed out that being quick off the mark entailed more than merely being operational from day one. As Sam pointed out, it means addressing matters that most employed managers would postpone for some time:

There are two things [that characterize being a contract manager]. One, and the most obvious, is that you have a very short time horizon. [...] When I entered DocCo, I engaged in tasks that most CEOs would postpone for a year or two. You have to do that in the very first week. And if you don't have the necessary toolbox, it's too late to acquire that once you have started a contract management job. [...] So that's the main thing: You have very little time, and you have to act very fast. You need to be able to act, you have to stand upright, [and] you have to be comfortable. You have to act. Even if you do not really have the foundation to do so [and] you do not really know the company, you have to act fast.

He then provided a concrete example from his most recent job as a CEO:

I had been at the company for four days, and I was instructed to increase the profitability by [USD] 14 million. I remember, the owners left the room and said, "Let's reconvene [with a plan] at 3 o'clock." And it was then 2 o'clock. So, you have to act fast.

Beyond the clients' need for a manager who is operational from day one, two additional factors made it important. First, contract managers are a relatively expensive solution. As an example, the highest-grossing contract manager we interviewed, at least in terms of daily compensation, was Lars, who had a going rate of 1,500 USD an hour for some of his jobs. A more typical rate among the informants who discussed their compensation was around 8,000–10,000 USD a week. In addition, on top of contract managers' relatively high compensation, LMIs add a varying percentage for their mediation services.

Another factor was that the LMI that matched clients with contract managers had as one of its main selling points that the contract managers it mediated would be operational from day one. Were they not, or, more generally, if they received a poor review from the client, the contract manager in question would not be recommended by that LMI in the future.

To be quick off the mark, our informants prioritized their work in two ways. First, they prioritized the tasks that their clients prioritized, making sure to frequently update and consult with their clients. Karen elaborated on this approach.

Interviewer: What have been the commonalities in your jobs as a contract manager?

Karen: Well, being quick off the mark. Get an overview of the situation, learn the business, [and] find out what matters the most. What are the most important tasks? What matters most to the client? Be crystal clear about what exactly they want you to do.

In addition to prioritizing some tasks over others, many of our informants made sure to prioritize tasks over relationships to be quick off the mark. Lars described this as follows:

I am a warrior – extremely mission focused. You have to focus on the task at hand and satisfy the warlord, the chair of the board. So that’s my position.

Lucas elaborated more on the matter in our first interview with him:

Yeah, you have to be tougher [as a contract manager]. You have to seize your role. You have a mandate, and your client expects to see results. That means that you do not have much time to get acceptance and to execute. If you are there for some time without any results to show for it, you have not been a good hire. So that means that I have to act faster and have less focus on support and follow-up of subordinates and the other things you would do as an employed manager. You do less of the soft stuff and have more focus on results and progress.

Every informant emphasized that contract managers must have extensive prior experience to succeed in being quick off the mark. Though managers at higher organizational levels (CEOs and CFOs in particular) would emphasize it more strongly or frequently, all the informants pointed out that being a manager is, to some extent, transferable from company to company and industry to industry.

### **4.3 Finding the right level of integration**

The third on-the-job challenge that emerged from our informants’ experiences – one that contract managers have to continuously engage with from the moment they enter a client company – is finding the right level of integration. Specifically, contract managers have to decide on an ongoing basis how strong they want their relationships with their temporary colleagues to be. At the outset of our study, we believed that contract managers would want to integrate as much as possible during the months spent working at a client company; however,

several informants pointed out that this was rarely the case for them. Elizabeth was the first to explain this:

Interviewer: So, because of the relatively short-term horizon, you do not think too much about relationships?

Elizabeth: Well, I'm not planning to stay with the company, right? I am not dependent on people liking me so damn much. I depend on them liking me sufficiently to work with me while I am there, but that gives me a lot of wriggle room. So, yeah, it is that short-term horizon.

Our informants' reasons for not wanting to integrate as much when they were contract managers as they had previously when they were employed managers differed from their reasoning regarding the other three on-the-job challenges; in this case, their focus was less on avoiding negative outcomes and more on achieving positive ones. The informants discussed three positive outcomes of not integrating too much. The first was that not being close to their colleagues enabled them to be tougher and more task oriented, doing what was necessary to succeed in their job. Thomas explained this:

Interviewer: What are the differences between being a contract manager and being an employed manager?

Thomas: Well, you have one bad and one good difference [regarding] being a contract manager. [He explains what, in his experience, is the bad difference – harder to attain managerial authority]. The advantage is that it doesn't matter if somebody doesn't like me. I will not be here forever. As long as I achieve my goals, I can accept that, well, not everybody likes me.

The second reason was that not being too close to their temporary colleagues enabled them to function as neutral actors in the company. Martha elaborated on this:

Well, I can only speak for myself, but I notice that I am included in many more processes. [She elaborates on different processes]. So they include me because I am neutral. [She elaborates thoroughly on a recent event at her previous job]. So I am

neutral. And I notice [that] people would include me. There is often politics; that's part of human nature. But I am neutral.

The third reason that emerged regarding informants' preference for not integrating too much into the client companies was that they believed that doing so could make it more difficult for their permanent successor to be accepted in the company. Facilitating their successor's integration was viewed as important for getting a positive reference from the client. Sam elaborated on this matter:

I chose to not connect too much with my subordinates because I knew I was just a visitor – there for a period. So I worked closely with my [management] team, though without getting on a first-name basis with them. So you need to find a balance, right. Not getting too comfortable either. I have to respect the fact that I am only temporary and make sure that my successors have the best conditions possible when they enter. Show respect for the person receiving the baton after you, not put up any tripwires. That is what characterizes a professional contract manager.

Numerous informants also felt that many of their colleagues were not interested in getting to know them. Hank elaborated on this:

There's a huge difference [between being a contract manager and being an employed manager]. You are never viewed as part of the team. When you enter, people are curious, but then they do not adopt you into the company. You're more dependent on having a lot of interaction. And then, after a while, people know this is coming to an end.

As we see from Hank's experience, which was corroborated by approximately half of the informants, permanent members of organizations do not necessarily put effort into getting to know their temporary colleagues. However, no informants complained about this, further indicating that they were not interested in integrating much into client companies.

#### **4.4 Attaining authority**

Finally, power and authority are vital aspects of management. According to many of the informants, attaining the authority that accompanies a managerial position is noticeably more difficult as a contract manager than as an employed manager. Grounded in the experiences of

our informants, we focus on authority – that is, specifically legitimate power (Spencer, 1970) – and not power.

One of the most interesting cases that, to us, most clearly demonstrates this on-the-job challenge is Sebastian's experience. When we interviewed Sebastian, he had recently finished his first contract management job as a CEO. Following his client's instructions, Sebastian initially concealed from everyone at the company that he was a contract manager. However, during a private dinner, he informed the CEO whom he had replaced, and a few days later, everyone in the company had somehow learnt about Sebastian's contract status. After describing this, Sebastian stated the following:

The good thing about being a contract manager in such a period [when no one knew that he was a contract manager] was that I got the power and authority that I needed. Once it was revealed [that he was a contract manager], people were like "Well, let's see how long he remains. We don't need to care about what he says."

Interviewer: Really? Did you experience this?

Sebastian: Yeah. Some behaved like that.

Interviewer: How did you notice that?

Sebastian: They stopped doing the things I told them to do. They were less cooperative. Not necessarily huge things, but there was behaviour that showed that they were thinking, "Let's see how long he remains."

Others, like Thomas, were openly confronted by their subordinates. When Thomas was the CEO at a professional service firm, his CFO told him in front of every member of the top management team, "You can say whatever you want. I really don't care." Several other informants reported having given instructions and been confronted with "You're just a consultant" and "You're just temporary." These statements were followed by actions or further statements that clearly indicated that their subordinates did not respect their managerial authority. Such open confrontations would primarily manifest when there were disagreements between the informants and their subordinates regarding how to proceed in some regard.



To avoid or mitigate this challenge to authority, most informants, including many of those who had not experienced a reduction of their managerial authority, pointed out that to succeed as a contract manager and overcome (potential) authority issues, the number-one resource was support from the client. George pointed this out:

Interviewer: You mentioned that you sometimes have less authority as a contract manager [compared to when he was an employed manager]. Does backing from the client matter somehow?

George: Yeah, that is a decisive factor – that the person who hires you backs you one hundred percent. So you have to clarify with the client, map potential areas of conflict, and make sure that they back you. That is the alpha and omega. If you do not ensure this, you will fail as a contract manager; you would be in the wrong business.

In an attempt to completely avoid authority issues, several informants ensured from the very beginning that their subordinates knew that they, as contract managers, functioned as an extension of the client. Isaac described this as follows:

Interviewer: Based on your experience, does the mandate the board gives you matter for how subordinates receive you?

Isaac: Yeah, that is key ... that the board hands you the baton. That they do that in a public meeting. That I am introduced and say my piece. Explain what will happen in the coming weeks. It is important that it happens live [in front of everyone] ... that the board or a CEO hands you the baton. That is important. You can't just put someone in the position; you have to show it physically – that “This person has this task and will be working with us for six to ten months to solve these issues.”

In some cases, authority issues had already arisen, and informants had to lean on clients to overcome these challenges. Jonas explained this:

Jonas: I have to acquire the authority differently [as a contract manager].

Interviewer: Interesting. And how do you do that?

Jonas: First of all, you have to be aware [that subordinates may ignore your authority] and identify it. That they fall into that category [of people ignoring the authority of a contract manager]. And then you have to turn to the CEO and say, “I feel this person is ignoring me” or “I need these reports from this guy.”

Saul described a similar, more concrete experience from his most recent job:

Saul: People on my management team tried to bypass me by going straight to the chair of the board.

Interviewer: How did you react to that? How did the chair of the board react?

Saul: Well, he was loyal to me, so he just sent them back to me. So backing from the board is a decisive factor when you are a contract manager, particularly in a top management position.

It is also noteworthy that some informants referred to their expertise to reduce or avoid authority issues. This was especially the case for the project managers and some of the managers in the managerial support function and less so for CEOs and CFOs. A possible reason for this difference is that CEOs and CFOs are often involved in crafting strategy and are less operational, while project managers and some other managers are often more involved in executing strategies and thus get to demonstrate their expertise to their subordinates.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Contract managers are outside insiders. On the one hand, they are expected to function as managers. On the other hand, they are expected (by law) to keep a certain distance from client companies, and their lack of an organizational history, coupled with their short-term horizon at the client company, can create on-the-job challenges that are unique to them. A greater understanding of these challenges could reduce the discrepancy between contract management’s theoretical promise and documented organizational outcomes. We have documented four on-the-job challenges that are common to and unique for contract managers – that is, challenges that follow from their status as outside insiders. We have also documented how they act in their attempts to mitigate these challenges. Table 3 summarize these findings.

Some of the findings are new to the literature on contract management, and for some, we offer a nuanced perspective. In this section, we discuss the novelty of these findings and how they contribute to both theory and practice.

**Table 3.** Findings

<b>Perceived reason(s) for on-the-job challenge</b>	<b>On-the-job challenge</b>	<b>Action(s) taken to overcome on-the-job challenge</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contract status triggers a different response among (i) internal and (ii) external actors</li> <li>- End dates are often tentative in practice</li> </ul>	Communicating contract status and period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Present as employed manager</li> <li>- Conceal contract period</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time horizon is short</li> <li>- Solution is expensive</li> <li>- (i) LMIs and (ii) clients expect contract managers to be fully operational from day one</li> </ul>	Being quick off the mark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prioritize tasks clients wants them to do</li> <li>- Prioritize tasks ahead of relationships</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can act tougher</li> <li>- They can function as a neutral actor</li> <li>- They enable the integration of their successor</li> <li>- Colleagues are less interested in developing relationships with a temporary manager</li> </ul>	Finding the right level of integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoid forming strong relationships with colleagues</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subordinates may be more prone to disregarding the managerial authority of a temporary manager</li> </ul>	Attaining authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seek visible backing from client</li> </ul>

The literature on contract managers either neglects to consider how they present themselves to the employees of client companies or presumes that employees (e.g. Anderson & Cappelli, 2021) and external actors (Ballinger & Marcel, 2010) are aware of the end date of contract managers' contracts. We find that some contract managers portray themselves as employed managers and that some do not communicate the end date of their contract. This novel and important finding has several theoretical implications. Studies have documented negative organizational outcomes from the hiring of contract managers (Ballinger & Marcel, 2010; Bangert et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). A common explanation is that employees and external actors react negatively to the hiring of contract managers, which the informants in our study also testified to. This suggests that the negative organizational outcomes could be mitigated if contract managers introduce themselves as employed managers and, to some extent, if they do not communicate the end date of their contract. Moreover, we see these actions by contract managers – that is, presenting themselves as employed managers or not communicating the end date of their contract – as antecedents to the on-the-job challenges documented in this study and others (Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021; Inkson et al., 2001). For instance, we do not believe that contract managers would experience hostility from others in client companies, as reported by Inkson et al. (2001), if they introduced themselves as employed managers. In short, how contract managers present their contract status could have a large influence on the extent to which they are perceived and treated as outside insiders.

