asae foresightWORKS

New Forms of Work

SUMMARY: Freelance, gig, contract, and temporary work and the infrastructure to support them (e.g., online platforms and reputation systems) are growing. The number of independent professionals is expanding, and networked organizations rely on them. Associations will have new opportunities to serve these workers and advocate for their interests.

Forecasts

- Online talent platforms, including gig-economy digital marketplaces, could improve productivity, grow some kinds of employment, and boost labor force participation globally.
- As more jobs are atomized into tasks and shorter-term engagements, a vast amount of work—blue-collar or white-collar—could be outsourced to freelancers or gig workers.
- Future social safety net policies, and especially about access to health insurance and retirement benefits, will significantly affect the viability of new work forms.
- More work will shift from jobs with titles to shorter-stint project work. Fewer careers will move upward on straight paths, with more taking fluid courses.
- The shift to freelance and gig work could be a temporary stage. More policy and economic factors will have to align to make the change viable as a primary structure for work.

Key Uncertainties

Changing regulatory climate for new work patterns

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Economic conditions affecting hiring and employer confidence

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Societal tolerance for potential adverse impacts of new work forms—e.g., less certain employment and reduced access to the social safety net

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Evolution of attitudes toward the freelance and gig work lifestyle held by rising generations

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Societal recognition of traditionally unpaid work, e.g., childcare and elder care

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Supporting Trends

- **Growth of global gig economy.** The global "gig economy," in which workers either freelance, work under short-term contracts, or work as independent contractors, is projected to grow.
- **Drivers of freelance growth.** Demand is increasing and an infrastructure to support freelance work is forming.
- **Growth of the blended workforce.** "Blended" workforces, consisting of conventional staff and freelancers, are spreading.
- **Worker reputation systems.** Reputation systems have the potential to effectively match prospective workers to organizations.
- **Remote work as a benefit.** Remote (or virtual) work is playing an increasingly important role in the flexible workforce.
- **Working from home.** The number of Americans telecommuting and working from home continues to rise.
- **Human-machine hybrid work.** As intelligent systems permeate the work world, semi-autonomous systems that collaborate with humans—rather than fully autonomous systems—may become more prevalent.
- **Job polarization.** High-skill and low-skill jobs are increasing, while middle-skill jobs decline.

Related Drivers of Change

- Automating Work
- Human-Machine Cooperation
- Empowering the New Workforce
- Reputation by the Numbers
- Microlearning

Notable Data Points

ONE BILLION HOURS

Americans spent an estimated
1.1 billion hours per week freelancing in 2018.

Source: Upwork, Freelancing in America 2018

WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

The U.S. civilian workforce-
participation rate dropped from 67% (1999) to 63% (2019).

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Civilian labor force participation rate

GIGGING THROUGH THE AGES

Americans who have done app-based, short-term work include
25% of 25–34 year-olds, 24% of 45–54 year-olds, and 13% of 55–64 year-olds.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics data on electronically mediated employment

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Strategic Insights

- Associations will not be immune to the forces driving the conversion of work to gig or freelance jobs, and executives will need to look at how to best maximize the positive and minimize the negative effects on their organizations.
- Continuing evolution of the job market from all-employee to a balance of employee, contract, and freelance means that associations have the opportunity to offer targeted services to members who participate in freelance and gig employment, including employment services and benefits usually provided by payroll employers.
- Alternatively, new forms of work may call for new associations that cater to the unique needs of freelance, gig, contract, and temporary workers and advocate for them in the wider society.
- Associations have an opportunity to help members track changes to the complex network of workforce regulations and to advocate for regulations that benefit their members.
- Associations can help members gain the skills needed to effectively manage a blended workforce that includes freelancers, who will often be working off site, sometimes in another country.
- Associations may be in a position to support reputation systems that can support freelancing and gig work in their industries.

Timing

- **Stage:** Growth that could be nearing saturation in some sectors
- **Speed:** Moderate, with gig-employment growth significantly exceeding payroll-job growth in some sectors

Potential Alternative Futures

- **Just a fallback:** Gig work declines when the economy offers alternatives, keeping it niche.
- **Security first:** The system of temporary, contract, and gig workers fails as a social structure—workers reject it because it fails to provide stable, secure employment and benefits.
- **Safety net backlash:** Protections for permanent workers become so strict that the great majority of new hires are for temporary positions, as is already the case in France.

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Take Action

- **Look at the work your association needs to do and find cost-effective ways to boost your staff capacity.** Many associations already contract with temporary employees to staff major meetings or manage peak-demand times. When someone leaves, consider whether that job can be restructured using outside expertise. Some associations may want to turn to members who are willing to work for hire on short-term tasks that cannot be completed using volunteers.
- **Consult with HR professionals about legal use of independent contractors.** The growth of freelance and gig economy work may blur existing labor law practices. Be sure that employees supervising project and task-oriented workers have a working knowledge of HR requirements. Associations may discover common legal and regulatory constraints that associations working together could clarify or remove.
- **Investigate whether new forms of work are growing in your industry.** Are organizations in your arena restructuring work and services? What effect will this have on your members and their livelihood? Are they relying on specific technology platforms to find and do this work? Is there a global dimension with new people and reimbursement scales coming into the picture? Your answers have important implications for your membership, advocacy, and education strategies.
- **Help members find and do freelance work.** You could create a database of people interested in working as consultants or on specialty tasks. Job posting services and talent fairs could help people access these opportunities. If you have enough interest, you may be able to organize special-interest groups, introduce a new membership class, provide education and training, and offer insurance and other benefits for members on short-term assignments.

Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms:
gig economy, sharing economy, flexible workers, 1099ers, independent workers, contract workers, precariat, crowdsourcing, crowd work, TaskRabbit, UpWork, Uber, Lyft

Who Will Be Affected

All organizations are likely to feel greater pressure to control staffing costs by employing short-term workers, especially for peak-demand times. Small-to-medium-sized businesses may find hiring independent contractors gives them affordable access to a wider range of competencies. Some industries have already experienced significant disruption and restructuring of how work is structured and performed.

About ASAE ForesightWorks

ASAE ForesightWorks is a deliberate, evidence-based research program and emerging line of products to provide association professionals with a continual stream of intelligence about the changes facing the association industry, including:

- regularly updated action briefs;
- tools for applying insights from the research in your association;
- guidance in performing environmental scans; and
- opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

Ultimately, the program's mission is to empower association leaders to create a culture of foresight.

Check **asaecenter.org/ForesightWorks** and follow **@ASAEfdn** on Twitter for updates on new findings and events.

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