

The Global Survey on Freelancing: Overall Results



A Collaboration of the Agile Talent Collaborative
And the Department of Psychology, University of Toronto

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Introduction: Why We Began This Work

Freelancing has been around for over two thousand years. According to [Herodotus](#), early freelancers included Greek soldiers working for the Persian King Cyrus in the sixth century BC. A few centuries later, the Roman Senate relied on independent architects, engineers and construction managers to build the Colosseum and Pantheon.

Mercenary soldiers were common after 1000 AD and played an important role in military campaigns in Europe between the 12th and 14th centuries. And, the first published use of the term freelancer was offered by Sir Walter Scott in the book *Ivanhoe*. In it, a feudal lord and vassal of King Richard refers to paid soldiers offered to the king:

“I offered Richard the service of my Free Lances, and he refused them ... thanks to the bustling times, a man of action will always find employment.”

Modern freelancing has grown quickly in these bustling times

Freelancers are independent professionals. We distinguish freelancers from “gigsters,” independents providing a range of non-professional services or “gigs” and made famous by [Uber](#) and other riding services. In 2016, [McKinsey & Co](#) estimated the global population of independent talent at nearly 160m, a number that likely included gigsters as well as freelancers. But without doubt freelancing in tech and other areas continues on a growth tear fueled by global economic growth, enabled by technology, and facilitated by a pandemic-induced shift to remote work. [Upwork](#), a large freelance platform well-known for the *Freelancing in America* surveys, estimates the US population of part- and full-time freelancers at 60m. Taking a page from [Mary Meeker's](#) well-known research on internet trends, we might reasonably infer that 15m or one quarter of this population is full-time (essentially doubling Meeker's estimate of 7-8m full-time freelancers made in 2018) and the 45m remaining are part-time or side-giggers. Together, these professionals produce over a trillion dollars in economic value.

Drivers of the freelance revolution

Several factors came together to ignite the freelance revolution:

- The *cost advantage* of what Miles Everson, CEO of [MBOPartners](#) calls the fractionalization of talent: hiring “on demand” experts for just the amount of cost and time required
- The *time advantage* of accessing vetted talent quickly, in days or weeks rather than waiting months to attract, select, and on-board full-time employees

- The *performance advantage* of accessing top talent the organization would not be able to attract or afford on a permanent basis
- The *strategic advantage* of utilizing world-class experts in a variety of fields for a short time, an extended projects or as an interim professional or executive
- The *risk advantage* of working through freelance platforms where freelancers are vetted and their qualifications and experience are transparent

These are significant benefits to employers. But other contextual factors are at play in the freelance revolution:

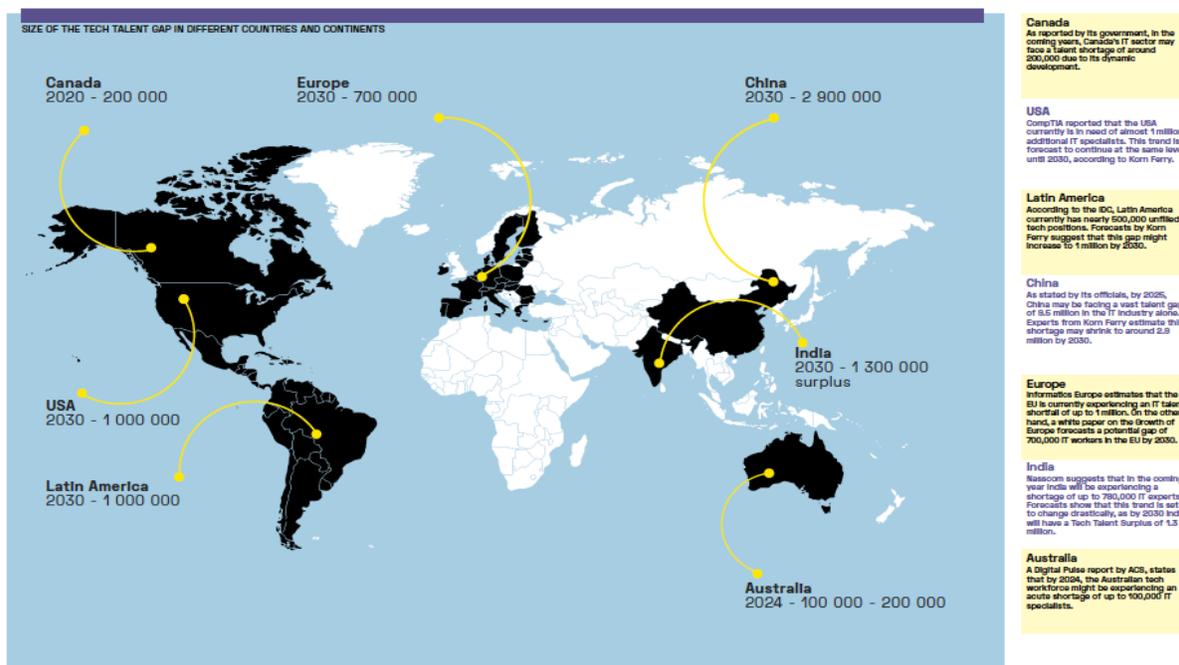
- The *massive expansion* of talent created by global sovereign investments in post graduate STEM education
- The *demographic challenge* of an ongoing talent shortfall driven by global economic growth and the impact of Covid-19
- The *demand for greater agency* by young professionals who are disenchanted with corporate employment
- The *openness of organizations* to remote or hybrid work arrangements, which reduces the difference between freelancers and remote employees
- *Adapting to the post-Covid workplace*, hybrid and flexible, blended workforces have been accepted by organization leaders
- *Recognition of freelancing* as a legitimate alternative career, and the experience of regular employees experiencing freelancing through side-gigs (see [my article](#) on Gazprom Neft)

Freelancing offers organizations an efficient way of meeting critical temporary talent gaps, and continues to grow because organizations see the advantage of a “third way” of resourcing: the flexible, blended workforce. Freelancing fills the donut hole between full-time permanent hires and hand’s off contract-out service relationships.

The freelance revolution is global

While the US and EU are major markets for global freelance work, the freelance revolution is a worldwide phenomenon and is driven by global

changes in talent supply and demand. Here's a chart by [TalentAlpha](#) that makes the point.: While the magnitude of demand may vary by region, the impact of the talent gap is as strongly felt in Latam as in China.



While the US is a major consumer of freelancers and the largest single market for global freelance work, it is clearly global demand that is driving the freelance revolution.

That growth is supported by a fast growing ecosystem of marketplaces, communities, agencies, applications and services that support freelancers and freelancing.

Pundits estimate between 800 and 1000 platforms currently operating or funded and growing, but this is likely a very low measure of the freelance population world-wide. Many freelancers choose not to participate in platform communities. And, it is difficult to accurately count the numbers of regular Side-Giggers, who are themselves a large and growing population within the freelance community.

About the Global Survey on Freelancing

In January, I teamed up with Professor Gerald Cupchik of the University of Toronto to create the *Global Survey on Freelancing*, the first significant, global collaborative survey of freelancing. It was a unique opportunity to follow-up on the original research that produced [Agile Talent](#) and my more recent writing in [Forbes](#), [Harvard Business Review](#),

Talent Quarterly, *Huffington Post* and other publications. We hoped that working together with a wide range of freelance platforms would help identify unique insights. More than 75 freelance platforms, agencies and communities signed on to our project as research partners and encouraged their freelance members to participate. A total of almost 1900 individual freelancers completed the survey.

The 75 plus research partners that joined our project as research partners are a true microcosm of the global freelance community. This cohort includes

An initiative to develop the **first global database of freelancer's views and experiences**, and what helps some freelancers achieve more than others.

GLOBAL STUDY ON FREELANCING

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large and small platforms, agencies and communities, well-established companies and startups, and both profitable and attractively funded as well as bootstrapped platforms just emerging from beta and seeking growth funding. Our research partners operate all over the world from companies headquartered in North America, Western and Eastern Europe, the Nordics, Russia, North and SE Asia and Pacific countries including India and Australia, as well as Latin America and several countries within Africa. They represent the full range of the freelance revolution: Pharma to space satellites, software development to AI, and optical engineering as well as freelancers in music, events planning, life coaching and personal training.