We learnt that contract managers must be quick off the mark because clients and LMIs expect this. The short-term time horizon that characterizes contract management also drives this need to be quick off the mark. We are not the first researchers to document this. Inkson et al. (2001) reported a similar finding – that is, that many contract managers experience a “lack of familiarization time.” (p. 275). Enhancing our understanding of this challenge, we document the three reasons why it arises, viewed from the contract managers' perspective, as well as how contract managers attempt to overcome this challenge. An important and novel insight in this regard is that contract managers actively focus their role by targeting a select set of managerial tasks and by focusing on tasks rather than relationships. This can suggest that contract managers perform well in some tasks, and less well in other, perhaps important tasks.

Another interesting finding is that some contract managers deliberately limit the extent to which they integrate into client companies; they do this by not developing strong relationships with their temporary colleagues. This finding has several implications for contract management theory. First, Anderson and Cappelli (2020, 2021) found that the primary power base of many contract managers is their expert power – a power base enabled by their

objectivity and independence from organizational members. The finding we report here implies that it is contract managers' deliberate effort to not integrate too much into client companies, rather than an inherent objectivity and independence per se, that is the primary enabler of such an expert power base. More broadly, their active efforts to limit their integration into client companies are arguably key to facilitating several of the other "outsider advantages" that Anderson and Cappelli (2020, 2021) discuss – for example, trust. Second, to facilitate the integration of their successor, several informants deliberately limited the extent to which they integrated into client companies, which is indicative of a helping behaviour that was hitherto neglected in the literature on contract management. It would be interesting to investigate the differences in managers' integration following the exit of contract managers, who, to varying degrees, limited their integration into the company. Third, our second finding – the need to be quick off the mark – was facilitated by focusing more on tasks and less on relationships. If being quick off the mark is a prerequisite for success as a contract manager, which is facilitated by a task- rather than a relationship focus, this suggests that those contract managers who do not form strong relationships with their temporary colleagues will be more successful.

Like Anderson and Cappelli (2020, 2021), we find that it is not uncommon for contract managers to experience power issues, though our inductive approach in this study led to a focus on authority – that is, legitimate power (Spencer, 1970) – that should accompany a given managerial position. Several informants described experiences indicating that, viewed in light of the seminal framework of French et al. (1959), it was difficult for them to derive power from their social/managerial position in the social structure/company. To deal with this challenge, the informants generally turned to their client for backing – that is, what French et al. (1959) described as designation by a legitimizing agent – which is an alternative base for legitimate power/authority. Interestingly, this finding runs counter to that of Anderson and Cappelli (2020, 2021), who found that the contract managers in their sample were reluctant to rely on clients for backing when running into power issues and instead focused on developing and utilizing an expert power/authority. We believe that a likely explanation for this difference is that the informants in our sample have functions similar to those of equivalent employed managers with regard to supervision and other responsibilities, while Anderson and Cappelli (2020, 2021) predominantly sampled project managers. These project managers were typically involved in the implementation, rather than the development, of strategies, suggesting that they had a more observable skill set than managers at higher levels who were involved in developing strategy. Our informants arguably had less opportunity to demonstrate their expertise and therefore found it more natural to turn to an alternative base for legitimate power.

## **5.1 Practical implications**

Contract managers are an important source of numerical and functional flexibility for companies, but further insights are needed to facilitate their positive impact on and in client companies. Our findings have several practical implications that can facilitate this impact. First, we document that contract managers and their clients have options regarding how to present their contract status. We are not recommending one option over the other but simply illustrating that presenting contract managers as employed managers could mitigate some of the negative consequences that can accompany the hiring of a contract manager – for example, employees' uncertainty or market actors' negative reactions. Second, clients should be aware that contract managers focus on their role in companies, which could come at the expense of some tasks and how they engage with their subordinates. Clients and other managers should consider paying extra attention to contract managers' subordinates and the wider set of tasks they expect a contract manager to undertake. Third, contract managers may be viewed as neutral actors in a company, according to our informants and participants in the studies by Anderson and Cappelli (2020, 2021). They may be particularly valuable sparring partners for clients in contested matters, wherein sparring with certain employees could sow discontent among others. Finally, clients would be wise to demonstrate from the very beginning of a contract management job that they support their new hire, which could provide contract managers with the necessary managerial authority and improve their efficiency from the start.

## **5.2 Limitations and future studies**

Our study contributes theoretical and practical insights to the literature on contract management. However, some limitations are worth noting and pave the way for future contract management studies. First, our data are based exclusively on the experiences of contract managers. While many of their experiences resonate with those documented in the extant literature (Anderson & Bidwell, 2019; Anderson & Cappelli, 2020, 2021; Inkson et al., 2001), data from clients and employees would be beneficial in terms of both corroborating and further nuancing the insights that our data provide.

Second, the context of our study could matter for our findings. Contract management does not have as long-standing a tradition in Norway as in many other European countries, and interpersonal and organizational dynamics could differ in contexts in which contract management is more common. That said, many of our findings resonate with those documented in studies that took place in New Zealand (Inkson et al., 2001) and the US and Italy (Anderson

& Cappelli, 2020, 2021), and we would argue that our findings can be theoretically generalized to many settings.

Third, while our sample and data enable us to explore common on-the-job challenges and actions amongst contract managers in primarily executive/director positions, future studies could add valuable insights by exploring further antecedents, boundary conditions, and outcomes of these challenges and actions. To illustrate, we believe it worthwhile to investigate organizational-level antecedents to and interpersonal and organizational outcomes from contract managers presenting themselves as employed managers.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Contract management has become a popular arrangement. Trends also seem to increasingly favour contracting to employment (Cappelli & Eldor, 2023; Katz & Krueger, 2019), indicating that contract management will become more popular in the years to come. The literature on contract management is surprisingly limited, given that the arrangement originated around 40 years ago and has become widespread in recent years. Nonetheless, the extant research suggests that a discrepancy exists between the promise that contract management holds and common organizational outcomes, indicating that contract managers, who are usually highly experienced managers, deal with challenges that differ from those that employed managers face. Our study uncovered four on-the-job challenges that can reduce contract managers' capacity to have a positive impact on the companies they work for; however, we also found that contract managers attempt to mitigate these challenges. These insights can serve scholars and practitioners who are concerned with management.

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## Paper 2

**Title** I Am Not an Employee; Am I Then a Professional? Work Arrangements, Professional Identification and the Mediating Role of Intra-Professional Network.

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**Abstract:** Professions are faced with challenges from proliferation and dilution, two processes that are challenging our understanding of what a profession is and what it means to be a professional. As a response, profession scholars are paying increasing attention to how individuals come to see themselves as a professional. We contribute to this evolving literature by investigating the relationship between work arrangements, i.e., freelancing and employment, and professional identification, and pay particular attention to the mediating role of an intra-professional network and three aspects that characterize such a network. To investigate the relationships in question we sample from journalists, and employ structural equation modelling to test our hypotheses. We found no direct relationship between work arrangements and professional identification. However, we do observe that freelancers' intra-professional network density is lower than that of employees. The consequence of this mediating mechanism, we found, was that they identified less with their profession than employees did. This paper shows that the type of work arrangement has important implications for professional identification.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Profession scholars are faced with challenges from what we can refer to as proliferation and dilution. While professions were once a select group of occupations ‘easily’ distinguished by their institutional capability to enforce social closure (Saks, 2016), this select group of occupations has grown significantly the last decades (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011; Kirkpatrick et al., 2021). At the same time, scholars question if professions will survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2012; Susskind & Susskind, 2022) and, if so, how the institutional features of professions will evolve (Noordegraaf, 2015, 2020). As an apt example of how professions and professional work are diluted, Galperin (2017) documents how professional services are now mass-produced by non-professional workers, drastically challenging our understanding of what it means to be a profession and a professional.

As a response to this proliferation and dilution many profession scholars have turned to neo-Institutional theories and focused on professionalization processes rather than profession structures (Muzio et al., 2013; Suddaby & Muzio, 2015). Of central concern in this literature have been the processes by which individuals develop a professional identity and an identification with this identity (Ahuja et al., 2017; Barbour & Lammers, 2015; Bévort & Suddaby, 2016). When individuals identify with a profession, they are guided by the epistemic and moral properties associated with that profession (Alvesson et al., 2015; Hendriks, 2017; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004) and become more supportive of the community and the epistemic and moral properties that constitutes their profession (Wright et al., 2017). In other words, were individuals *not* to identify with their profession, professions would represent little more than a label. Thus, individuals’ identification with professions are a prerequisite for the survival of professions.

In this paper we investigate the relationship between work arrangements and professional identification by sampling from freelancing- and employed journalists. One of the biggest changes to affect the world of work since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, differentiating the ‘new’ world of work from the ‘old’ (Spreitzer et al., 2017), has been the increasing trend of externalizing work outside of organizational boundaries through nonstandard work arrangements (Barley et al., 2017; Pfeffer & Baron, 1988). Freelancing is particularly relevant in this regard (Ashford et al., 2018). Freelancers drive the resilient and sustained surge in nonstandard work amongst highly skilled, often professional, workers (Cross & Swart, 2021; Katz & Krueger, 2019) and fuel the large and growing gig-economy (Kuhn, 2016). In terms of how work is organized, freelancing is the contrasting arrangement to permanent employment

(Cappelli & Keller, 2013). This makes freelancers a theoretically and empirically interesting group of workers to compare employees with. Yet, despite their increasing relevance, freelancers remain understudied and undertheorized in the profession literature (Cross & Swart, 2021).

Freelancers are sometimes portrayed as ‘free agents’ (Pink, 2001), atomized workers that prefer to spend their lives in solitude in the job market as ‘hired guns’ (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Inkson et al., 2001) and ‘lone wolves’ (Cross & Swart, 2021). Viewed in this light, freelancing could reduce individuals’ professional identification by disrupting their relation to a professional community and the properties associated with this community. Recent studies suggest this may be the case. Many freelancers develop a multiplicity of work identities, some of which are of a more ‘fluid’ and precarious nature than those of employees (Cross & Swart, 2021; Maestripieri, 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2018). However, these studies do not investigate if freelancers identify *less* with their profession than employees do, which is, arguably, the primary concern in terms of how freelancing may challenge professions’ foundation.

To better understand the relationship between work arrangements and professional identification we pay particular attention to the mediating role of intra-professional networks. We know that identity construction is a highly localized process that depends on social relations and daily interactions (Anteby et al., 2016; Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), where members of in-groups are the primary validators of professional identities (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Van Maanen, 1975). However, we know less about how intra-professional networks mediate the relationship between work arrangements and professional identification. Building on insights from qualitative studies of freelancers’ professional networks we argue that their intra-professional network, in terms of three defining aspects, are of lower quality than those of their employed professional peers.

We conducted our study using a sample of 1,031 journalists, including 113 freelancers. Several factors make journalism an opportune setting for investigating the relationship between work arrangements and professional identification, despite journalism sometimes being classified as a semi-profession due to the absence of social closure (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003). Journalists speak of and view themselves as professionals (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003; Berry, 2016; Raemy, 2020) and identify with what they see as a profession (Russo, 1998). Journalists also have a strong knowledge base and adhere to a comprehensive and strong set of professional norms (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003; Raemy, 2020; Weaver & Willnat, 2020). Many journalists, as is the case for our entire sample, are members of professional associations. On top of this, journalism represent the fourth pillar of democracy, testifying to a trusted and important role in

modern societies, another hallmark of professions (Derber et al., 1990). Therefore, moving beyond a trait-based understanding of professions to a neo-Institutional and discursive understanding (Saks, 2016), it is reasonable for profession scholars to treat journalists as professionals and acknowledge that they do experience professional identification, and not reserve studies of professional identification for practitioners of more established professions (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003; Cross & Swart, 2021; Galperin, 2017).

Furthermore, journalism is a (semi-)profession in which freelancing has been widespread and common for decades (Gynnild, 2005), making it a theoretically and empirically relevant setting for investigating professional identity formation. Studying professional identity formation among journalists can provide valuable insights into dynamics that may arise in other professions if freelancing were to become, as projected (Katz & Krueger, 2019), widespread and common also in these.

This paper offers three key contributions to the profession literature. Building on valuable insights from three qualitative studies (Cross & Swart, 2021; Maestripieri, 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2018), this paper both challenges and nuances arguments and theorization found in these studies as the results in this study only partially corroborate the findings of these three studies. Second, while much has been written on how professional networks inducts novel practitioners into a profession (Spreitzer et al., 2017), no study has investigated how intra-professional networks bridge individuals' work arrangement and their professional identification. Our findings highlight the importance of one of the three aspects of an intra-professional network in this regard. Third, we demonstrate that work arrangements are important institutions to consider when analysing individuals' professional identification. In sum, this paper both nuances and provides new insights to the profession literature.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Freelancing and Employment**

Freelancers differ from employees with regard to two key dimensions: contract and control. Employees have an employment contract, while freelancers contract with their clients on a piece-rate basis. Consequently, freelancers have directive control of their work while employees do not (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). More fundamentally, freelancers spend their work-life in the job market while employees spend theirs in organizations (Barley & Kunda, 2004). These differences may have consequences for how freelancers and employees identify with their profession.

## **2.2 Professional Identification**

What constitutes a profession is disputed (Abbott, 1998). A common starting point is that professions are constituted by a community of practitioners that embodies a certain set of epistemic and moral properties (Saks, 2012). Beyond this, the popular neo-Institutional school of professions (Muzio et al., 2013; Saks, 2016) portrays professions as dynamic systems that are embedded in unique institutional contexts (Suddaby & Muzio, 2015). Thus, acknowledging the impact of time-space heterogeneity (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2012), there are few traits believed to be universal or everlasting for professions. With this acknowledgement, the profession literature has increasingly focused on processes rather than structures (Suddaby & Muzio, 2015), processes such as professionalization and professional identification (Barbour & Lammers, 2015).

Professional identification can be understood as individuals' sense of oneness with their professional identity (Ashforth et al., 2013). Professional identities are self-referential descriptions relatively common to, and unique for members of a given social group (Barbour & Lammers, 2015). Social identities, such as professional identities, emerge from the 'essences' that characterize a social group (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 328). In case of professions, these essences are the epistemic and moral characteristics associated with the professional community that constitutes the profession (Ashforth et al., 2013; Barbour & Lammers, 2015). When individuals internalize these 'essences' they come to experience a sense of oneness with their profession, that is, professional identification.

Research rooted in social identity theory have uncovered three dimensions that characterize identification as a psychological experience. First, identification is characterized by a cognitive awareness of belonging to a social group ('I am a journalist'). Second, this cognitive awareness is accompanied by evaluative assessment of this belonging ('As a journalist, I should behave this way'). Finally, identification entails an experience of emotional investment to the belonging of a social group ('I feel good about being a journalist') (Ashforth et al., 2008).

## **2.3 Freelancing and professional identification**

Work contexts matter for how individuals relate to their profession (Barbour & Lammers, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2009). Three recent studies have documented that freelancers tend to experience a multiplicity of work identities, some of which take on a 'fluid' (Cross & Swart, 2021) or

precarious (Maestripereri, 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2018) form, often at the expense of how they identify with their profession. Both Maestripereri (2019) and Cross and Swart (2021) argue that this happens because freelancers focus on marketability and employability, i.e., adhere to a market logic, at the detriment of their professional identification.

We know that a life in the job market for many freelancers will necessitate a predominant focus on a market logic to land jobs (Barley & Kunda, 2004). On the receiving end of their services, Zadik et al. (2019) found that clients prioritize adaptability to organizational demands, what Cross and Swart (2021, p. 1710) refer to as “being a chameleon”, well ahead of professionalism when hiring freelancers. More, as Maestripereri (2019) show, a life in the market will for some entail doing whatever work is available, professional or not, through ‘any’ means necessary, professional or not (see also Cross & Swart, 2021). Thus, life in the market could clearly lead to reduced professional identification, as freelancers think and act less as a typical professional. However, while research have shown freelancers to practice a different logic than employees, sometimes at the detriment of their professional identification, we are left with the question of: Is life in the job market *less* conducive to professional identification than life in the organization? Following the arguments of Cross and Swart (2021) and Maestripereri (2019), we are led to believe that:

H1: Freelancers identify less with their profession than their employed peers do.

In addition to this direct relationship between work arrangements and professional identification, we also believe that intra-professional networks mediate this relationship whereby freelancers’ professional identification is reduced compared to that of employees. Next, we elaborate on our reasoning and present hypotheses for the relationships between work arrangement and intra-professional network, and then on the relationship between intra-professional network and professional identification.

## **2.4 Social networks and professional identification**

Like Cross and Swart (2021) and Maestripereri (2019), Petriglieri et al. (2018) also argue that being a freelancer can reduce the extent to which individuals identify with their profession. Supplementing the theoretical insights provided by Maestripereri (2019) and Cross and Swart (2021), Petriglieri et al. (2018) emphasize the significance of social networks. One of their findings is that none of their informants, all of which were freelancers, had regular peer groups

that anchored their work identity. This was largely a lack that accompanied the absence of an organizational social context. As one of their informants told Petriglieri et al. (2018, p. 141): “The kind of community that’s created for people with policies and procedures in the organization; that is the container I have to create for myself.” As indicated by this statement, the informants of Petriglieri et al. (2018) developed more personal rather than professional networks. This, according to the authors, lead to a more personal rather than social/professional work identity.

Research has shown that ‘in-group’ members, professional peers, are the primary external validators of a professional identity (Alvesson et al., 2015; Anteby et al., 2016; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Van Maanen, 1975). These insights highlight the potential relevance intra-professional networks (IPN) can have as a mediator in the relationship between work arrangements and professional identification. To investigate this further, we relied on social network theory, a common approach in identification studies (Jones & Volpe, 2011; Walker & Lynn, 2013).

Accordingly, social networks consists of a set of actors who are connected by ties of a certain nature (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). Note that the focus in this study is on professionals’ egocentric networks, i.e., on individuals’ unique network, as opposed to a network focus. This entails a focus on that part of individuals’ networks that directly influences individuals (Jones & Volpe, 2011; Marsden, 1990). With this in mind, three aspects of a social network can be inferred from the definition above. The first is the network size, which corresponds to the number of actors to whom an individual is connected (Ibarra, 1995). The second is the network strength, which, according to Granovetter (1973), corresponds to the frequency of interaction between an individual and other actors in the network. The third aspect is density, which, in an egocentric network perspective, refers to the distance between an individual (the ego) and the other actors in that network (Jones & Volpe, 2011).

#### ***2.4.1 Freelancers, Permanent Employees, and Intra-Professional Networks***

There is a dearth of studies empirically comparing employees’ and freelancers’ social networks (Lo Presti et al., 2018) and, as far as we could find, none that have done so in case of IPN. We therefore rely on qualitative studies of freelancers’ social networks to infer differences between the two groups’ respective IPN.

When it comes to the size of freelancers’ IPN, research tend to emphasize how important networking is for freelancers and their careers (Van den Born & Van Witteloostuijn, 2013). Yet, research also indicate that it is hard for freelancers to develop *lasting* ties with professional

peers. Based on an extensive ethnographic study Kunda et al. (2002) concluded that the majority of the freelancers they interviewed came to accept the burden of “the existential status of a perpetual stranger” (p. 250, see also Barley & Kunda (2004) and Osnowitz (2010)). It is therefore likely that freelancers meet more professional peers than their employed peers do, but that few meetings result in ties that lasts, thus limiting the size of their IPN. Employees, on the other hand, will often develop lasting ties with long-term colleagues, many of whom will be professional peers. This leads us to the first hypothesis concerned with freelancers’ and employees’ IPN:

H2A: Freelancers’ IPN are smaller than that of their permanently employed peers.

Regarding the strength of their ties with other actors in their IPN, freelancers tend to have less frequent interactions with their professional peers than do their employed peers. While some of the time spent in the job market is spent interacting with professional peers, much of it is spent in solitude or interacting with others outside of their own profession (Barley & Kunda, 2004). In fact, many freelancers prioritize labor market intermediaries, online labor markets, and former clients when looking for jobs, suggesting that *most* of the time spent in the market is spent not with professional peers (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Shevchuk & Strebkov, 2018). As for employees, they generally dedicate their time fully to one organization (for a comparatively long time). This enables permanent employees to have consistent, continuous, and frequent interaction with other professional peers employed by the same organization. Based on these insights, we hypothesized as follows:

H2B: Freelancers’ IPN have weaker ties than do that of their permanently employed peers.

As for the density of their IPNs, compared to permanent employees, freelancers will often be less proximal to their professional peers. As with size and strength, this difference also follows from freelancers’ life in the market. For instance, Osnowitz (2010) discussed how the interaction between freelancers will inevitably be of a competitive nature, suggesting that freelancers hold each other at an ‘arm’s length’ distance. As for freelancers’ ties to their permanently employed peers, several studies have found that freelancers are sometimes treated as an “underclass” (Zadik et al., 2019, p. 40), “servants” or “scapegoats” (Barley & Kunda, 2004, p. 215). Demonstrating this experience, in their study of interim/freelance managers, Inkson et al. (2001) found that the most common on-the-job problem reported by their



informants was that they were met with hostility and a lack of recognition in the companies they worked for. All of this suggests that freelancers will often have more instrumental and less proximal ties with their professional peers than do their permanently employed peers. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H2C: Freelancers' IPN have a smaller density than that of their permanently employed peers.

#### ***2.4.2 Intra-Professional Network and Professional Identification***

Research have shown the three aspects of a social network, namely its size, strength, and density, to be positively associated with identification (Graupensperger et al., 2020; Ingram, 2022; Jones & Volpe, 2011; McFarland & Pals, 2005), and we believe this to be the case also for IPNs. The larger the size of an individual's IPN, the more commitment the individual will likely experience toward the network, since more actors are involved in the evaluation of the individual's behavior (Jones & Volpe, 2011; McFarland & Pals, 2005). In addition, if an individual develops a large IPN, this suggests that they are satisfied with and have internalized the properties of a profession, which is indicative of a strong identification. The arguments above can be referred to as a case for homophily (Ibarra, 1995), where like tends to attract and be attracted to like. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H3A: The size of workers' IPNs is positively associated with their professional identification.

Regarding the strength of the ties in a network, it is through actual interaction that actors influence each other. Of course, some influence can be exerted indirectly, such as through intermediaries (Sluss & Ashforth, 2008), but direct interaction will likely have a greater influence. As people seek to make sense of themselves, they compare their perceptions with those of similar others, which is a comparison that necessitates interaction. Moreover, social interaction will often induce actors to become more similar to each other (Brass et al., 2004). This implies that frequent interaction can be a driver for workers to increasingly identify with their profession (Reichers, 1987; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 38) The fifth hypothesis in this study is as follows:

H3B: The strength of the ties between actors in an IPN is positively associated with their professional identification.

As for network density, density should in general facilitate a sense of oneness (i.e., identification) with a social group. The smaller distance there is between actors in a network the easier it is for them to share information between them. Smaller distance would also suggest a more positive relationship, which is more conducive to the internalization of a professional identity (Jones & Volpe, 2011). Put differently, the closer workers are to each other, the more influence they will likely have on one another (Sluss & Ashforth, 2008). Based on these insights, the final hypothesis is as follows:

H3C: The density of workers' IPNs is positively associated with their professional identification.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 Sample

To gather the necessary data we distributed a questionnaire to active, i.e., non-retired and non-student, members of two trade unions for journalists in Norway. One of these trade unions represent the vast majority of journalists in Norway. The second trade union is a niche organization with around 200 members. Besides size, the key difference between the two trade unions is that the smaller one is primarily oriented toward writers of cultural content, and is therefore open to non-journalists (e.g., professors), provided they write such content (these respondents were excluded from our sample). The two trade unions have in total around 6500 active journalists as members, around 650 of whom are freelance journalists.

A total of 1860 members (29% of the active members of the two trade unions) responded to the survey. Due to some incomplete responses to questions used in this study, the usable sample consisted of 1,031 responses (15.9 %). This included 113 respondents (10.9 % of the usable sample) who were exclusively or primarily freelancing, meaning that they did not combine freelancing with permanent employment. When compared with registry data from the Norwegian Tax Authorities covering the population of journalists in Norway – out of which freelance journalists represent approximately 8% – we find that our sample generally corresponds with the population of journalists in Norway on key demographic features: The average age of the journalist population was 45 in 2021, while the sample average was 41-50; 54% of the population were women compared to 50% in our sample; average income in 2018 was 655,427 NOK compared to 500,000-700,000 NOK in our sample; and the average journalist had a bachelor degree both in our sample and in the population.

The questionnaire, issued in Norwegian, was distributed in the final months of 2021. Prior to distributing it, the author and two researchers external to this study, independently of each other, translated the original English items into Norwegian. In the few cases of discrepancy between the translations, the author and one of the external researchers settled the discrepancy by determining which of the options would be perceived as most natural and semantically correct for a Norwegian sample. The final questionnaire was inspected in its entirety by representatives of the unions and by one freelance journalist. During this inspection, the reviewers were instructed to pay particular attention to formulations and the choice of terms. The inspectors had no comments on these.

## **3.2 Measures**

### ***3.2.1 Dependent Variable***

*Professional identification* was measured by extending on Mael and Ashforth (1992)'s scale for organizational identification and adapting it to the relevant target (journalism). An example item from this scale is: "When I talk about journalists, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'." Mael and Ashforth (1992)'s scale is the most widely used and, according to a meta-analysis by Riketta (2005), advantageous approach to measuring professional identification. However, the scale is not without its caveats. As Edwards (2005) and Van Dick (2001) noted, the scale mainly taps into the affective and evaluative dimensions of identification and neglects the cognitive dimension. To account for this, we supplemented our scale with items suggested by Van Dick et al. (2004) to measure the cognitive dimension of identification. Adapted to our target, one example item is: "I identify myself as a journalist". A total of eight items (see appendix A) were used to measure professional identification, and they were scored according to a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored by "Strongly disagree" and "Strongly agree."