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Who, What, Where and When

“Working for myself offers flexibility and a better work-life balance, and I enjoy the freedom. It is feast or famine when it comes to work, and networking is a challenge. I worry about late payments, finding retained clients and keeping up to date with best practices, but overall I love it.” PR Freelancer, UK

In this first chapter we briefly review the demographics of our survey, and the important insights that can be gleaned from them. Here are the factors we examined:

Age

Multiple generations (GenZ to Baby Boomer) were well represented: 15% were under 30, almost 30% were 30-39, and 25% were 40-49. 31% were 50 plus. While writing on freelancers tends to focus on youthful freelancers, freelancing is actually a big tent.

	N	%
Under 20	10	0.5%
<30	279	15%
30-39	540	29%
40-49	468	25%
50 plus	588	31%

Gender

Traditional gender labels were chosen by 99% of participating freelancers. Males represent almost two-thirds or 63%. 37% of freelancers identified as female.

	N	%
Male	1177	63%
Female	688	37%

Education

The educational experience range of our freelancers was broad. 8% described themselves as self-taught. 49% were tech or university graduates. 42% had earned a post graduate degree, for example: MA, Law or MBA, MD or PhD.

	N	%
High School or Self Educated	161	8%
Tech School/University	922	49%
Post Graduate Degree (MA, Law, MD, PhD)	802	42%

Freelancing Tenure

About 16% of our population had freelanced for less than a year, while 22% of our individuals identified themselves as freelancing for over 10 years. The balance reflected individuals with between 1–10 years of freelancing experience.

	N	%
Less than 1 year	294	16%
1-3 years	487	26%
3-5 years	315	17%
5-10 years	369	20%
10+ years	420	22%

Location

North American freelancers were almost 18% of the population. European freelancers including Eastern Europe, the Nordics and Russia, added 46%. Based on response numbers, we re-constructed location groups: *North America*, *Greater Europe and Russia*, *Asia and Pacific* including Australia, India and China, *Latin America* and *Africa*. *Asia and Pacific* was 9% of participants, Latam region provided 16%, and African freelancers contributed 11% of our total population.

	N	%
North America	334	18%
Europe/Russia	874	46%
Asia/Pacific	171	9%
Latin America	305	16%
Africa	201	11%

Profession or Specialty

Tech specialists were 33% of respondents. 19% were creatives in marketing and advertising. 20% identified as Independent Management Consultants. 5% worked in Scientific or related fields, and almost 6% were in the Events and Hospitality. 18% of freelancers didn't specify an expertise.

	N	%
Tech	625	33%
Advertising/Marketing/	356	19%
Mgt Consulting	369	20%
Science/Clinic/Medical	91	5%
Events/Hospitality	110	6%
Other	334	18%

Freelancing Career Choice

64% of our freelancers described themselves as Full-Time by Choice. Another 12% were Temporarily Full-time while seeking regular employment. 20% of our population were Side-Gigging while also working full-time. 4% didn't respond.

	N	%
I'm a full-time freelancer by choice	1200	64%
I'm a full-time freelancer now but looking for a full-time job	225	12%
I'm a part-time freelancer (I have a full-time job) and plan to continue both	383	20%

Platform memberships

Finally, we asked how many platforms our freelance survey respondents joined. The "0" option wasn't offered because our study partnered with platforms to reach freelancers. Most freelancers, 69%, were loyal to one or two platforms rather than several.

	N	%
1-2 platforms	1296	69%
3+ platforms	589	31%

A note on data analysis

A copy of the survey items is provided in the appendix. The items in this survey used 7-point scales, typically annotated in one of two ways: 1= less than others, 4=equal to or about the same as others, and 7=more than others, or 1=strongly disagree, 4=neutral and 7=strongly agree.

The Freelance Life

"I failed my first attempt being a freelancer because I didn't take time to learn about taxes and money management. I had to step back into employment, take my time to learn what I had to learn and came back empowered by new knowledge and skills!" Digital marketer, Benelux

We wanted first and foremost to understand how our freelancers feel about work and life in general. Remember, context and timing matters: Freelancers completed the survey from April – June, 2021, at a time when Covid-19 had temporarily ebbed in some parts of the world, but raged in others. We asked freelancer's about their workload, network, feelings of financial success or difficulty, their client and collegial relationships, enjoyment from the work, reputation, and their commitment to freelancing.

Here's what we found:

1. Most have a solid workload, but a third of freelancers in our sample struggle

Many freelancers face the challenge of not enough work, the wrong type of project work, or lumpy work, a feast or famine situation. 30% reported that they had more work than typical colleagues. An additional 33% felt their workload was in line with others. 38% of freelancers were frustrated by insufficient project work.

Typical workload		
	N	%
1 -	240	13%
2	214	11%
3	264	14%
4	622	33%
5	313	17%
6	145	8%
7 +	87	5%

How does this impact feelings of financial success? 40% of freelancers felt more successful than colleagues, and 26% saw their success as similar to other freelancers. 34% thought their financial success was sub-par.

Financial success		
	N	%
1 -	193	10%
2	200	11%
3	248	13%
4	485	26%
5	342	18%
6	263	14%
7 +	154	8%

2. *Networking is a strength for many but a challenge for a third of freelancers*

Networking is a key driver of success; freelancers must sell *and* deliver. 44% saw their network as strong, and 24% more thought they networked as well as colleagues. 32% were self-critical.

Networking effectiveness		
	N	%
1 -	119	6%
2	209	11%
3	282	15%
4	452	24%
5	350	19%
6	305	16%
7 +	168	9%

3. *Most freelancers see their client relationships as satisfactory or better*

Most freelancers see client relations as a strength: 61% of freelancers described strong relationships. 27% were on par and 11% were more critical. More on this when we report the *Client Satisfaction Index*.

Client relationships		
	N	%
1 -	50	3%
2	59	3%
3	97	5%
4	510	27%
5	423	22%
6	424	22%
7 +	322	17%

4. *Freelancers generally enjoy their work*

Freelancers generally enjoy the work: 63% found it satisfying and only 11% were negative. More specifics in our discussion of the *Freelance Satisfaction Index*.

Work satisfaction		
	N	%
1 -	44	2%
2	61	3%
3	104	6%
4	498	26%
5	489	26%
6	388	21%
7 +	301	16%

5. *Overall, freelancers feel they are building strong reputations in the marketplace*

When asked about reputation, 59% describe theirs as stronger than others and 25% say it is comparable to colleagues. 16% say their reputation is weaker than others.

Reputation		
	N	%
1 -	92	5%
2	91	5%
3	108	6%
4	477	25%
5	415	22%
6	448	24%
7 +	254	13%

6. *Freelancers tend to have a realistic planning horizon*

49% described themselves as focusing more on the longer term than others. 23% of freelancers describe their planning as more short-term oriented.

My goals and plans		
	N	%
1 -	93	5%
2	141	7%
3	200	11%
4	529	28%
5	335	18%
6	305	16%
7 +	282	15%

7. *A majority of freelancers in our survey are committed to freelancing*

We were interested in freelancers' commitment to freelancing. 61% say they are highly committed, consistent with surveys like Upwork's [Freelancing in America](#). Only 15% were non-committal. This aligns with freelancers who are temporary.

My commitment		
	N	%
1 -	40	2%
2	86	5%
3	148	8%
4	464	25%
5	383	20%
6	397	21%
7 +	367	20%

Interesting demographic trends:

- **Age.** Younger freelancers were more satisfied with their workload and financial success, while older reported higher scores in satisfaction with their work, relationships, and commitment to freelancing.
- **Gender.** Males were more positive than females in workload, financial success, satisfaction with freelancing, and commitment to freelancing.
- **Profession.** Tech professionals reported higher overall satisfaction. Creatives were close behind and independent consultants followed along with Scientific freelancers. Events freelancers were less satisfied, reflecting the challenges of the event and travel industries.
- **Location.** North America and Europe freelancers reported stronger workloads. Africa was lowest. Client relationships were strongest among Europeans.
- **Freelance career type.** Temporarily full-time freelancers rated themselves slightly lower than others in the experience of freelancing, but higher in commitment than other freelance career types, suggesting that as long as they are freelancing they will give it their full effort.
- **Freelancing tenure.** More experienced freelancers generated a stronger workload and financial success. Trends were similar for network strength and satisfaction and, unsurprisingly, for commitment to freelancing.
- **Education.** There are few differences in how educational attainment influences freelance life.
- **Platform membership.** Two-thirds of our population worked with only 1-2 platforms. They reported slightly greater financial success, modestly stronger relationships with clients, and stronger reputations.
- **Client type.** The most positive ratings were by freelancers primarily working for a mix of SMB and Enterprise. Overall, workloads were larger, network effectiveness was increased, commitment was deeper and enjoyment and satisfaction was greater in the mix category, but financial success and reputational strength was more closely correlated with a focus on large corporates. Freelancers working primarily with non-profits were less satisfied.

How Freelancers See Their Competencies

“Freelancing enables me to be recognized for my talent in delivering an enhanced client experience while fulfilling my purpose of giving clients a higher ROI, in a flexi-work set up. While prolonged receivable cycles impact my operating cash flows, easing legislations and increased need for on-demand HR solutions have been a blessing.” HR Expert, Mid-East

Freelancing isn't easy. It takes skill and self-confidence for a freelancer to put themselves out there and compete for work. Networking is uncomfortable for many people. Flexibility and adaptability is required to successfully collaborate on a work plan or project. Dealing with challenging clients requires resilience. Successful freelancers are inevitably problem solvers, team players, and strong communicators. And so on.

To better understand how freelancers see themselves, we asked our 1900 freelancers to assess their competencies relative to freelance colleagues.

Here is what we learned:

1. Freelancers express high confidence in many areas

In the last section we noted that most freelancers describe freelancing in positive terms. How, then, do they assess their competencies as freelancers? The chart below shows that freelancers tend evaluate their soft and hard skills relatively favorably. For example, if we focus on the high and low end of ratings (strongly agree and strongly disagree), our population is generally confident that they have the right stuff. Here are some areas where freelancers see themselves in particularly positive terms:

How Freelancers see Themselves: Highest ratings	% Strongly Agree
Flexible and adaptable	66%
Shows real grit; resilient	59
Meet commitments	70
Accepts accountability and responsibility	70
Creative	63
Work well with people at all levels	74
Values based; strong ethics	78

These data show a confident and optimistic population overall (in fact, 65% describe themselves as highly optimistic). But, looking more deeply, there are a number of areas where freelancers acknowledge room for improvement.

2. To improve success and satisfaction, there are several competency areas where platform support would be welcome

Looking where ratings of competence are below 50, they tend to cluster around relationship issues: Making time for networking, building strong business connections, establishing and investing in relationships with colleagues and clients.

How Freelancers see Themselves: Lowest ratings	% Strongly Agree
Good networker	34%
Effective planner and time manager	48
Speaks other languages	47
Makes business connections	45
Persuasive	44
Sensitive to how others perceive me	43
Risk-taker	40

There are also some areas that received higher ratings but also suggest opportunity for improvement. Clustered again are items relating to client or colleague working relationships.

- 50% say they think ahead about working relationships (during or before and after projects)
- 51% say they pay attention to conflicting perspectives (important when dealing with client or colleague disagreements)
- 52% say they work hard to bring harmony to working groups
- 54% effectively gives and receives feedback
- 56% say they deal well with conflict

Here is the full set of competencies and associated ratings:

Competency	Self-Critical; Much Less than Others ¹	Self-Confident; Much More than Others
Goal oriented	3%	46%
Ambitious	3%	52%
Flexible and adaptable	1%	66%
Shows real grit; resilient	2%	59%
Delivers on commitments	1%	70%
Problem solver	1%	74%
Communication skills	2%	62%
Builds effective client relationships	2%	57%
Creative thinker	1%	63%
Works well with people at all levels	1%	74%
Deals well with conflict	2%	56%

¹ *Less than others* reflect percent ratings at the low end (1-2) of the seven point scale (“much less than”) and *more than others* reflect the high end (6-7) of the scale (“much more than”).

Effectively gives/receives feedback	2%	54%
Stays up to date technically	3%	51%
Seen as real expert	2%	57%
Accepts accountability and responsibility	1%	70%
Generous in crediting others	1%	73%
Value based; strong ethics	1%	78%
Optimistic	1%	65%
Analytical	1%	61%
Realistic	1%	56%
Effective planner and time manager	4%	48%
Makes business connections	5%	45%
Good networker	12%	34%
Good listener	1%	61%
Emotionally invested in work	4%	53%
Works with others	2%	63%
Thinks ahead about working relationships	4%	50%
Sensitive to how others perceive me	4%	43%
Builds harmony in working groups	2%	52%
Takes a leadership role	4%	56%
Thinks globally	3%	59%
Speaks other languages	10%	47%
Energized by the work	3%	54%
Considers conflicting perspectives	1%	51%
Multi-tasker	6%	52%
Persuasive	4%	44%
Risk-taker	6%	40%

Interesting demographic trends:

- **Age.** Younger freelancers are less career goal oriented, ambitious, and client relationship builders. Older freelancers are more positive in communication and presentation skills, client relationships, working well with others, establishing a reputation for expertise, and dealing with conflict.
- **Gender.** Women were more positive than men in flexibility and adaptability, resilience, client relationships, giving and receiving feedback, and working with others. Men rated themselves stronger in skills areas like perceived expertise, accountability, and analytical.
- **Profession.** While Events professionals suffered the greatest loss of business immediately after Covid-19 they haven't lost confidence, rating themselves higher in ambition, flexibility and adaptability, resilience, and delivering on promises.
- **Location.** Overall, North American and European freelancers are consistently more positive. African freelancers rated themselves stronger in many areas while

Asian and Pacific and Latin American freelancers were less positive than other cohorts.

- **Freelance career choice.** Temporarily Full-time freelancers rated themselves more highly on most attributes than did other freelancers.
- **Freelancing tenure.** More experienced freelancers were generally more positive about their skills and attributes.
- **Education.** Few differences; freelancers lacking university education were slightly more positive about their skills and competencies than other groups on many items.
- **Platform membership.** Individuals on more platforms offered slightly higher ratings in staying up to date technically, learning new tools and methods, and being seen as an expert.
- **Client type.** Mix and Start-Up / SMB category freelancers were more positive in areas like goal oriented, ambitious, flexible and adaptable, delivering on commitment, and showing grit.

Freelance Satisfaction Index

“Becoming self-employed did not feel riskier. It feels great to build my own company. I enjoy the flexibility, and I am more efficient. I also appreciate the freedom to buy whichever software and hardware I feel necessary for work. The greatest concern is getting the next assignment. Working remotely has worked out fine. Being a programmer, it’s easier to focus at home.” Software Developer, Nordics

Our survey shows that a majority of freelancers in our survey report an acceptable workload, count themselves successful, enjoy the work, are committed to freelancing, and believe they have most of the competencies needed for a successful freelance career.

But, we wanted to understand freelance satisfaction at a deeper level. To do so, we created an index of 8 items we’ve called the *Freelance Satisfaction Index*.

Here’s what our freelancers told us:

My feelings about my freelancing career:	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree
Freelancing offers me an attractive career opportunity	5%	56%
Freelancing offers me the chance to build expertise in interesting areas	2	66
Freelancing allows me to enjoy the quality of life I hope for	5	66
Freelancing makes it possible for me to achieve my financial goals	10	47
Freelancing gives me the chance to meet and work with interesting colleagues	6	56
Freelancing gives me the chance to meet and work with interesting clients	3	69
Freelancing offers me the flexibility and independence I value	3	78
Freelancing gives me the opportunity to work on challenging problems	2	66

These data offer a deeper perspective of how full and part-time freelancers see the pros and cons of freelance life. Taking the highest highs and the lowest lows of the Freelance Satisfaction Index gives us some insight into how freelancers assess their career prospects.

1. Freelancers understand and accept the trade-off inherent in freelance life

Most freelancers understand and accept the trade-off they make by trading traditional professional employment for a solopreneurial life and career. The data line up with earlier results; Freelancers value the flexibility and independence that freelancing

provides, enjoy the quality of life it offers, and appreciate the chance to build satisfying client relationships. And, they accept the occasional volatility of opportunity, and the challenge of a frequently changing workplace and colleagues.

2. *Concerns, while real and important, don't diminish the attraction of freelance work for most of our freelancers*

“Can I achieve my financial goals” is a common worry factor. Almost half of our freelancers see financial success is a concern, a finding consistent with our earlier data; 34% of freelancers worry about their financial performance.

In the chart below, we show the *relative* pluses and minuses of the freelance life as described by the Freelance Satisfaction Index. It shows that in areas like working with interesting clients and colleagues, building expertise in interesting areas, and enjoying a high quality of life, freelancers rate their experience and career choice very well.

While rated lower, the uncertainties and dilemmas of freelancing represented as minuses are still well north of neutral. Even with the most demanding focus on the data – the strongly agrees and strongly disagrees - a strong percentage of freelancers are confident they will achieve their financial goals.