### ***3.2.2 Mediating Variables***

The three aspects of IPNs discussed above were measured. As has long been standard in social network research (see Ibarra, 1993; Jones & Volpe, 2011; Morrison, 2002), one item was used to measure each of the aspects of a social network. While some critics have argued that using single items to measure sociometric constructs is equivalent to doing so for psychometric constructs, a review and empirical studies have long since established that single items can be used to measure social networks provided that respondents are able to recall and report their networks' links correctly (Ibarra, 1993; Marsden, 1990). Two steps were taken to facilitate the

respondents' recollection and reporting. First, as recommended by Ibarra and Andrews (1993) and Marsden (1990), no limit was implemented in the questionnaire for the potential size of the respondents' networks. Second, when measuring the size of networks, the empirical focus was limited to professional peers who the respondents were also friends with. Focusing on peers who are also friends, as opposed to every professional peer who they might be acquainted with, should assist respondents' recollection and give a more reliable measure (Carpenter et al., 2012). This delineation also fits with our focus on the egocentric network of professionals, i.e., that part of their social network that directly influences them.

With the above insights in mind, the following items were utilized. First, to measure *IPN size*, which is determined by the number of actors someone is connected to (Carpenter et al., 2012), the respondents were asked "How many close friends do you have who work as journalists?" This item was scored continuously, without any upper boundary imposed by the questionnaire. More than 97% of the respondents responded that they were close friends with 10 or fewer professional peers. To further strengthen the reliability of this measure, the remaining ~2% were coded as missing and discarded from this study.

Second, for *IPN strength*, respondents' frequency of interaction with other actors in the network was measured, as recommended by Granovetter (1973) (see also Arnaboldi et al., 2016). The item used to do so was inspired by Ibarra (1995), although it was adapted to our setting as follows "How often do you meet other journalists outside of working hours?" The item was scored in the following way: "Never" (0), "Less than once a month" (1), "Once a month" (2), "Several times a month" (3), "Once a week" (4), "Several times a week" (5), and "Every day" (6).

The third aspect, *IPN density*, was more challenging to measure than the first two. Not every empirical study of egocentric networks has measured the network's density (Jones & Volpe, 2011), and among those that have, no approach is fit for universal usage. It was therefore necessary to design an item to measure IPN density specifically for this setting. Network density refers to the extent to which people in a network know each other (Jones & Volpe, 2011), and scholars focusing on network density tend to use it to study how well networks facilitate information sharing (Carpenter et al., 2012; Phelps et al., 2012). Information sharing was therefore used as a proxy for density, and the respondents were asked "To what extent can you rely on other journalists for professional advice?" This item was scored as follows: "Not at all" (1), "To a small extent" (2), "To a moderate extent" (3), "To a large extent" (4), and "To a very large extent" (5).

### 3.2.3 Independent Variable

The independent variable *work arrangement* consists of the following two categories: Employee with open-ended contract (0) and Freelancer (1). To categorize respondents, they were asked “What is your primary work arrangement?” and the questionnaire further specified that “By primary work arrangement, we refer to the connection to work that you spend the most time on if you have several work arrangements.” In this sample, 29 respondents were primarily freelancers who sometimes worked as temporary employees. For many freelancers, mixing freelance with temporary employment follows automatically from a regulation that states that workers physically located in an editorial newsroom should be classified as (temporary) employees. Since these 29 respondents self-identified as freelancers they were grouped with the 84 respondents who exclusively freelanced.

### 3.2.4 Control Variables

Ten control variables were used. These were theoretically relevant, and several have been shown to be empirically relevant in previous studies of professional identification (Ashforth et al., 2013; Hekman et al., 2009) and/or studies of freelancers’/independent contractors’ identification with targets at work (George & Chattopadhyay, 2005). The first five related to the respondents’ work situation, while the remaining five were standard demographic and background variables. Related to work, these were *years of experience as a journalist* (continuous), *years of experience with current work arrangement* (continuous), *work location* (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns in Norway from March 2020) (distinguishing between “at an employer/client’s location” (0) and “at a home office/remote (co)workspace” (1)), *working hours per week* (categorical), *job* (distinguishing between those with the job title of “journalist” (1) and those with other job titles and journalistic functions, such as “editor,” “news anchor,” or “photographer” (0)). Related to demography and background, we controlled for *gender*, *age* (measured categorically, i.e., cat. 1: 18–20 years, cat. 2: 21–30 years, cat. 3: 31–40 years, etc.), *level of education* (categorical), *type of education* (“other” (0), “journalism” (1)) and *income* (categorical).

## 4. RESULTS

Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations, as well as correlation coefficients for the variables used in the analysis. Besides descriptive statistics reported above, table 1 show that the respondents’ average tenure as a journalist was 21.2 years, and average experience with

current work arrangement was 17.7 years. Moreover, 59% of the sample had a journalism education, 66% had the position of “journalist,” and 34% held different positions, e.g., “editor.” The average respondent worked 36–40 hours a week (the standard work week in Norway), and 91% generally worked from employer’s location (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Experience as a journalist	21.99	11.28	-	.81*	.01	-.00	.00	.17*	.82*
2. Experience with current work arrangement	17.69	11.00	.81*	-	-.15*	.06*	-.02	.15*	.74*
3. Work location	1.09	0.29	.01	-.15*	-	-.14*	.01	-.07*	.05*
4. Working hours per week	3.23	0.73	-.00	.06*	-.14*	-	-.02	.10*	-.04*
5. Position	0.66	0.47	.00	-.02	.01	-.02	-	.03*	.00
6. Gender	0.50	0.50	.17*	.15*	-.07*	.10*	.03*	-	.12*
7. Age	4.22	1.15	.82*	.74*	.05*	-.04*	.00	.12*	-
8. Income	4.18	0.71	.27*	.30*	-.19*	.25*	-.13*	.17*	.19*
9. Level of education	3.90	0.85	-.25*	-.24*	.11	-.05*	.04*	-.21*	-.13*
10. Type of education	0.59	0.49	-.12*	-.09*	-.05*	.00	-.08*	-.09*	-.20*
11. Work arrangement	0.10	0.30	.01	-.20*	.70*	-.26*	-.05*	-.08*	.06*
12. Size of IPN	3.00	2.63	.05*	-.00	.01	.07*	-.11*	-.05*	-.06*
13. Strength of ties in IPN	3.09	1.35	-.17*	-.17*	-.00	.04*	-.03*	-.03*	-.25*
14. Density of IPN	3.92	0.86	-.12*	-.06*	-.18*	.05*	-.00	-.04*	-.18*
15. Professional identification	3.24	0.57	-.01	-.02*	.01	.06*	.06*	-.12*	-.08*

<b>Table 1 cont.</b>	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
8. Income	-	-.08*	-.05*	-.27*	.17*	.10*	.13*	.04*
9. Level of education	-.08*	-	-.01	.11*	.06*	.07*	.03*	-.09*
10. Type of education	-.05*	-.01	-	-.05*	.06*	.06*	.07*	.05*
11. Work arrangement	-.27*	.11*	-.05*	-	.05*	-.01	-.24*	-.05*
12. Size of IPN	.17*	.06*	.06*	.05*	-	.47*	.18*	.09*
13. Strength of ties in IPN	.10*	.07*	.06*	-.01	.47*	-	.26*	.18*
14. Density of IPN	.13*	.03*	.07*	-.24*	.18*	.26*	-	.14*
15. Professional identification	.04*	-.09*	.05*	-.05*	.09*	.18*	.14*	-

*Note.* \* indicate correlations significant at  $p < .05$ .

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis for the eight-item measure of professional identification. This process yielded a satisfactory composite reliability score of .763. The resulting goodness-of-fit statistics were initially sub-par however, though with a few modifications to the measurement model (see appendix B) our measurement model attained satisfactory goodness-of-fit statistic scores (Kline, 2015): RMSEA = .079, CFI = .951, TLI = .902, SRMR = .045. The only exception was the chi-square score ( $\chi^2 = 116.148$ ,  $P = .000$ ), though this is expected given our large sample (Kline, 2015). We then conducted a SEM analysis with this slightly modified measurement model.

The model we analyzed is a multiple mediation model equivalent to the one shown in Figure 1 below, with the addition of control variables added with a path to the dependent variable. A bootstrap estimation procedure with 50,000 replications was used to estimate standard errors and confidence intervals (CIs). The CIs reported here are bias-corrected which, according to MacKinnon et al. (2004), provides the most accurate confidence intervals. The analysis was facilitated by use of Stata 17.0 (StataCorp, 2021). Table 2 below shows the results of the SEM analysis and Figure 1 summarize the key results.

We see that the direct relationship between work arrangement and professional identification is negative, as expected, suggesting that freelancers identify less with their profession than their employed peers. The relationship is not significant however, and H1 is not supported by the empirical evidence. That said, a post-hoc analysis revealed a significant indirect relationship, as discussed below.

Next, among the second group of hypotheses only H2C is supported by the empirical evidence, with a significant relationship between the respondents' work arrangements and the density of their IPNs. This relationship is negative (-.70), as hypothesized, indicating that freelancers have less dense IPNs than their employed peers. The two remaining relationships that this group of hypotheses is concerned with vary in their sign, but neither is significant.

As for the third group of hypotheses, the relationship between IPN density and professional identification is significant and positive ( $b=.10$ ), as hypothesized. This result provide support for H2C. H2A and H2B fails to find support, as the relationship between, on the one hand, the size of individuals' IPN and the strength of ties in their IPN and, on the other hand, their professional identification is not significant.

## Table 2

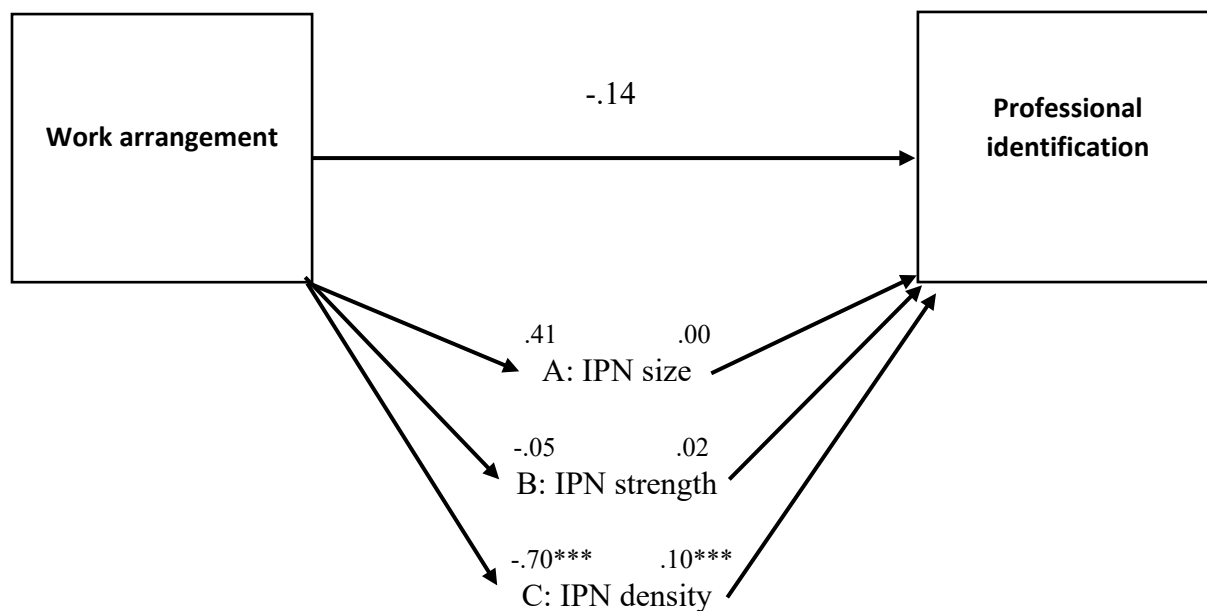
*SEM Results*

Variables (dependent variables in italics in table)	Path coefficient	SE	Boot BC CI	
			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
<i>Professional identification</i>				
Experience as a journalist	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.01
Experience w/ current work arrangement	-0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.01
Work location	0.12*	0.06	0.01	0.24
Working hours per week	0.03	0.03	-0.02	0.08
Position	0.05	0.05	-0.04	0.15
Gender	-0.16***	0.04	-0.25	-0.08
Age	-0.05	0.03	-0.12	0.01
Income	0.01	0.03	-0.05	0.07
Level of education	-0.08***	0.02	-0.13	-0.04
Type of education	0.01	0.04	-0.07	0.09
Work arrangement	-0.14	0.09	-0.32	0.04
Size of IPN	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.02
Strength of ties in IPN	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.06
Density of IPN	0.10***	0.02	0.05	0.16
<i>Size of IPN</i>				
Work arrangement	0.41	0.25	-0.07	0.92
<i>Strength IPN ties</i>				
Work arrangement	-0.05	0.14	-0.31	0.23
<i>Density of IPN</i>				
Work arrangement	-0.70***	0.09	-0.88	-0.53

*Note.* BC, bias corrected; LL, lower limit; UL, upper limit; W.A., work arrangement. Coefficients are rounded off to two decimals. \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* denote significance at  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and  $p < 0.001$ , respectively.

Among the control variables, only gender and level of education are significant, both of which are negatively related to professional identification, indicating that men and highly educated workers identify less with their profession. Years of experience with current work arrangement, years of experience as a journalist, work location, job position, working hours per week, age, income, and type of education are not significantly related to professional identification in our sample.





**Figure 1.** Key results from structural equation model analysis.

#### 4.1 Post-hoc analysis

To analyze if and which aspects of an IPN mediates the relationship between work arrangements and professional identification we conducted a post-hoc analysis. This was done in Stata, but we explain the approach here. The only significant mediator was IPN density. Taking the product of the coefficients for the relationship between work arrangement and IPN density ( $b = -.70$ ), and for IPN density and professional identification ( $b = .10$ ), gives us a coefficient for the indirect relationship of  $-.07$  (bootstrap standard error = 0.02,  $p = 0.002$ , CI =  $-.11 - -.02$ ). This means that differences in freelancers' and employees' IPN density results in significant differences in their levels of professional identification, i.e., freelancers identify less with their profession than employees because of their comparatively lower IPN density. Moreover, dividing the coefficient for this indirect relationship ( $b = -.07$ ) by the coefficient for the total relationship between work arrangement and professional identification ( $b = -.21$ ,  $p = .018$ , BC CI =  $-.11 - -.02$ ) informed us that IPN density mediates 33% of the relationship between work arrangement and professional identification.

## 5. DISCUSSION

As the world of professions continues to evolve, questions surrounding professionals' identity and identification have become increasingly relevant. This study aims to advance our understanding of the factors that shape professionals' identification with their profession. To do so, we have investigated the relationship between work arrangement, specifically freelancing

and permanent employment, and professional identification, and paid particular attention to if and how an IPN mediate this relationship.

Qualitative studies have found that freelancers tend to develop a multiplicity of, as well as more fluid and precarious work identities, often at the expense of their identification with their profession (Cross & Swart, 2021; Maestripieri, 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2018). Building on these insights, we hypothesized that freelancers would identify less with their profession than permanent employees. Our results showed no direct relationship between freelancing and, compared to employment, a reduced professional identification. However, when accounting for freelancers comparatively reduced IPN density, we observed the professional identification of freelancers and permanent employees.

The absence of a direct relationship between work arrangement and professional identification suggests the following to us. If freelancers do develop a multiplicity of work identities, identities that are also more fluid and precarious than what is the case for employees, as several qualitative studies suggest (Cross & Swart, 2021; Maestripieri, 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2018), this multiplicity of work identities does in themselves not develop at the expense of freelancers' identification with their profession. Following a similar vein of reasoning that informed our first hypothesis, we can think of three explanations for this result. The first and most straightforward explanation is that a market logic is not detrimental to a professional identity. If this is the case, our result directly challenges the arguments and findings of Cross and Swart (2021) and Maestripieri (2019).

The second explanation is that a market logic, i.e., a focus on employability and marketability, could be detrimental to professional identification, but other factors accompanying freelancing may strengthen their professional identification and counteract the detrimental influence of a market logic. For instance, freelancers tend to spend more time than employees on updating their professional knowledge (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Osnowitz, 2010). Given the epistemic foundation of professions, this time spent on furthering their own professional knowledge, as well as the more comprehensive/updated professional knowledge in itself, could strengthen freelancers' professional identification and mitigate the influence of a market logic.

A third explanation is that a market logic could be detrimental to professional identification, but that logics found in organizations are equally detrimental. The literature on hybrid professionalism have shown how a professional logic often give way to competing logics accompanying bureaucratization and managerialism, logics that, according to Noordegraaf (2015), can endanger the essence of being a professional. Moreover, we should keep in mind

that employed professionals are also exposed to a market logic (Hendrikx, 2017), even if less so and less frequently than freelancers. In short, there are several possible explanations for why freelancers and employees may identify to the same extent with their profession. The first explanation runs counter to the arguments and qualitative findings of Cross and Swart (2021) and Maestripieri (2019), while the two latter serve to nuance the theorization these authors provide.

Next, our results pertaining to the second group of hypotheses inform us that freelancers have an IPN of equivalent size and strength to that of employees. This suggests that life in the market do in fact enable freelancers to form lasting ties to their professional peers in a manner that matches permanent employees'. Similarly, though permanent employees likely interact with fewer professional peers than freelancers who move from organization to organization and often prioritize networking, their IPN size is not reduced because of it. Furthermore, freelancers' IPN density is lower than that of employees. Specifically, freelancers experience that they cannot rely on their professional peers for professional advice to the same extent as employees experience they can. It therefore seems, as previous literature suggests (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Osnowitz, 2010), there is an 'arm's length' distance between freelancing peers and/or freelancers and their employed peers. This result feeds into a broader set of literature that documents how nonstandard workers are alienated by permanent employees (e.g. Broschak et al., 2008).

The results show that IPN is related to professional identification, though density is the only relevant aspect of IPN in this regard. This suggest that how close a professional is to her or his peers, not how many professional peers she or he interacts with, nor how often, is what drives professional identification. Interestingly, in their study of organizational identification Jones and Volpe (2011) found that the only significant predictor of identification, among the IPN aspects studied here, was network size. While Jones and Volpe (2011) focused on a more extensive network than IPN and used a different measure of network density, a tentative inference can be made from these differences in results: Different network aspects matter for if and how workers identify with different targets at work, and one aspect may matter for one target but not for another. In case of organizational identification, it is, more instrumentally, all about *how many* employees a worker knows, while in case of professional identification it is more about *how* a professional is connected to his or her peers.

Finally, our post-hoc analysis revealed that because of freelancers' comparatively lower IPN density, freelancers do identify less with their profession than employees. This outcome emphasizes the importance of an IPN as a driver for identity construction. More, this results

provide further credence to the findings and arguments of Petriglieri et al. (2018), who conclude that freelancers' lack of an organizational holding environment, i.e., an organizational social context wherein they construct their identity, can in fact be detrimental to their professional identification. At the same time, nuancing the arguments and findings of Petriglieri et al. (2018), it is not the lack of professional peers that is detrimental to their professional identification but rather, according to our results, the distance between them and their peers.

Above we asked the question: Is life in the job market *less* conducive to professional identification than life in the organization? Freelancers are sometimes portrayed as atomized workers that live out their work lives in solitude on the open market, a life marked by competition with professional peers, possibly reducing the relevance belonging to a professional community. Our results would suggest that freelancing and life in the market is, in fact, less conducive to professional identification than permanent employment and life in the organization. Freelancers are more atomized, i.e., have less dense IPN, and therefore experience a lower level of identification with their profession. The remedy that immediately comes to mind is for professionals to be more inclusive towards freelancing peers as a proactive measure to increase their IPN density and strong IPNs.

### **5.1 Limitations and future studies**

This study, in itself and through its limitations, opens up for future studies. First, it relies on cross-sectional data; therefore, while the theory and model make causal assumptions, the data do not enable causal claims. This is a limitation that particularly relates to the causal relationship between work arrangements and IPNs. It is possible that workers' who fail to develop an IPN with relatively high density are the ones who end up freelancing, although theory and empirical studies would suggest that comparatively low network density follows somewhat naturally from (the competitive nature of) freelancing. While this study cannot make claims regarding the causal direction in the relationship between workers' IPN and their professional identification, McFarland and Pals (2005) found that causality flows primarily from social networks to identity. Using panel data, the authors found that changes in individuals' social networks induce changes in their identities. Changes in their identities, on the other hand, do not lead to significant changes in their social networks. Nonetheless, future studies of the relationship between work arrangements and professional identification would benefit from longitudinal data.

This study samples from what is viewed as a semi-profession. This could have implications for the generalizability of the findings. We argue in the introduction of this paper

that the benefits of sampling from journalists far outweigh the costs and that identity construction, following a neo-Institutional and discursive view on professions, is more dependent on how (semi-)professionals view themselves than how (academic) others view them. Nonetheless, we encourage future studies to investigate further the relationship between work arrangements and professional identification. Such studies would benefit from also incorporating other nonstandard work forms, e.g., temporary employment and externalization of work through working from home.

Another potential limitation of this study relates to common method biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). There are several factors that could create such bias in our study, such as social desirability, common scale format, and item wording. Though we cannot measure the presence of such bias, we implemented several procedural remedies to reduce the likelihood of it. First, we used a validated scale for the dependent variable, which should reduce the presence of such bias. Second, the mediating variables and the dependent variables all have different scales, with variation in scale length and scale anchors. This should reduce potential bias from scale format. Third, we used neutral wording for the items, reducing bias from item wording. Fourth, the questionnaire was vetted by members of the target population to reduce item ambiguity. Fifth, social desirability could influence some responses, perhaps especially regarding IPN size. As described in the Method section, we took several steps to improve the reliability and validity of responses to the question comprising this variable. Finally, common method bias is of particular concern when respondents respond in consistent ways across measures as a result of the measures easily lending themselves to implicit theories that the respondents are aware of (Morrison, 2002). We do not believe the respondents had any preconceived notions about how items used to measure their IPN are related to items used to measure their professional identification, nor work arrangements and the other variables. In short, we believe common method bias to have a limited impact in this study. Regardless, future studies would benefit from applying research designs with method- and data-triangulation to further reduce the relevance of common-method variance.

The nonsignificant direct relationship between work arrangement and professional identification challenges the theorization of Cross and Swart (2021) and Maestripiერი (2019). Following their vein of reasoning, we offer three possible explanations for this nonsignificant relationship. Future studies could try to tease out if and which institutional logics promote or reduce professional identification. The work by Barbour and Lammers (2015), which incorporate insights from literature on institutional logics to measure professional identity, could be a valuable source of inspiration when doing so.

In conclusion, the world of professions is evolving, opening up several venues for future studies. Building on insights from the profession literature and, particularly, three qualitative studies of freelancers' professional identities, in this paper we show that the externalization of work is an important factor to consider when discussing the future of professions.

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## Appendix

### A) Items used to measure professional identification

Cognitive 1: I identify myself as a journalist

Cognitive 2: Being a journalist reflects my personality well.

Affective 1: When someone criticise journalism, it feels like a personal insult.

Affective 2: When someone praises journalism, it feels like a personal compliment.

Affective 3: If a story in the media criticised journalism, I would feel embarrassed.

Evaluative 1: Journalism's successes are my successes.

Evaluative 2: When I talk about journalism, I say 'we' rather than 'they'.

Evaluative 3: I am very interested in what others think about journalism.

### B) Modifications to measurement model of professional identification

To investigate which and how many steps were necessary to arrive at satisfactory goodness-of-fit statistics we used Stata to calculate modification indices for our measurement model (Sörbom, 1989). Based on this calculation we modelled covariation between every pair of items, where doing so would reduce the chi-square score with 50 points or more. We therefore modelled covariation between the following six pairs of items (covariation coefficient in parenthesis): cognitive 1 and cognitive 2 (.23), cognitive 1 and affective 1 (-.05), cognitive 1 and affective 2 (-.02), cognitive 1 and evaluative 1 (.18), cognitive 2 and affective 1 (-.10), affective 1 and affective 3 (.21). Given the composite reliability score and prevalent use of our measurement model in extant literature on identification, we implemented these measurement modifications and proceeded with this adapted version of our measurement model.

## Paper 3

**Title:** Free to Have Imbalance: Freelancers' Work–Life Balance and the Mediating Role of Three Key Work Facets.

**Author:** Flatøy, C.

**Under review at journal:** *Personnel Review*.

### **Abstract:**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the difference in freelance and employed journalists' work-life balance. In so doing, we pay particular attention to the mediating role of work-scheduling autonomy, job-income security and collegial informational support, and contrasts two competing theoretical frameworks, a resource perspective and the stress of higher status perspective.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected with a survey questionnaire that were administered to a sample of 1,189 journalists, including 118 freelancers, in Norway. We analysed this data using regression-based mediation analysis.

**Findings** – We report three main findings: First, freelance journalists have a lower level of work-life balance than employed journalists. Second, our results provide unanimous support for the stress of higher status perspective. Third, the work facets partly mitigate the negative relationship between freelancing and work-life balance.

**Originality/value** – This study adds to the existing literature on nonstandard work arrangements and work-life balance, demonstrating both work arrangements and the status of an occupation are important predictors of work-life balance. The theoretical and practical implications of this are discussed.

## 1. INTRODUCCION

High-skill freelancers, freelancing providers of knowledge-intensive labour, represent the largest and, in absolute terms, fastest growing group of nonstandard workers in the US (Katz and Krueger, 2019), with similar trends being seen in the UK and other countries (Burke and Cowling, 2020). In line with this development, human resource management (HRM) scholars (Hennekam and Bennett, 2017) and practitioners (De Leede et al., 2019) are paying increasing attention to freelancers. However, they still remain understudied (Ayoobzadeh, 2022), and HRM practitioners often find it difficult to establish productive relations with freelancers (Van den Groenendaal et al., 2022, McKeown and Cochrane, 2017). In consequence, as described by Cross and Swart (2022), HRM scholars and practitioners currently risk taking some of the 'human' out of HRM in the case of freelancers.