Highs	% Positive	Lows	% Positive
Flexibility and independence	78%	Achieve my financial goals	47%
Meet and work with interesting clients	69	Attractive career opportunity	56
Build expertise in interesting areas	66	Meet and work with interesting colleagues	56
Enjoy the quality of life I hope for	66		
Work on challenging problems	66		

3. *The Freelance Satisfaction Index offers a useful tool for freelance platforms and freelancers*

In addition to these interesting data, the *Freelance Satisfaction Index* seems to give both platforms and individual freelancers a way to assess, better understand, and discuss their attraction and commitment to freelancing. We are eager to build this micro data base and look forward to platforms hacking the *Index* and making it available to freelancers as a means of assisting them to determine “Is freelancing is for me?”

Interesting demographic trends:

- **Age.** The older the freelancer, the more likely he or she sees freelancing as an attractive career choice.
- **Gender.** Women were more positive in describing freelancing as an attractive career opportunity, building expertise, working with interesting colleagues and clients, and offers the flexibility and independence they seek. Men were more positive on achieving their financial goals, and the chance to work on challenging problems.
- **Profession.** Once again, Events freelancers were generally more positive in describing their freelance career despite current financial challenges. Tech was close by in second place. Tech freelancers were twice as positive as other freelancers in achieving their financial goals.
- **Location.** North Americans are most positive overall; they are more likely to see freelancing as an attractive career opportunity that provides a higher quality of life, and achieves their financial goals. But, other location groups are close behind.
- **Freelance career type.** Full-time Freelancers by choice consistently rated themselves higher in this category than other freelancers.
- **Freelancing tenure.** Freelancer's tenure had an impact: Those with the greater experience in freelancing rated it high: the career opportunity, building expertise in interesting areas, quality of life, working with interesting colleagues, and the flexibility it offers. Tenure didn't influence how freelancers judged financial attractiveness.
- **Education.** All three groups were positive on freelancing as a career, and the opportunities it provided to work on interesting projects and interesting clients and valued the flexibility that freelancing offered.
- **Platform membership.** Freelancers who worked with Fewer platforms consistently rated their clients and their client experience marginally more favorably than freelancers working with multiple platforms.
- **Client type.** Freelancers working with a combination of SMB and enterprise clients were consistently more positive about freelancing as a career, seeing a higher quality of life, achieving their financial goals, working with more interesting clients and colleagues, and providing greater independence and flexibility. As we report later, "the magic is in the mix of work."

Freelancer Work Styles and Future Focus

“The best thing about being a freelancer is that you grow with a broader vision as a professional, while enjoying freedom and autonomy in your life. Clients and projects on whom I can make a positive impact are those I enjoy most. The hardest thing about freelancing is not having colleagues from whom you can learn.” Agile Coach, Latam

Our global survey provided an opportunity to more deeply explore how freelancers size-up and deal with work and life challenges. We asked several questions about how freelancers approach work planning and difficult decisions: how they deal with stress, respond to challenge and obstacles, and consider their future goals.

Here is what we learned:

1. Freelancers see themselves as problem solvers

60% of freelancers described themselves as contingency thinkers, identifying multiple potential solutions to problems. A similar percentage, 65% said they were effective dealing with challenges and obstacles to their goals. As we learned in the earlier section freelancer competencies, 74% describe themselves as strong problem solvers, 61% say they are highly analytical, and 63% believe they are creative.

2. Freelancers do their homework

76% said they actively sought as much information as possible when dealing with new situations. 60% say they find it helpful to consider conflicting perspectives when dealing with challenging issues.

3. Freelancers are thoughtful about the future

A number of items asked freelancers about their planning for the future. 47% say they pay strong attention to media information and the internet in forming plans for the future. 61% include in future planning how they want to live. And, as we learned earlier, most freelancers describe their plans as considering the longer term impacts of their decisions.

4. Freelancers are optimists

When asked about optimism in an earlier survey section, 59% of freelancers described themselves as strongly optimistic, and only 1% described themselves in opposite terms. In this section, 60% reported see themselves as likely to achieve financial security in the future through their work. And, 66% were confident they'll be recognized as an expert by their clients and colleagues.

Interesting demographic trends:

- **Age.** All age groups were generally optimistic but younger freelancers are more so than older colleagues. Younger freelancers were also more confident that they would be financially secure and recognized for their expertise.
- **Gender.** A majority of both genders described themselves as optimistic, competent at dealing with problems and eliminating obstacles, and expected to be successful financially and reputationally.
- **Profession.** Scientific, clinical and medical freelancers were somewhat more optimistic than others, and more likely to be recognized as experts in their field. Tech freelancers are most confident of financial success; independent management consultants were least.
- **Location.** Asia and Pacific freelancers were most optimistic; Europe was least. Asian freelancers are most confident they will be financially successful. African and Asian freelancers were most certain their reputations would rise.
- **Freelance career choice.** Whether full- or part-time, freelancing by choice or while seeking employment, there were few differences. Side-giggers were most confident they would be financially secure (remember, they have full-time jobs).
- **Freelancing tenure.** Newer freelancers are more optimistic than more experienced freelancers, and more confident they will be financially secure.
- **Education.** Few differences by education: Individuals with advanced professional or academic degrees were slightly less optimistic than others, and slightly less confident of financial security.
- **Platform membership.** Those belonging to more platforms are slightly more confident they will be financially successful, and will build a strong reputation.
- **Client type.** Freelancers working a mix of SMB and Enterprise corporates were more optimistic, more self-confident, more likely to believe they will be financially secure, and more confident of establishing themselves as experts.

Client Satisfaction Index

“A few months as a freelance digital nomad, I’ve realized that creativity benefits from rest as any muscle does. Creativity for me is a sprint, better in short sharp bursts than marathons, and more rewarding. Waking up in new places doesn’t hurt either - when your mind is opened up to new experiences, it’s in the perfect state to come up with the next big idea.” Creative Director, Australia

Similar to the format of the Freelance Satisfaction Index, we wanted a better understanding of how freelancers experienced client work. We accomplished this by constructing a *Client Satisfaction Index*, an index of 10 items.

In a recent article for Forbes, I described the [six drivers](#) of client readiness for an effective blended, flexible team or workforce. The survey results provide evidence of real progress in client readiness and the quality of client relationships:

1. *Overall, more organizations are learning how to work effectively with freelancers*

We were surprised by the high percentage of freelancers describing their clients as skilled at working effectively with freelancers. 45% strongly agreed that their clients know how to work well with freelancers. Only 7% strongly disagree.

2. *The same can be said for client project management competence.*

Project management competence in working with freelancers is a *critical* factor in freelancing success: It impacts every aspect of a freelancers’ experience: the reasonableness of deliverables and timelines; relations with client team members; how the project is designed, whether the work is satisfying, and access to essential information. Almost half of freelancers, 47%, strongly agreed that client project managers know how to work well with freelancers, a big jump in confidence from just a few years back. 52% said they had easy access to the information they needed, and 46% strongly agreed that deliverables and timelines were generally fair.

3. *Freelancers feel a positive connection to the client team*

A critical readiness driver is how freelancers are treated by internal team members; 69% strongly agreed that client team members were friendly and helpful, and 56% rated client team members as technically and professionally competent.

4. *Freelancers say they are generally treated with fairness and respect, and paid fairly*

How freelancers are treated administratively is a key driver of client effectiveness, and here again we find evidence of meaningful progress. 69% strongly agreed that they are

treated fairly and with respect; only 3% strongly disagree. 52% strongly agree that they are paid fairly for their work.

This latter finding is particularly noteworthy. So much is said these days that there is a frustrating “race to the bottom” for freelance compensation. [Reddit](#), for example, recently hosted a conversation about the challenge of fair pay. The data from our survey don’t challenge the assertion, and there are certainly areas within the freelance-verse like writing and web coding where rates are problematic. But, for a majority of our freelancers, there is a feeling that pay is fair.

Here are the data from the Client Satisfaction Index:

Client Satisfaction Index: A typical client experience ...	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree
Organization knows how to work effectively with freelancers	7%	45%
Work deliverables, milestones and timelines are generally fair and realistic	6%	46%
This client requires top quality work from freelancers	5%	66%
My client project manager knows how to work well with freelancers	1%	47%
I have access to the information I need to meet my deliverables for this client	4%	52%
Client team members are normally friendly and helpful when I have a question or need	2%	69%
I am treated fairly and with respect in my dealings with this client company	3%	69%
Work I’m doing for this client is interesting and satisfying	3%	62%
The client team members I’ve worked with are technically and professionally competent	4%	56%
I am paid fairly for my work for this client company	6%	52%

Interesting demographic trends:

- **Age.** 30–39 seems, for freelancers, a golden decade in their dealings with clients. Freelancers in this cohort feel experienced, competent, building reputation and clientship. This cohort was most positive about their client’s competence in working with freelancers, the reasonableness of milestones and timelines, and client project manager effectiveness. The 50 plus age category comes in second place.
- **Gender.** Males were consistently more positive in assessing clients than females on almost every measure.
- **Profession.** Tech freelancers were most positive in describing clients, and Consulting freelancers were least. Consulting clients were rated lowest on most

items: Client project manager competence, timelines, access to critical information, treatment by the client, overall client team competence, and adequacy of pay for the work done.

- **Location.** North American and European freelancers were more positive than freelancers elsewhere. Asian and Pacific freelancers found clients more realistic in setting deliverables and timelines. Asian and Pacific freelancers found client project managers more competent, and client staff more helpful. More than 60% of all location groups believed they were treated fairly by clients, but Europeans are most positive about being paid fairly for their work.
- **Freelance career type.** Full-time freelancers by choice generally rated client organizations higher than those looking for full-time employment or side-giggers.
- **Freelancing tenure.** More experienced freelancers rated client deliverables more realistic, client project managers as more effective, and they described their project pay as more equitable.
- **Education.** Freelancers with advanced degrees tend to be more negative in their assessing client experience than other categories: They were more critical of client project managers, client team members, and how they are treated by the client.
- **Platform membership.** Those working with only 1-2 platforms were more positive about their client work: 48% of those belonging to 1-2 platforms saw clients as very competent in working with freelancers versus 39% of those working with 3+ platforms. Other data trends were slight but consistent.
- **Client type.** Freelancers working with a mix of small and larger corporate clients were most positive, seeing clients and client project managers as more skilled, more likely to treat freelancers fairly, more helpful, and creating a more satisfied experience for the freelancer.

Freelancing During Covid-19

“Challenging client problems, project variety and complexity, and freedom to work “my way” are the main reasons I like freelancing. It continuously challenges to come out of my comfort zone and rethink my future direction. Uncertainty of assignments, client acquisition, and language-related barriers are the most significant challenges for a freelancer. Covid impacted me heavily because the pipeline of projects suddenly dried out, but I enjoy being a freelancer and now aiming to grow my network and business.” Independent Management Consultant, Western Europe

The final survey section asked freelancers to describe the impact of Covid-19 on freelancers. We asked a series of items reflecting their feelings, behavior, and the impact of Covid-19 on their lives, work and business.

Here’s what we learned:

1. Freelancers are cautiously optimistic about their health and taking precautions

68% or over two-thirds of freelancers in our survey believe they are unlikely to experience Covid-19. 80% say they are doing what’s necessary to lower their risk of contracting the virus. 34% of freelancers say that concerns about Covid-19 make it difficult to work without worry about health and finances, and over half of our population are distressed by seeing others not practicing healthy behaviors.

2. Covid-19 is seen as both a challenge and an opportunity generator

Despite the human tragedy of epic proportion, Covid-19 has been very much of a mixed bag for freelancers around the world. 45% of freelancers say that Covid-19 has increased competition for work in their area, limiting opportunity. However, 53% also say it has also opened up more opportunities for freelancers in their profession.

At the heart of this mixed bag is the shift to remote or hybrid work arrangements. 56% of freelancers believe they will benefit from the shift to remote work, because it combines increased demand, and greater openness to the use of freelancers as a consequence of remote work.

Interesting demographic trends:

- **Age.** Older freelancers reported doing more to avoid the virus and (consequently) feel a lower risk of Covid-19. Younger freelancers more enthusiastically noted Covid-19 related opportunities but also greater competitive pressure. All age cohorts saw remote as helpful.

- **Gender.** There were no meaningful difference among freelancers identifying themselves as men or women in concerns about Covid-19, or responses to ensuring health. .
- **Profession.** Events freelancers were most attentive to the need for personal care, but also understandably least enthusiastic about the impact of Covid-19 on work opportunity compared with Tech.
- **Location.** Freelancers in North America were least worried about Covid-19 and African and Latam freelancers were most, understandable given the rollout of vaccines. Asia and Latam freelancers see more upside from Covid-19 and the shift to remote and hybrid work arrangements, but also feared greater competition.
- **Freelance career choice.** Side-Giggers were least optimistic about the growth of freelance opportunity during Covid-19. All groups equally expect the shift to remote would be helpful.
- **Freelancing tenure.** Long tenured freelancers were slightly less worried about Covid-19 than others, and fewer described themselves as being affected at work and in their daily activities. Shorter tenured freelancers were more enthusiastic about the opportunities created by Covid-19, more aware of increasing competition, and most likely to see benefits from the shift to remote.
- **Education.** All education cohorts reported taking steps to remain healthy. A third of all categories described anxieties interfering with work and home life. All groups reported increased opportunity and the benefits remote work.
- **Platform memberships.** Whether freelancers were members of fewer or more platforms had no impact on ratings of risk for Covid-19, care taken by freelancers, or related anxiety and difficulty at work. Those belonging to fewer platforms saw a small but greater benefit from the shift to remote.
- **Client type.** Freelancers working non-profit clients were slightly more affected by Covid-19 and reported slightly greater anxiety. Those working primarily with Startup and SMBs reported the greatest increase in opportunity. Non-profit clients were less optimistic. Enterprise focused freelancers reported the lowest increase in competition. All client categories saw benefit from the shift to remote.

Concluding Insights and a Call to Action

“Talent doesn’t recognize national boundaries. Our challenge as a global society is to better distribute opportunity. Freelancing makes that possible by connecting economic opportunity through technology to talented and ambitious individuals.” Matt Barrie, CEO, Freelancer.com

What help can these data provide to individual freelancers and the freelance communities that support them? In this chapter I try to distill the findings most relevant to freelancers, platform leaders, ecosystem builders and client organizations.

Here is what we learned:

1. Freelancing is a work and career innovation that’s succeeding world-wide

Freelancers are, on the whole, enthusiastic: More engaged than struggling, more pleased than frustrated with their opportunities, and more optimistic than pessimistic about the amount and quality of work available to them. Over 60% have enough or more work. A similar percentage describes interesting work and satisfying relationships with clients. 63% believe they’ll meet their financial goals. These data fit well with trends on freelance demand. Well over 90% of companies both utilize freelancers and plan to increase their involvement. In short, freelancing has “arrived”.

2. The freelance revolution is large and growing

Freelancing is growing both in the range of services offered, and where offered. Our data show an active and expanding freelance economy across markets in a wide variety of professions. While most of our respondents were from North America or Europe, Latam (16%) Africa (11%) and Asia (8%) regional platforms like [Consultok](#) in Chile, [African Foresight Group](#) in Ghana, and [Mash](#) in Australia all report consistent growth. Freelancing will continue to grow as marketplaces and a supporting ecosystem deliver. That means enough talent, at the right level of expertise, and easy access when needed. Individual freelancers are doing their part: over 60% of freelancers are committed to a full- or part-time freelance career.

3. There is no one “type” of freelancer

Our over 75 research partners demonstrate the massively heterogeneity of freelancing, including every type of profession one might imagine: Musician to rocket scientist, architect to engineer, film documentarian to freelance diplomat, and investment banker or M&A lawyer to barista. A full 30% of the freelancers in our global survey were 50 plus Baby Boomers. As freelancing grows, the diversity of freelancers by age, gender, location and profession also grows.

4. *Freelancers are, by and large, optimistic and confident despite business challenges and Covid-19*

Andy Grove, co-founder and CEO of Intel famously said, “[only the paranoid survive.](#)” but freelancers as a population seem not to agree. Overall we found freelancers across professions, locations, ages and gender to be optimistic and self-confident, and rated themselves positively across a wide range of attributes. Many of the freelancers in our survey recognize the need to raise their game in areas like networking, client management, marketing and selling work, and staying up to date technically. But overall freelancers are impressively stubborn believers in themselves and the freelance revolution despite economic distress and the challenge of Covid-19.

5. *It's important to recognize freelancing as a source of public good*

As an economic engine that connects talent and opportunity, freelancing is directly and indirectly creating social good. It does so in part by reducing financial inequality. Freelancing offers a [path out of poverty](#) for refugees in Turkey who are learning how to code, and a way to middle class life for a Bangladeshi artist. Freelancers at [Flexing It](#) in India provide tech support for large corporates in Germany, and Estonian freelancers at [Klapp](#) work on marketing campaigns in Spain.