A unique feature of freelancing is that workers retain directive control of their work (Cappelli and Keller, 2013). Companies and public institutions therefore generally neglect freelancers when designing work-life balance policies (Annink et al., 2015, Kelliher et al., 2019), leaving it up to freelancers themselves to maintain their work-life balance. This emphasis on individual agency, coupled with the challenges that come with life in the job market (Osnowitz, 2010, Barley and Kunda, 2004), can have important implications for freelancers' work-life balance. In this paper, we investigate the difference in work-life balance between freelancers and employees and the extent to which key work facets can explain this difference.

Previous studies have documented some of the challenges freelancers face in attempting to maintain satisfactory work-life balance (Davis et al., 2014, Annink, 2017, Gold and Mustafa, 2013). However, Anderson and Bidwell (2019) were the first and, seemingly, only researchers to empirically compare high-skill freelancers' and employees' work-life balance levels, using a sample of contracting and employed managers. They find no difference between the two groups after controlling for work hours. Because we can generally expect managers to have a low level of work-life balance, Anderson and Bidwell (2019) recommend investigating the work-life balance of freelancers in other high-skill occupations, occupations that, by their nature, do not deflate work-life balance to the same extent as management.

In this study, we build on the insights generated from these previous studies when investigating freelance and employed journalists' work-life balance. We incorporate three key work facets as mediating mechanisms in this investigation, facets previously shown to be

relevant to freelancers' work-life balance (Davis et al., 2014, Annink, 2017, Gold and Mustafa, 2013, Shevchuk et al., 2019). The extant literature on work-life balance offers two competing explanations for the roles of these work facets. The first is rooted in a resource perspective (Halbesleben et al., 2014), in which these work facets are believed to promote work-life balance. The second explanation is rooted in the 'stress of higher status' perspective (Schieman et al., 2006) and contends that workers in high-skill occupations, in their effort to attain these work facets, experience lower work-life balance.

Our study contributes to the literature on non-standard work arrangements and work-life balance. We demonstrate that work arrangements are important institutional structures that can shape individuals' work facets and work-life balance. Because we investigate journalists' work-life balance, our results should be relevant to practitioners in many other high-skill occupations. Furthermore, our study provides further support for the 'stress of higher status' perspective. Key work facets are often presumed to be resources that promote work-life balance (e.g., Brough et al., 2020, p. 6). We demonstrate that this may, under certain circumstances, be inaccurate. Particularly for workers in high-skill occupations, work facets may be attained at the expense of their work-life balance. In sum, we extend the literature on freelancers' work-life balance, as well as work-life balance overall. In addition to theoretical contributions, these insights have implications for HR practitioners, as discussed below.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Freelancers**

Freelancers and employees differ regarding two dimensions: their type of contract and their control over their work. Employees have an employment contract, while freelancers contract with their clients on a piece-rate basis, meaning that they agree on the work outcome, deadline, and compensation. In the absence of an employment contract, freelancers retain directive control over their work (Cappelli and Keller, 2013). These differences can have consequences for both the work facets freelancers are able to attain, as well as their work-life balance.

### **2.2 Work-life balance**

Work-life balance is a construct that refers to an individual's perception that work and non-work activities are compatible in accordance with that individual's current life priorities (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). This definition has two important implications. First, individuals engage in activities in their work domain and in several other domains, which can jointly be

referred to as their non-work domain. Second, work-life balance is a perception-based construct, which means that what constitutes work-life balance varies from individual to individual. Some may prefer 10 hours of work per week, while others may prefer 100 hours of work per week to maintain a desirable work-life balance (Casper et al., 2018, Brough et al., 2020). In other words, there is no universal recipe regarding what constitutes work-life balance. With that in mind, work arrangements can have a strong influence on individuals' work-life balance.

### **2.3 Freelancers' work-life balance**

Several studies have explored employees' work-life balance (Casper et al., 2018). Some have also explored freelancers' work-life balance (Shevchuk et al., 2019), though few have empirically compared freelancers' and employees' work-life balance, limiting our understanding of how freelancing can influence work-life balance as compared to employment. Comparing freelancing and employed managers' work-life balance, Anderson and Bidwell (2019) find no difference after controlling for work hours, but they recommend further studies of workers in other occupations.

Their work arrangements leave it up to freelancers to delineate the boundaries of their work domain. They can generally decide how and when to do their job, and we could therefore expect freelancing to promote work-life balance. However, most studies exploring freelancers' work-life balance challenge this expectation. Evans et al. (2004) find that, despite their perception of having more flexibility than employees in terms of structuring their time (see also Osnowitz and Henson, 2016), freelancers tend to prioritise 'billable hours' (work) and 'bridge time' (looking for work) at the expense of 'beach time' and 'down time' (not working) (see also Osnowitz, 2010). Shevchuk et al. (2019) find that many freelancers are dissatisfied with their work-life balance, even though, formally, they have a high level of autonomy. Gold and Mustafa (2013) find that freelancers put the needs of their clients ahead of their own needs throughout the day and, in many cases, throughout the night (see also Shevchuk et al., 2021). In short, the title of Gold and Mustafa (2013) neatly summarises the literature on freelancers' work-life balance: 'Work always wins.'

A key mechanism uncovered in studies of freelancers' work-life balance is referred to as 'the shadow of the future' (Evans et al., 2004). Freelancers are well-aware that their current and future success in the job market depends on referrals and references from current and previous clients. It is therefore in freelancers' long-term interest to put the needs of their clients ahead of their own. This opens them up to what Gold and Mustafa (2013) refer to as 'client

colonisation' of the non-work domain, a situation in which they are sensitive to requests from clients outside of their preferred working hours. Most employees do not have this shadow of the future hanging over them, making 'employer colonisation' less of an issue. In addition, employees can rely on regulations and policies both at the company and (inter)national levels that are aimed at promoting employees' work-life balance (Annink et al., 2015, Van den Groenendaal et al., 2022). We therefore hypothesise as follows:

H1: Freelancers experience a lower level of work-life balance than employees.

## **2.4 Work-scheduling autonomy, job-income security, and collegial support**

Work arrangements can influence which work facets workers attain and the extent to which they attain them. Of particular interest here is how freelancing influences (1) work-scheduling autonomy (i.e., the extent to which workers can decide when to do their work); (2) job-income security (i.e., the extent to which workers experience that their job(s) functions as a stable source of income) and (3) collegial support (i.e., the extent to which workers experience that they can receive support from their colleagues). These three work facets are of particular interest for two reasons. First, these facets have the potential to influence individuals' work-life balance. Second, each of these facets relates to important dimensions that structures individuals' work-life. Reviewing the literature on freelancing and sketching out a research agenda for future studies, Ashford et al. (2018) discuss how the 'old world of work', that of employees, differs from 'the new world of work', that of freelancers. Accordingly, freelancers' work-life differs regarding five dimensions: (i) autonomy, (ii) financial instability and job insecurity, (iii) physical and relational separation, (iv) career path uncertainty and (v) work transience. Work-scheduling autonomy, job-income security and collegial support relate to dimensions (i), (ii) and (iii), respectively.

## **2.5 Freelancers' work-scheduling autonomy, job-income security, and collegial support**

Freelancers can generally decide when to do their jobs as long as they do so within a given deadline. Consequently, a sense of independence (Kunda et al., 2002) and 'control over my life' (Inkson et al., 2001) are commonly reported experiences, testifying to a high level of work-scheduling autonomy among freelancers. Employees, on the other hand, are subject to the directive control of their employer (Cappelli and Keller, 2013), meaning that it is up to their employer to set their work schedule. Based on this, we hypothesise as follows:

H2A: Freelancers experience a higher level of work-scheduling autonomy than employees.

A commonly noted cost of the freedom that comes with freelancing is job-income insecurity (Barley and Kunda, 2004). Among the interim/freelance managers interviewed by Inkson et al. (2001), career and lifestyle instability problems are, by far, the most mentioned *personal* problem that comes with freelancing. The two most mentioned topics under this rubric are a discontinuity of assignments and financial insecurity, both of which relate strongly to job-income insecurity. Of course, employment can also come with some job-income uncertainty (Witte, 1999), though rarely to the same extent as the inherently contingent work arrangement of freelancing (Osnowitz, 2010). We therefore hypothesise as follows:

H2B: Freelancers experience a lower level of job-income security than employees.

Freelancing can also make it harder for workers to attain collegial support, both from their employed and freelancing professional peers and from their freelancing professional peers. Several studies find that freelancers tend to be treated as an ‘underclass’ (Zadik et al., 2019) or as ‘servants’ or ‘scapegoats’ by employees (Barley and Kunda, 2004). Inkson et al. (2001) find that the most commonly reported *on-the-job* problem interim/freelance managers experience is being met with hostility and a lack of recognition in the companies they work for. As for the relationship between freelancing peers, this relationship will inherently be of a somewhat competitive nature because freelancing peers compete for the same jobs (Osnowitz, 2010). Supporting this impression, Annink (2017) finds that freelancers primarily rely on sources outside the work-domain for social support instead of professional peers (see also Petriglieri et al., 2018). In short, freelancing can create social barriers that employment does not, barriers that can reduce freelancers’ access to and attainment of collegial support. Therefore, we hypothesise as follows:

H2C: Freelancers experience a lower level of collegial support than employees.

## **2.6 The three job facets as resources for or costs of work-life balance**

The three above-mentioned facets of work can influence workers’ lives in important ways. Our understanding of how they do so remains limited, however, particularly in the case of freelancers (Ashford et al., 2018). This study concerns itself with two competing and contrasting explanations for how these three work facets can influence individuals’ work-life



balance. In short, the first explanation, anchored in resource theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014), promotes these three facets as job resources that promote individuals' work-life balance. The second explanation, anchored in the perspective referred to as the 'stress of higher status' (Schieman et al., 2006, Schieman et al., 2009), contends that workers in certain occupations strive to attain key resources at the expense of their work-life balance. More specifically, the stress-of-higher-status perspective holds that many presumed job resources actually function as costs, specifically regarding their influence on individuals' work-life balance and particularly so in high-skill occupations. Following this last explanation, occupational characteristics are important to consider.

### ***2.6.1 Journalism as high-status occupation***

There is no universal definition of a high-status occupation, but there are some typical characteristics associated with such occupations (Schieman et al., 2006). First, high-status occupations are often professional and knowledge intensive. Journalism is usually characterised as a semi-profession because there is no association or state-body with the exclusive right to grant someone a title as a journalist but journalism meets the other criteria associated with professions (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003). At the same time, journalism is very much a knowledge-intensive occupation, revolving around acquiring, processing, and disseminating information (Donsbach, 2014). Second, high-status occupations usually provide workers with relatively high levels of autonomy and non-routine work, as is true for journalists, who must remain attuned to the ever-evolving news picture. Third, high-status occupations often come with many responsibilities, as does journalism, as journalists are tasked with reporting important and unimportant information to the public. Journalism can therefore be considered a high-status occupation, one, arguably, quite representative for other non-managerial high-status occupations.

### ***2.6.2 Work-scheduling autonomy, job-income security and collegial support as resources for work-life balance***

Work-scheduling autonomy, job-income security and collegial support are often presumed to be important job resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). A job resource is, in short, anything perceived by the individual as helping them attain their goals in or pertaining to the work-domain (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Resources can thus be means to attaining work-life balance.

Work-scheduling autonomy can function as a key resource for promoting work-life balance (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018). While employers are often aware of which activities

workers must deal with in the work domain, workers themselves know best which activities to do in the non-work domain. When workers can schedule activities in their work domain themselves, they can therefore do so in a manner that results in less conflict between the two domains. We can therefore expect that workers with a relatively high level of work-scheduling autonomy will have better work-life balance than workers with a relatively low level of work-scheduling autonomy. Thus, we hypothesise as follows:

H3A: Work-scheduling autonomy is positively associated with work-life balance.

Job-income security can function as a resource by reducing stress and anxiety, freeing up time and energy that would otherwise be spent coping with job-income insecurity (Selenko et al., 2017). Job-income security can thus prevent negative sentiments in the work domain from spilling over in the non-work domain, as well as freeing up time in the non-work domain. Consequently, it is generally considered a boon to workers' wellbeing (Shoss, 2017). Based on this, we hypothesise as follows:

H3B: Job-income security is positively associated with work-life balance.

Social support is often found to be a key resource in promoting individuals' wellbeing (Thompson and Prottas, 2005). A meta-analysis by French et al. (2018) shows that support from others at work, as opposed to from others in the non-work domain, is the key predictor of work-life balance, with informational support being an important type of support. One potential explanation for this is that collegial informational support entails the sharing of knowledge, which can increase a worker's efficiency at work (Chen et al., 2009), freeing up time and energy and thus facilitating work-life balance. Informational support from professional peers can also increase a worker's ability to balance requirements at work with requirements outside of work (Annink, 2017). Thus, we hypothesise as follows:

H3C: Collegial support is positively associated with work-life balance.

### ***2.6.3 Work-scheduling autonomy, job-income security and collegial support as costs of work-life balance***

Some scholarly work has nuanced the portrait of several work facets often presumed to be unequivocal job resources. For instance, Mazmanian et al. (2013) report an autonomy paradox

in which more autonomy is detrimental to work-life balance. Similarly, Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) discuss the ‘dark side’ of workplace friendships, pointing out that positive relationships do not yield universally positive outcomes. A unifying logic behind this scholarly work is that some work facets can function as costs rather than resources, particularly in high-skill occupations and specifically regarding work-life balance (Schieman et al., 2009).

If we adopt the stress-of-higher-status perspective, we can expect that journalists will apply their work-scheduling autonomy by being available to their employer/client when needed, including outside of normal work hours. Put differently, if we adopt the stress-of-higher-status perspective, we can expect an autonomy paradox (Shevchuk et al., 2019) in which more work-scheduling autonomy results in more client/employer colonisation, to the detriment of workers’ work-life balance. Thus, we hypothesise as follows:

H4A: Work-scheduling autonomy is negatively associated with work-life balance.

Regarding job-income security, a derivative of job security, attaining more security will often entail spending more time in the work domain, possibly at the expense of activities and relationships in the non-work domain, as well as work-life balance (Major et al., 2002, Brett and Stroh, 2003). This is not to say that job-income security does not reduce stress or anxiety but, rather, that the efforts invested to achieve such come at the expense of work-life balance. Put differently, there may be a trade-off between different types of wellbeing. Thus, we hypothesise as follows:

H4B: Job-income security is negatively associated with work-life balance.

Finally, collegial support may also be negatively associated with work-life balance within a stress-of-higher-status perspective. Studying why managers work excessive hours, Brett and Stroh (2003) find evidence for a social contagion hypothesis. Here, social contagion refers to social interactions that lead to increased expectations regarding working hours, as opposed to attaining a work-life balance, and such social contagion is particularly relevant in high-status occupations. To a similar end, commenting on some of the negative relationships between social support and psychological wellbeing in the extant literature, McClure et al. (2014) argue that social support can sometimes reduce individuals’ self-efficacy. With this in mind, particularly in high-status occupations, we expect the following:

H4C: Collegial support is negatively associated with work-life balance.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 Research setting and sample

This study samples from the population of journalists in Norway, an occupation in which freelancing has been common for a long time. In 2003, for example, 50% of journalists under the age of 30 in Norway had never been employed (Gynnild, 2005). At the same time, freelancing has also become more common in this occupation, partly as a result of media companies' increasing desire for flexible staffing arrangements (Steensen and Kalsnes, 2020). Statistics from the Norwegian Tax Authorities show that, in 2019, there were 7,919 active journalists in Norway, with 'active' referring to non-students and non-retirees. Among these, 584 were freelance journalists receiving a wage. Beyond these wage-receiving freelancers, a minority of freelancers, 10% according to our survey, are excluded from these statistics because they operate as a company (i.e., as a limited liability company or sole proprietorship).

Journalists were surveyed with the assistance of two trade unions for journalists, which distributed a link to an online questionnaire to their 6,500 total members. One of the unions is, by far, the largest trade union for journalists in Norway, with most active journalists being members. The second union is a smaller union with around 200 members that is open to everyone who produces reviews of books and movies for news agencies (the respondents from this second union who did not work primarily as journalists were dropped from the sample).

The questionnaire was distributed during the final months of 2021, in Norwegian. Prior to distributing it, this author and two researchers external to this study, independently of one another, translated the original English items into Norwegian. In the few cases of discrepancies between the translations, the author and one of the external researchers settled the discrepancy by determining which of the options would be perceived as most natural and semantically correct by a Norwegian sample. The final questionnaire, in its entirety, was inspected by representatives of the unions and one freelance journalist. During this inspection, they were instructed to pay particular attention to the formulations and choice of terms. The inspectors had no comments on the formulations or choice of terms.

A total of 1,860 members (29%) responded to the survey. Due to some incomplete response sets, the sample in this study contains 1,186 responses. This includes 118 respondents who are exclusively or primarily freelancing, meaning that they do not combine freelancing with employment. Comparing this sample to the population of journalists via the use of data

from the Norwegian Tax Authorities shows that freelancers are slightly overrepresented in the sample (nine (N) and ten (n) percent, respectively).

## 3.2 Measures

### 3.2.1 *Dependent variable*

Four items were used to measure work-life balance, one item for a global assessment and three items retrieved from Grzywacz and Bass (2003) that tap into experiences of work spilling over into the non-work domain and *vice versa* (see Appendix A). An example item is ‘How often do you experience mental fatigue after a day at work?’ The items were scored along a five-point scale anchored by ‘Never’ and ‘All the time’ (the response scale for the item measuring a global assessment was anchored by ‘Strongly disagree’ and ‘Strongly agree’). The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this four-item measure of work-life balance was .73.

### 3.2.2 *Mediating variables*

Each of the mediating variables was measured using one item. To measure experienced work-scheduling autonomy, we presented the respondents with the following statement retrieved from Breugh (1999): ‘I have control over the scheduling of my work activities.’ Responses to this were scored along a five-point scale anchored by ‘Strongly disagree’ and ‘Strongly agree’. To tap into respondents’ experience of job-income security, they were presented with the following statement: ‘My current job income(s) are secure.’ The response scale used for work-scheduling autonomy was used also for this item. To measure the extent to which the respondents experience they can receive collegial support in the form of information sharing, we asked following question: ‘To what extent can you rely on other journalists for professional advice?’ This item was scored along a five-point scale anchored by ‘Not at all’ and ‘To a very large extent’.

### 3.2.3 *Independent variable*

The independent variable *Work arrangement* consists of the two categories: Employee with open-ended contract (0) and Freelancer (1). In order to categorise the respondents, they were asked the following: ‘What is your primary work arrangement?’ The questionnaire further specified that ‘By primary work arrangement we here refer to the connection to work that you spend the most time on, if you have several work arrangements.’

### 3.2.4 Control variables

Ten control variables that characterise important features of the work domain and the non-work domain were included, all of which have been shown by prior studies to be relevant predictors of work-life balance (Haar et al., 2019, Brough et al., 2020, Shevchuk et al., 2019). To characterise, first, the work-domain, these are *Working hours per week* (0–20 hours, 21–35 hours, 34–40 hours, 41–55 hours, 56–75 hours and more than 75 hours), *Work location* (i.e., before Corona-pandemic lockdowns; employer’s/client’s location and not employer’s/client’s location), and *Income from work* (>100,000; 100,001–300,000; 300,001–500,000, 500,001–750,000, 750,001–1 million and more than 1 million). We also controlled for *Position*, differentiating between those with the job title of ‘Journalist’ and others (e.g., ‘Editor’, ‘Photographer’ or ‘News anchor’). In addition, a control variable for PR or content marketing work, *Moonlighting* (i.e., work that substantially differs from journalism), was included (I did not do such work, 1–25% of total work time, 26–50% of total work time, 51–75 % of total work time, 76–95% of total work time or 96–100% of total work time). To characterise the non-work domain, the following control variables were included: *Gender* (male, female) *Age* (18–20 years, 21–30 years, 31–40 years and so on), *Children in the household* (no, yes), *Status* (single or has a partner) and *Level of education* (primary school, high school, college, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree or PhD).

## 4. RESULTS

Table I below show the means and standard deviations for the variables used in the analysis, as well as their correlation coefficients. From Table I, we see that the average age range is 41–50 years, 48% of the respondents were women, the average income was in the range of NOK 500,000–750,000 and the average level of education was a bachelor’s degree. These sample characteristics roughly correspond with the population characteristics based on the NTA statistics noted above: the average age in the overall population was 45 years, 54% were women, the average income in 2018 was NOK 655,427 and the average education was a bachelor’s degree. Furthermore, in the sample, 81% of participants were in a relationship, and 49% had a child or children in the household. Regarding the work domain characteristics of the sample, the average work week was 36–40 hours (the standard work week in Norway), 88% of participants worked from an employer’s location, 64% had a position as a ‘Journalist’ and 36% had another position (e.g., ‘Editor’).

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics and correlations

<b>Variables</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Control variables</i>									
1. Working hours per week	3.23	.02	-	.12*	.23*	-.04*	.00	.11*	-.06*
2. Work location	.88	.00	.12*	-	.22*	-.02*	-.22*	.07*	-.09*
3. Income from work	4.17	.02	.23*	.22*	-	-.16*	-.12*	.16*	.19*
4. Position	.64	.01	-.04*	-.02*	-.16*	-	.20*	-.00	-.00
5. Moonlighting	1.25	.02	.00	-.22*	-.12*	-.19*	-	-.07*	-.03*
6. Gender	0.52	.02	.11*	.07*	.16*	-.02	-.07*	-	.15*
7. Age	4.24	.03	-.06*	-.09*	.19*	-.01	-.03*	.15*	-
8. Children in the household	.49	.01	.06*	.04*	.04*	.10*	.06*	.02	-.08*
9. Status	.81	.01	-.02*	-.01	.08*	-.06*	-.04*	.06*	.10*
10. Level of education	3.83	.03	-.03*	-.06*	-.08*	.09*	.07*	-.23*	-.14*
<i>Independent and mediating variables</i>									
11. Work arrangement	.10	.01	-.21*	-.73*	-.29*	-.02*	.29*	-.08*	.08*
12. Work-scheduling autonomy	2.85	.40	-.02	-.28*	-.07*	.07*	.11*	-.01	.10*
13. Job-income security	4.14	.03	.09*	.40*	.27*	.04*	-.17*	.05*	-.11*
14. Professional support	3.93	.03	.04*	.21*	.13*	-.01	-.12*	-.03*	-.17*
<i>Dependent variable</i>									
15. Work-life balance	2.86	.02	.17*	.07*	-.14*	.02*	.04*	-.16*	-.19*
<b>Table 1 cont.</b>									
	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	
8. Children in the household	-	.29*	.03*	-.05*	.03*	.00	.02*	.08*	
9. Status	.29*	-	-.03*	-.02*	-.01	.03*	.00	-.03*	
10. Level of education	.03*	-.03*	-	.09*	.00	-.06*	.04*	.07*	
<i>Independent and mediating variables</i>									
11. Work arrangement	-.05*	-.02*	.09*	-	.30*	-.54*	-.25*	-.07*	
12. Work-scheduling autonomy	.03*	-.01	.00	.30*	-	-.09*	-.08*	-.13*	
13. Job-income security	.00	.03*	-.06*	-.54*	-.09*	-	.28*	-.13*	
14. Professional support	.02*	.00	.04*	-.25*	-.08*	.28*	-	-.09*	
<i>Dependent variable</i>									
15. Work-life balance	.08*	-.03*	.07*	-.07*	-.13*	-.13*	-.09*	-	

\* indicates correlations significant at  $p < .05$ .

We used Hayes's approach to mediation analysis and PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) in SPSS (IBM-Corp., 2021). Figure 1 below displays the model that we analysed, with the addition of regressing the mediating variables and dependent variable on the control variables. A bootstrap sampling procedure with 50,000 replications was used to estimate the 95% confidence intervals (CI; percentile bootstrap CI reported below), and a Huber-White estimator was used to yield robust standard errors. The regressions were run in a combined sample of freelancers and employees, as recommended by Hayes (2017). The result of this analytical process is summarised below in Table II. Note that, in most cases (i.e., in which PROCESS performs a normal theory test), Table II reports both p-levels and CIs. However, PROCESS does not automatically yield a normal theory test and p-values for indirect effects (i.e., ' $X \rightarrow MI-3 \rightarrow Work-life\ balance$ ' in Table II). There are several reasons for this (see Hayes, 2017), notably that such tests are not reliable for indirect effects, and it is recommend to focus on the

bootstrap CIs for indirect effects. The results are shown in Table II below, while Figure 1 summarises the key results.

Hypothesis 1 is supported by our analysis. Freelancing journalists experience a significantly lower level of work-life balance than their employed peers ( $b = -.30^{**}$ ). Seen in combination with the results of Anderson and Bidwell (2019), these results suggest that there are differences in freelancing and employed peers' work-life balance in high-skill occupations in which the occupation itself does not hamper work-life balance. However, freelancers' work facets mitigate the negative influence their work arrangement seems to have on their work-life balance. Testifying to this 'blessing in disguise', which we discuss further below, the coefficient for the direct relationship between work arrangement and work-life balance ( $b = -.30^{**}$ ) is larger than the coefficient for the total model (i.e., 'Total X->Y',  $b = -.12$ ).<sup>1</sup>

Hypotheses 2A–C also found support. Freelancers experience significantly more work-scheduling autonomy ( $b = .86^{***}$ ) but less job-income security ( $b = -1.43^{***}$ ) and collegial support ( $b = -.48^{***}$ ) than employees. These results indicate that, in addition to influencing the work-life balance of high-skill freelancers, their work arrangement also shapes their work facets in a different way than that of their employed peers.

As for the competing explanations of how key work facets relate to the work-life balance of workers in high-skill occupations, our results provide unanimous support for the stress-of-higher-status perspective. Specifically, work-scheduling autonomy ( $b = -.05^{**}$ ), job-income security ( $b = -.13^{***}$ ) and collegial support ( $b = -.09^{**}$ ) are all negatively associated with work-life balance, suggesting that the efforts workers invest in attaining these facets come at a cost to their work-life balance.