Moreover, much of freelancers' work creates larger social benefits. Freelance scientists at [Kolabtree](#), and the Pharma quality assurance professionals at [LifeSciHub](#) played critical roles in the creation of Covid-19 vaccines. [Spacely](#) is helping the space industry grow by providing Satellite engineering and design support to. Freelance platforms and individual freelancers are improving the [design and construction of buildings](#), creating new methods for farming, and as [Omdena](#) is doing, applying AI and crowd-sourcing to critical social problems like homelessness and elder abuse. They've made the wheels of government and industry work, from mail delivery to electric cars and trucks.

6. *Freelance platforms must continue to add value to freelancers*

I've written about this issue in [Forbes](#). Like any other talent-centric enterprise, freelance platform success depends on their reputation for freelancer competence. We learned that most freelancers are members of only 1-2 platforms. Therefore, expect greater competition for top freelancers. For platforms to attract top freelancers, they will take greater initiative in teaching clients to be better clients, and freelancers to be more successful small business owners and salespersons. Many outstanding professionals join freelancing without the full skill set or understanding of it takes to be successful, beyond technical excellence. A third of our survey participants admitted frustration with their income and work portfolio.

Some platforms are already [helping new freelancers to experience early success](#) through a disciplined onboarding process. More should follow the examples of

innovative platforms: Building teams or “Studios” as [Fiverr](#) has done, helping with marketing materials as [Toptal](#) does, connecting more experienced freelancers with new recruits as [OMS](#) in France has done, building relationships between older and younger freelancers as [Jolt](#) has done, providing workshops on pitches and proposal writing as [freelancerclub.net](#) does, offering coaching and information resources as [freelancer.com](#) is doing, and teaching freelancers to market more collaboratively or “[hunt in packs](#)” as [Vicoland](#) has done. By making their freelancers more successful, they increase the reputation and worth of the platform.

7. It's time for platforms to help freelancers by helping clients to be better

Organizations are increasingly ready for freelancers at scale; in fact, real progress at the enterprise level depends on it. More companies expect high quality and professionalism from freelancers, and understand the need to more actively engage the freelance community. As I mentioned in a podcast for the [Harvard Business Review](#), [Smart](#) companies understand what matters to freelancers, has a well-defined and communicated philosophy or strategy for the use of freelancers, trains their managers to work effectively with freelancers, treats freelancers administratively with respect, includes them as much as possible in communication, information sharing and team activities while on a project, and pays them fairly and on a timely basis for their work.

Our data say clients are getting better. Almost 50% of freelancers say their clients know how to work effectively with freelancers, a real improvement in just a few years since *Agile Talent* was published. An equal number think freelance project managers work well with freelancers, setting more realistic goals and timelines, helping freelancers feel part of the team, and respecting them. These are big shifts from just a few years ago when freelancers were more critical of clients, and many organizations saw freelancers as less engaged, less reliable, and often less competent.

There is still much work to be done. Professions differ. Tech clients are rated higher than consulting clients, and clients in developing regions such as Africa, Asia and Latam are described as less sophisticated than those in the US or EU. Freelance platforms in all regions can do more to help clients work well with freelancers, and set up projects for success. A good start is rigorously collecting freelancers' experiences, sharing the data with client organizations, providing meaningful feedback and recommending improvements in how they organize, staff and work with independents. Some smart platforms like [G2ai.com](#) meet regularly with project clients to review program and share feedback. [Seeds](#) in Latam offers regular webinars and blog posts to support client effectiveness. Smarter platforms like [Freelancerclub.net](#) are building advisory businesses to corporates and governments as a separate revenue stream.

8. When it comes to freelance work portfolios, the “magic is in the mix”

The most satisfied freelancers in our survey fashioned a portfolio of project work that combined startups and large corporates: *The magic was in the mix*. On the flip side, freelancers working for government and non-profit organizations were least satisfied. They felt less appreciated, found it more difficult to get things done, and were paid less for equally demanding work.

These findings suggest two recommendations. For individual freelancers, the clear message is: *Be thoughtful about your portfolio*. For clients, a very different message is most pertinent: *Remember, you are in competition with commercial organizations for the best freelancers to meet their needs*. As organizations continue to expand their use of freelancers, it is essential they find ways to create win/win relationships with top freelancers. If they cannot compete financially, they can offering a better work environment.

9. It's still tough out there for many; platforms can help freelancers by adding new services

While a majority of freelancers are satisfied with their work and income, a third of freelancers are not. Professions certainly differ; while tech work has remained buoyant, the events and travel industry was profoundly disadvantaged by Covid-19 and just returning to life. Newer freelancers had a more difficult time than more experienced hands. And, many freelancers saw sales and marketing of their services as a weakness.

Some platforms are doing more to [create prosperity for more of their freelancers](#). [Hoxby](#), a UK based creatives community, offers members future-proofing education. Some platforms offer [coaching services](#). Still others are expanding into new, adjacent, areas of business to create greater opportunity for their platform members: For example, many independent management consulting platforms are expanding their client offering to include [interim management roles](#) and [expert network services](#). Others are partnering with [aggregators](#) to expand market opportunities. Still others are increasing their marketing and PR budget or working hard to build more collaborative communities and [teamwork](#), or [expanding beyond](#) their original geographic borders to generate greater flow.

10. Practice "coopetition": Support the rising tide that will lift all boats

By one estimate, the market value of freelance platforms exceeds \$10 billion USD, at a 15% growth rate through 2027. It seems very low, and likely doesn't include the venture funding of the past few years. And, it is still a small slice of the global recruitment market, estimated at \$1 trillion by 2023. There is ample room for continued growth as more organizations welcome the flexible, blended workforce.

The best path for freelance platform growth at an industry level includes cooperation: I hope in future that platforms will collaborate in growing the pie, while competing for their slice. To benefit from network effects, the “rising tide to lift all boats,” the freelance industry will benefit from working together to promote high consistent standards of business practice, more common terminology, best practice sharing, and participation in community and network building across platforms and adjacent communities. The freelance revolution won't truly reach breakout speed until industry and government agrees that freelancing is a fully acceptable, mainstream, occupational choice.

11. Covid-19 has accelerated freelancing, making it more mainstream and creating both opportunity and greater competition

A good deal has been written by [me](#) and others on the impact of Covid-19 on freelancing. Covid-19 accelerated the shift to remote work, and technology like [Zoom](#), [Slack](#), and [Mural](#) made it possible. It also created a flood of furloughs, resignations, and supply chain challenges that created a demand for freelancers in many professional fields. We are still reeling from these impacts and the demand for freelance talent has grown unabated. Freelancers see greater opportunity but also more competition.

In summary

In a recent [Forbes article](#), I reported on the trends driving the freelance revolution. Freelancing grew steadily through the last decade, but in 2020 Covid-19 tied a rocket to its tail. The shift to remote work, forced by the pandemic, reduced the psychological distance between freelancers and full-time employees, and forced the hand of companies. Covid-19 also pushed Millennials and GenZs to reconsider their priorities, increasing interest in freelancing and becoming “[freelance lite](#)” in their expectations of employment, and interest in side-gigging.

We were not wrong when in 2016 Norm Smallwood and I published [Agile Talent](#), and made the case for freelancing as a significant innovation in organization development and HR management. Despite the extraordinary disruptions of Covid-19, the freelance revolution is thriving and, over time, is destined to provoke work 3.0: *A remaking of how we resource work, connect with employers, and organize how work gets done.*

Although more than 2000 years old, freelancing has been made new by technology that enables a writer, photographer, software programmer, or AI specialist to live in Shenzhen while working for a company in Rome or agency in Buenos Aires. It enables a Bangladeshi illustrator to compete for a children's book project on an equal footing with artists in Denmark or Ireland, and enables a startup in Chile to access amazing technical talent that they couldn't attract or afford on a full-time basis. I can't wait to see and write about what happens from here.

Appendix A: About Jon Younger and Gerald Cupchik

Jon Younger is an author, teacher and early stage investor in the freelance space, and founder of the Agile Talent Collaborative. He's the co-author with Norm Smallwood of [Agile Talent](#) (Harvard, 2016) the first book describing the global freelance revolution, and several books in talent management and HR leadership with writing partners Professors Dave Ulrich and Wayne Brockbank, including best-sellers [HR From the Outside In](#) and [HR Transformation](#). He writes the [freelance revolution blog](#) for *Forbes.com*, is a regular contributor to the *Harvard Business Review*, *Talent Quarterly* and other publications, and is often described as the "freelance whisperer". He sits on several advisory boards and speaks often to freelance communities and professional and investor groups. His PhD in Psychology is from the University of Toronto. He has taught at the University of Michigan, Copenhagen Business School, the Indian School of Business, and Wharton. He lives in NYC.

Gerald Cupchik is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto (Scarborough) for almost 50 years. His interests lie in imagination, innovation, strategic planning, and personal growth. He has extensive experience building survey instruments and uses life narratives to make the numbers more concrete. He teamed up with Jon Younger for this survey to explore motivational styles and the roots of satisfaction in freelancing. He lives in Toronto.

Forthcoming Research Reports: Example

Over the next several months, expect a number of more specific research reports or “notes” on topics of interest. The following is an example:

How Do Freelance Creatives Feel About Their Work And Career?

Jon Younger
Forbes contributor

How do full- and part-time freelance creatives feel about their work and client relationships? What aspects of freelancing do these independent professionals feel best about? What changes would they like most to see in their work and relationships?

I teamed up with Professor Gerald Cupchik of the University of Toronto and over 75 freelance platforms around the world to more deeply understand the views and experiences of different categories of freelancers. Among the 1900 independent professionals who participated in our *Global Survey of Freelancing*, 20% were marketing creatives, a freelance segment that includes writers, photographers and videographers, graphic designers, marketing and advertising specialists, PR advisors and SEO experts.

Two sections of the survey are spotlighted in this article. The *Freelance Satisfaction Index*, focused on freelancers experience of the pros and cons of freelance life. The *Client Satisfaction Index* asked what it was like working with typical clients. The items comprising both indices are shared below.

We wanted to know how creative freelancers saw their craft and work: the good, bad, and in-between. We hoped the data would help us to identify practical ways to improve creatives’ experience.

How do creatives describe the freelance life? The chart below shows how creatives responded to the Freelance Satisfaction Index.

Freelancing offers me:	Marketing	Overall
Attractive career opportunity	61%	56%
Build expertise in interesting areas	68	66
Enjoy the quality of life I hope for	70	66
Achieve my financial goals	42	47
Meet and work with interesting colleagues	56	56
Meet and work with interesting clients	70	69
Flexibility and independence I value	84	78
Work on challenging problems	62	66

What factors are at play?

- First, it's clear from the data that creatives value the *lifestyle* offered by freelancing: the flexibility, independence, and worklife balance.
- A second factor is the intrinsic interest of the *work*. Again, positive overall. Creatives value the chance to work on challenging problems with interesting colleagues and interesting clients, and the chance to build expertise.
- A third factor is *career* and here it's a split decision: while freelancing is seen as an attractive career opportunity, less than half of creatives rate themselves confident when asked about the likelihood of achieving their financial goals.

Turning to the data from the *Client Satisfaction Index*, freelancer's responses provide an interesting view of their experience.

This client:	Marketing	Overall
Knows how to work effectively with freelancers	45%	45%
Work deliverables, milestones and timelines are generally fair and realistic	46	46
Requires top quality work from freelancers	68	66
Client project manager knows how to work well with freelancers	45	47
I have access to the information I need to meet my deliverables for this client	49	52
Client team members are normally friendly and helpful when I have a question or need	71	69
I am treated fairly and with respect in my dealings with this client company	72	69
The work I'm doing for this client is interesting and satisfying	59	62
Client team members I've worked with are technically and professionally competent	54	56
I am paid fairly for my work for this client company	49	52

A factor analysis of these findings might be:

- A first important factor is *client readiness*. Less than half the creatives feel strongly that their client's know how to work effectively with freelancers. A similar percentage consider their client project managers to be very good at working with independents.

- A second factor is *client expectations*. While 68% of creatives believe clients have high expectation of their work, fewer than half say clients have realistic expectations of deliverables and timelines. The combination can be explosive.
- The third factor is the *work*. Almost 60% of creatives see the work as satisfying. But, they are often frustrated by a lack of access to the information they need to do their work.
- The fourth factor is *relationships*. These are generally good. Client staff members are seen as friendly and helpful, and freelancers generally see them as technically and professionally competent.
- The fifth factor is *treatment and pay*. Here again, a split decision. 72% say the client treats them fairly and with respect, but fewer than half the creatives feel they are paid fairly for their work.

So, how can these data help us improve creatives' experience and create greater abundance for creative freelancers?

We see several ways to help creatives have a better and more productive experience.

The results of the survey fall into five helpful buckets:

1. Platforms can help freelancers by *helping clients to be better clients*. Rigorously collecting and reviewing freelancers' client experiences, meeting regularly with client project managers, seeking and providing feedback can make a difference. Entrepreneurial platform teams may consider adding a freemium or paid advisory service to organizations on best practice in the flexible, blended workforce. Working with organizations like the Agile Talent Collaborative, the Remote Work Coalition, or other groups can help.
2. *Offer training and tools* to client organizations on managing freelancers, and building flexible, blended teams as a client service or a supplementary profit making business. Platforms like [Jolt.io](https://www.jolt.io) and [Coursera](https://www.coursera.org) may be helpful partners in creating and delivering training and tools.
3. *Work on pay by coaching and training freelancers* to successfully raise their rates . Skill and confidence in asking is often half the challenge; platforms can help by providing coaching and training, or inviting top freelancers to mentor platform colleagues. In addition, smart platforms provide clients with periodic updates on hourly rates so they are kept informed.
4. *Remember, it's the lifestyle that keeps the creative's freelance career attractive*. Help creative freelancers to live that lifestyle and make it more successful, for

example, through peer group coaching and training and tools in time management, priority setting, dealing with conflict and other relevant topics

5. *Hack the Freelance Satisfaction and Client Satisfaction indexes* and introduce them to your freelancers.

Global Survey on Freelancing

Global Freelancing

Thank you for participating in this global study of freelancer opinions and preferences. Your participation is very important and we thank you for being part of this global study. Be assured that your personal responses are treated as confidential and no effort is made to identify any individual. We look forward to sharing the results with participants and will offer both a written summary of overall trends and webinars to further discuss the findings. It won't take more than 20 minutes of your time.

Jon Younger

Forbes #FreelanceRevolution Contributor and Founder, Agile Talent Collaborative

Professor Gerald Cupchik

University of Toronto

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[Begin Survey](#)

Invitation to Participate:

You are invited to participate in a voluntary survey to understand the experience of freelancing during the pandemic and looking ahead at the future of work.

The questions concern how you experience freelancing as well as the impact of COVID-19 on your freelance work and career. It should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete the survey.

The deadline to submit your responses for this survey is March 31, 2021.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. We do not ask your name and all responses will remain strictly anonymous and confidential. Demographic information will not be used to identify any participants in the data.

Investigator

The study is conducted by Professor Gerald Cupchik of the University of Toronto in collaboration with Jon Younger. If you have any questions or concerns you are welcome to contact Professor Cupchik at Gerald.Cupchik@utoronto.ca.

For any further inquiries regarding your right as a participant, you can contact the Research Oversight and Compliance Office – Human at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-949 3273.

Research Participant's Rights

You are free to withdraw from participating further into this study at any time by simply exiting the survey on your browser.

Please note: Any mandatory questions are marked with a red asterisk (*). A response to these questions is required before you can move to the next section.

After thoroughly reading this consent form, please select one of the options below.

- I understand the procedures mentioned on this form. I agree to participate in this study.
- I do not agree to participate in this study.

Continue

Please indicate which freelance platform is sponsoring your participation in this survey.
[PLEASE REFER TO APPENDIX A: Platform List]

Continue

SECTION 1: TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

What is your gender identity or expression?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Non-binary and/or genderqueer
- Other
- Prefer not to respond

Age:

- Under 20
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-60
- 60+

Field of Expertise:

- Tech (i.e., Design/Development/AI)
- Advertising/Marketing/PR/Copywriting/Illustration
- Educator/Life or Executive Coach
- Independent Management Consultant
- Events/Hospitality
- Expert Network/Interim Executive
- Scientific/Clinical/Medical
- Other

Location:

- North America
- EU/UK/Nordics
- Australia/NZ/Oceania
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- Latin America
- Asia/South Asia
- India
- Middle East/Saharan Africa

How Long Have You Freelanced (Full- or Part-Time)?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10+ years

What Best Describes Your Freelancing Career?