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<sup>1</sup> The total model is not significant. This is not surprising, because the positive and negative indirect relationships cancel one another out in the total model, yielding a small beta coefficient compared to the standard error (Hayes, 2017).



**Table 2.** Regression results for associations between the covariates and work-life balance.

Variable	$\beta$	SE	Percentile bootstrap CI	
			Lower limit	Upper limit
<i>Controls -&gt; Work-life balance</i>				
Intercept	4.24***	.24	3.77	4.71
Working hours per week	.17***	.03	.12	.22
Work location	.09	.09	-.09	.27
Income from work	-.11***	.03	-.17	-.06
Position	.04	.04	-.02	.01
Moonlighting	.03	.03	-.03	.09
Gender	-.19***	.04	-.27	-.12
Age	-.08***	.02	-.11	-.05
Children in the household	.10**	.04	.02	.17
Status	-.02	.05	-.12	.07
Level of education	.02	.02	-.03	.06
<i>X &amp; MI-3 -&gt; Work-life balance</i> (H1 & H3A-C)				
Work arrangement	-.30**	.11	-.51	-.10
Work-scheduling autonomy	-.05**	.02	-.09	-.02
Job-income security	-.13***	.03	-.19	-.08
Professional support	-.09**	.03	-.14	-.04
<i>X -&gt; MI-3</i> (H2A-C)				
W.A. -> Work-scheduling autonomy	.86***	.18	.51	1.21
W.A. -> Job-income security	-1.43***	.16	-1.73	-1.12
W.A. -> Professional support	-.48***	.12	-.71	-.25
<i>X -&gt; MI-3 -&gt; Work-life balance</i>				
Work-scheduling autonomy	-.05	.02	-.08	-.02
Job-income security	.19	.05	.11	.29
Professional support	.04	.02	.01	.08
Total X -> MI-3 -> Work-life balance	.18	.05	.09	.29
Total X -> Y	-.12	.10	-.32	.08

Direct effect model:  $R = .40$ ,  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $p = .00$

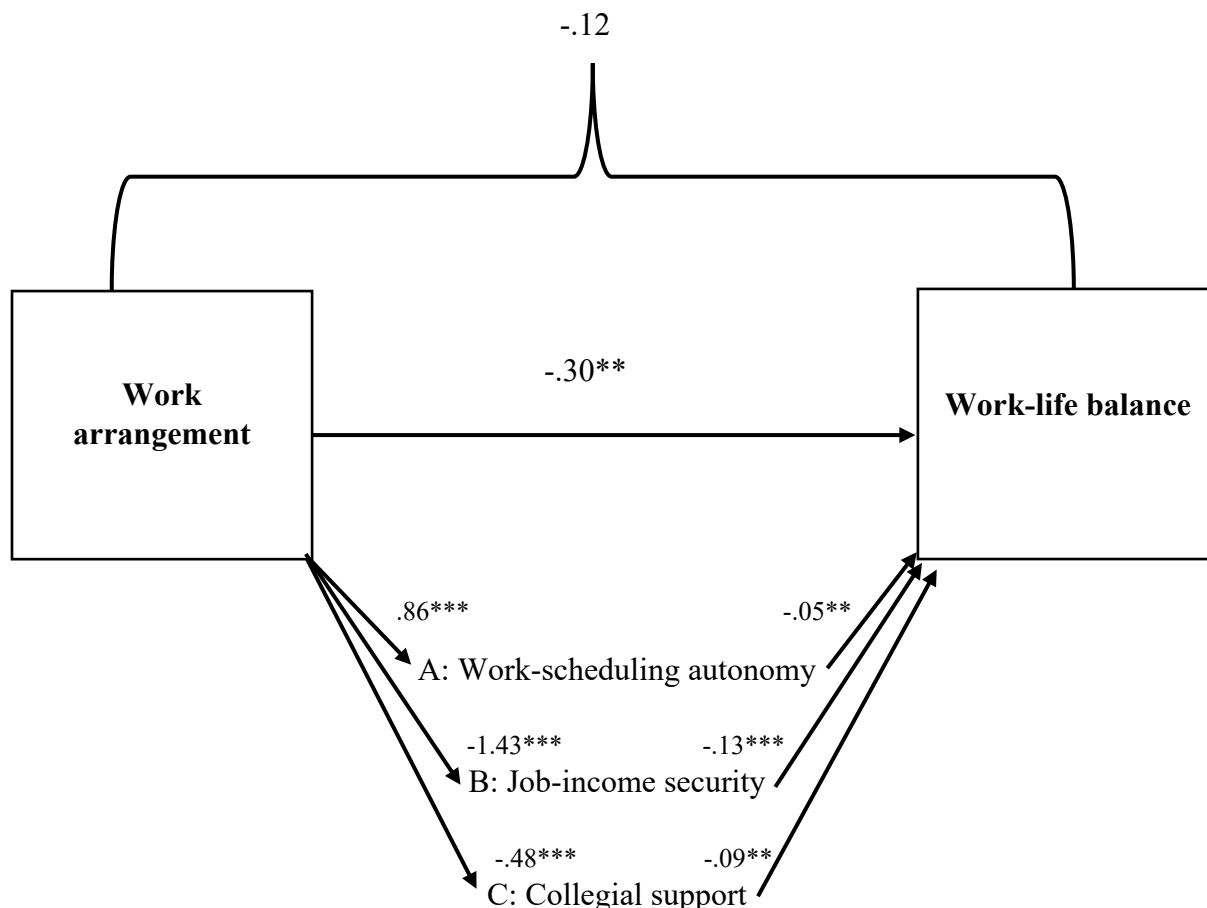
W.A. = Work arrangement

Coefficients are rounded off to two decimals.

\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* Significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

Among the control variables, working hours per week is significantly and positively associated with work-life balance. This positive relationship is likely an outcome of a slightly left-skewed distribution among journalists, particularly freelancers, in terms of work hours per week. The journalists in our sample generally work a standard work week or fewer hours. Like too many work hours, too few work hours—as in too much life and not enough work—can also be detrimental to individuals' work-life balance. Gender is significantly and negatively associated with work-life balance, indicating that female journalists experience a lower level of work-life balance than male journalists. Age is also significantly and negatively related to work-life balance. A worse work-life balance with age could be a product of having more responsibilities, both in work and in life, with age, making balance more difficult to attain. Having children in the household is significantly and positively associated with work-life balance. This is slightly surprising, as previous studies have found a negative relationship in this regard (e.g. Fan and Potočnik, 2021). One explanation could be the very family friendly

labour regulations in Norway as compared to most countries. Another explanation could be that having children in the household is an incentive for workers to focus more heavily on their work-life balance, as well as forcing them to impose stricter boundaries between the work and non-work domains. Work location, position, moonlighting, relationship status and level of education were not significantly related to work-life balance in our sample.



**Figure 1.** Key results from regression analysis.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

High-skill freelancers are an increasingly important part of the workforce. In line with this development, HRM scholars and practitioners are paying increasing attention to them. This study sought to further our understanding of high-skill freelancers' work-life balance, paying particular attention to key work facets and how these relate to work-life balance. To do so, we analysed a survey of 1,186 journalists, including 118 freelancers.

We report three main findings. First, freelancers experience less work-life balance than their employed peers. This result provides further credence to the notion that 'Work always wins', to the detriment of freelancers' work-life balance. The 'shadow of the future' (Evans et al., 2004), in combination with 'client colonisation' (Gold and Mustafa, 2013),

likely drives this outcome. Interestingly, organisations are sometimes portrayed as ‘greedy institutions’ that extract as much energy from their employees as possible (Coser, 1967). However, our results indicate that the job market is an even greedier institution, at least regarding workers’ work-life balance.

Second, freelancers have lower levels of job-income security and collegial support than employees but a higher level of work-scheduling autonomy. This is in line with what previous studies of freelancers have found (Barley and Kunda, 2004, Osnowitz, 2010, Shevchuk et al., 2019), though we provide quantitative and comparative-based backing for these findings.

Third, we find that these three key work facets are attained at the cost of journalists’ work-life balance. The more work-scheduling autonomy journalists have, the worse work-life balance they have. This outcome suggests that they either fail to utilise their work-scheduling autonomy in a manner that promotes work-life balance or that they prioritise other outcomes over work-life balance. Similarly, journalists seem to acquire more job-income security at the expense of work-life balance. Regarding collegial support in the form of information sharing, our results indicate that the more journalists can rely on other journalists for information, the lower their work-life balance. To us, this suggests that journalists, like managers, are exposed to ‘social contagion’, which drives journalists to work more rather than to prioritise their work-life balance.

Our study has several theoretical implications. First, we show that work arrangements are important institutions that have the potential to influence key work facets, as well as work-life balance. Based on this and with the extant literature in mind, we contend that freelancers, as well as workers in other nonstandard work arrangements lacking the same institutional frames as is associated with the standard work arrangement, are particularly prone to work-life balance issues.

Second, our results unanimously support the stress-of-higher-status perspective. This perspective seem to have received more attention in recent years (Moen et al., 2013, Schieman and Glavin, 2016), but it has received far less than the competing resource perspectives (Halbesleben et al., 2014, Demerouti et al., 2001). Resource perspectives generally portray key work facets, such as autonomy, as resources that promote work-life balance, though some studies, including the present one, have shown that there can be ‘too much of a good thing’ (Halbesleben et al., 2009). We therefore promote a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of work facets that *prima facie* would seem to be resources. In particular, it is vital for work-life balance studies to consider workers’ occupation and skill level/status.

Third, freelance journalists' comparatively lower level of job-income security and collegial support is a blessing in disguise regarding their work-life balance. If freelancers had a level of job-income security and collegial support on par with their employed peers, their level of work-life balance would be even lower than it is. If freelancers were to invest effort in attaining, for instance, job-income security on par with their employed peers, this effort would come at the expense of their work-life balance according to our results, creating an even bigger gap in the work-life balance between freelancing and employed journalists. Thus, while the three key work facets are undoubtedly desirable in and of themselves, not having too much of them seems to be a blessing in disguise for high-skill freelancers' work-life balance. At the same time, given the negative relationship between work-scheduling autonomy and work-life balance, freelancers would have better work-life balance if they also had a lower level of work-scheduling autonomy, on par with their employed peers. This indicates that freelancers would benefit from (self-)imposed work-scheduling boundaries. Overall, these findings testify to the complex and multifaceted relationship between work arrangements and work-life balance. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that we do not contend that the work facets in question are attained at the expense of work-life balance. High-skill workers may find themselves in a 'race towards the bottom' in terms of prioritising work at the expense of their work-life balance. Therefore, as we discuss below, regulations, policies and norms could enforce a healthier race, one in which the work facets in question become resources.

An important contribution of our study is that we expand on the literature on nonstandard work and work-life balance, a literature predominantly rooted in studies conducted in the Anglosphere (Casper et al., 2018), by reporting on a study conducted in a Nordic context. The Nordic context is characterised by strong trade unions (Arndt, 2018), as well as norms and policies that support work-life balance (Crompton and Lyonette, 2006). This is true in the case of freelance journalists. Investigating freelance and employed journalists' work-life balance in a Nordic context thus enables us to conduct a critical test of the stress-of-higher-status perspective. If high-skill freelancers and employees in Norway attain key work facets at the expense of their work-life balance, we believe the situation is less promising for high-skill workers' work-life balance in countries with weaker unions and norms and policies less in favor of work-life balance.

Some limitations of our study are worth mentioning. Our data are cross-sectional, which hinders our ability to draw causal inferences. Future studies would benefit from analysing longitudinal data to further our understanding of the causal relationship between

work arrangements and work-life balance, as well as the role of mediating mechanisms. Moreover, future studies should build on more comprehensive measures of key work facets, even if these facets are of a very specific nature. We also echo Anderson and Bidwell (2019) recommendation to include other occupations in future studies, but we believe the experiences of journalists to be relevant to practitioners of many other occupations.

Our study offers some advice for HR practitioners. Building on insights derived from several qualitative studies, our analysis demonstrate that it is more difficult for high-skill freelancers to maintain work-life balance than it is for their employed peers. Managers and HR practitioners can help freelancers in this regard. The ‘shadow of the future’ is difficult to eliminate as a mechanism because references and referrals serve important job market functions. However, the ‘shadow of the future’ is only harmful to freelancers’ work-life balance when combined with ‘client colonisation’. Therefore, to the extent it is possible, managers and HR practitioners should avoid contacting freelancers working for them outside of normal working hours. Human resources policies aimed at minimising ‘client colonisation’ could, in effect, mimic the effect of regulations implemented in some countries that prevent managers from contacting their employees outside of working hours (Kelly, 2022). Freelancers would then be less inclined to apply their work-scheduling autonomy to the detriment of their work-life balance. In a similar vein, attempting to create workplace norms that promote a work-life balance could benefit employees and freelancers alike if it succeeds in eliminating social contagion that promotes working too much at the expense of work-life balance. If and when possible, signalling more long-term relationships with freelancers can be beneficial, as it can increase their sense of income security without them having to expend too much effort to attain this. Organisations that promote the work-life balance of freelancers could, in turn, experience more efficient freelancers and, perhaps, a better reputation in the freelance community.

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