- I'm a full-time time freelancer by choice
- I'm a full-time freelancer now but looking for a full-time job
- I'm a part-time freelancer (I have a full-time job) and plan to continue both
- I'm a part-time freelancer and a student

Highest Level of Formal Education:

- High School or Self Educated
- Tech School/University (BA, BS, Associate)
- Post Graduate Degree (MA, Law, MD, PhD, etc.)

How Many Freelance Platforms Do You Belong To In Total?

- 1 - 2
- 3 - 5
- More than 5

As a Freelancer, What Category of Clients Best Describes Your Work?

- I primarily work with startups and SME companies
- I primarily work with Enterprise companies
- My work is a good mix of both startup/SME and Enterprise companies
- I primarily work with not-for-profit organizations: education, government, NGOs, etc.

Continue

SECTION 2. YOUR FREELANCE CAREER

(questions display a seven-point scale)

1. As a Freelancer, How Would You Describe Your Typical Freelance Workload? (1=I usually have much less work than I can manage, 4=I have the right amount of work for me to manage, 7=I usually have much more work than I can manage)
2. How Would You Describe The Strength of Your Network? (1=I have a small and inadequate network to depend on when I need help, 4=I have an OK network of freelancers to depend on when I need help, 7=I have a very strong network of freelancers to depend on when I need help)
3. My financial success as a full or part-time freelancer, compared with other freelancers I know. (1=less successful than others, 4=about the same, 7= more successful than others)
4. My satisfaction with my financial success relative to other freelancers I know and respect. (1=less satisfied than others, 4=about the same, 7=more satisfied than others)
5. My goals and plans as a full or part-time freelancer compared with other freelancers I know. (1=more short-term oriented than others, 4=about the same, 7=more long term oriented than others)
6. My relationships with clients as a full or part-time freelancer compared with other freelancers I know. (1=less collaborative than others, 4=about the same, 7=more collaborative than others)
7. The enjoyment and satisfaction I get from the work as a full or part-time freelancer compared with other freelancers I know. (1=much less than others, 4=about the same, 7=much more than others)
8. My reputation as a full or part-time freelancer compared with other freelancers I know. (1=not as strong as others, 4=about the same, 7=stronger than others)
9. My effectiveness as a networker compared with other full or part-time freelancers I know. (1=less effective than others, 4=about the same, 7=more effective than others)
10. My commitment to freelancing compared with other full or part-time freelancers I know. (1=less committed than others, 4=about the same, 7=more committed than others)

Continue

SECTION 3. HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF IN RELATION TO OTHER FREELANCERS

(questions display a seven-point scale)

For each attribute below, describe yourself compared with other freelancers you know in your field of expertise using a 7-point scale: (1=much less than others, 4=about the same, 7=much more than others)

1. Goal oriented
2. Ambitious; determined to do what it takes to succeed
3. Flexible and adaptable; comfortable with change
4. Show real grit; resilient in the face of difficulty and adversity
5. Deliver on promises and commitments; no excuses
6. Feel uplifted when I realize that two opposites can be true
7. Problem solver
8. Strong communication and presentation skills
9. Build effective client relationships
10. Creative thinker; willing to bust boundaries and try new, out of the box, ideas
11. Work well with people at all levels of an organization
12. Deal well with conflict; looks for the win/win
13. Effectively give and receive feedback, even when its uncomfortable
14. Stay up to date technically; invests meaningful time in self-improvement (e.g., learning new tools and methods)
15. Seen as a real expert by others whose opinion I respect
16. Willingly accept accountability and responsibility when problems arise
17. Generous in crediting and sharing opportunity with other colleagues
18. Value- based; strong ethics and integrity
19. Optimistic; I believe in myself and what I can achieve
20. Comfortable working on tasks that contradict each other
21. Analytical
22. Realistic in assessing situations, opportunities, and challenges
23. Effective planner and time manager
24. Invest in client relationships; make connections that create project opportunity
25. Good networker
26. A good listener
27. Emotionally invested in my projects
28. Prepared to work with other freelancers in short term collaborations
29. Actively thinking about how working relationships will evolve
30. Thinking ahead about problems or situations that need to be improved or resolved
31. Sensitive to how others in working groups perceive me
32. Oriented to building harmony in working groups
33. Oriented to taking a leadership role in problem solving in working groups
34. Thinking globally rather than locally

35. Value speaking other languages to facilitate global relationships
36. Feel energized by my work
37. Gain a better understanding of an issue, when I consider conflicting perspectives
38. Multi-tasker
39. Persuasive
40. Risk taker

[Continue](#)

SECTION 4. SATISFACTION WITH YOUR FULL OR PART-TIME FREELANCE CAREER

(questions display a seven-point scale)

How accurately do these statements describe your feelings about your freelancing career? Use a 7-point scale: 1=strongly disagree, 4=neutral, and 7= strongly agree

1. Freelancing offers me an attractive career opportunity.
2. Freelancing offers me the chance to build expertise in interesting areas.
3. Freelancing allows me to enjoy the quality of life I hope for.
4. Freelancing makes it possible for me to achieve my financial goals.
5. Freelancing gives me the chance to meet and work with interesting colleagues.
6. Freelancing gives me the chance to meet and work with interesting clients.
7. Freelancing offers me the flexibility and independence I value.
8. Freelancing gives me an opportunity to work on challenging problems.

SECTION 5: REFLECTING ON YOUR WORK STYLE AND FUTURE

What percentage of your time during a week do you spend reflecting on your PAST, your PRESENT, and your FUTURE? (Please be sure that the values total 100%)

Past: ___ +

Present: ___ +

Future: ___

= XX %

To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements? (1= strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

(questions display a seven-point scale)

1. When I have a problem, I typically come up with multiple ways to solve it.
2. When I think about the future, I feel generally optimistic.
3. I am good at dealing with challenges or obstacles to achieving my goals.
4. I actively seek as much information as I can in new situations.
5. During stressful situations, I typically imagine about how things might turn out differently.
6. Regarding future plans, I tend to keep my ideas to myself.
7. Regarding future plans, I do my homework by paying strong attention to information from the news and internet.
8. When I think about the future, I pay attention to the kind of person I would like to be.
9. I believe that in future I will be financially secure.
10. I believe that in future I will be recognized as an expert in my field by clients and colleagues.
11. Thinking about the future, I will maintain good health.
12. When I consider conflicting perspectives, I gain a better understanding of an issue.

[Continue](#)

SECTION 6. WORKING WITH MY FREELANCE CLIENTS

(questions display a seven-point scale)

As a freelancer, you work with different client companies. Take a moment and think of a recent client company, one that is fairly typical in your experience. Then rate the client company on the following items using the 7-point scale: 1= strongly disagree, 4=neutral, and 7= strongly agree.

1. This company knows how to work effectively with freelancers.
2. Work deliverables, milestones, and timelines are generally fair and realistic.
3. This client requires top quality work from freelancers.
4. My client project manager knows how to work well with freelancers.
5. I have access to the information I need to meet my deliverables for this client.
6. Client team members are normally friendly and helpful when I have a question or need.
7. I am treated fairly and with respect in my dealings with this client company.
8. The work I'm doing for this client is interesting and satisfying.
9. The client team members I've worked with are technically and professionally competent.
10. I am paid fairly for my work for this client company.

SECTION 7: FREELANCING IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

(questions display a seven-point scale)

How has Covid-19 affected you? If you have already contracted COVID-19, please describe your experience prior to contracting it. Use the following 7-point scale: 1=strongly disagree, 4=neutral, and 7=strongly agree

1. My personal risk for contracting COVID-19 is low.
2. I'm doing what's necessary to lower my risk of contracting COVID-19.
3. It has been difficult for me to focus on everyday activities and/or work due to anxiety and financial concerns.
4. It distresses me to see people not practicing good health behaviors e.g., such as not washing not wearing a mask or social distancing.
5. COVID-19 has increased my opportunity for freelance work.
6. COVID-19 has increased competition for the kind of work I do as a freelancer.
7. COVID is opening up more career opportunities for freelancers like me.
8. I will personally benefit from the COVID-based shift to remote work.
9. I rely on social media for information and/or insights about the COVID-19 pandemic.
10. I share information and/or insights on social media about the COVID-19 pandemic with family and friends.

SECTION 8:

Please write a brief paragraph (150 words or less) describing a concrete episode that sums up your experience as a freelancer (either positive or negative) and how you felt about it

[Complete Survey](#)

Thank you for completing this survey. We look forward to sharing the findings with you and other participants through a written summary as well as a webinar to discuss the implications for freelancing now and in future.

