

Project Goal:

The landscape of independent work is rapidly changing, yet this change isn't straightforward. We observe, among other things, a worrying trend of increasing loneliness among independent workers. They are self-employed and often juggle multiple jobs simultaneously, which limits their ability to build close relationships with other organizational workers. The COVID-19 pandemic and the popularization of remote work have deepened this sense of loneliness. Isolation for these workers isn't just physical separation; it means feeling disconnected from the workplace, colleagues, often leading to high stress and frustration. Some argue that social and professional isolation are nearly identical, while others see a difference. Social isolation refers to the lack of close relationships at work, while professional isolation relates more to a lack of appropriate work-related connections. Our research aims to answer an important question: How can managers help independent workers feel more included and acknowledged?

Research Description:

To address this question, we'll use a mixed-methods approach, conducting qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys. We'll start with interviews involving many of these workers and their managers. We aim to understand what truly matters to them and identify any patterns or shared ideas. Then, using these insights, we'll survey approximately 1000 workers. Computer programs and statistical analysis will help us understand their responses. Finally, we'll integrate all this information to understand how managers can make independent workers feel more valued and included, creating a theoretical model.

Rationale for Research Topic:

Most studies usually focus on including groups that might feel excluded due to their identity. However, our research looks at the other side of the same coin - how independent workers feel excluded because they don't fit into these typical groups. It's somewhat like finding the missing piece in understanding how people feel at work. Other studies mainly focus on how organizations include employees, but our perspective concentrates on the specific challenges faced by independent workers who often don't receive substantial support from their organizations. These workers often feel isolated from their peers, making it difficult to access important information or feedback. This is where managers come in. They are crucial as they act as the main link between these workers and the organization.

Expected Outcomes:

Our research doesn't just explore experiences of isolation among independent workers; it also emphasizes enabling managers to take active steps in creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for this growing group of workers. Our research will provide practical ideas to managers to bridge this divide. It suggests what they can do to bring their employees closer, even if they aren't in the same office. Through our research, we aim to provide specific strategies for managers to reduce isolation and increase inclusivity among independent remote workers. This study opens new horizons in understanding how people feel at work, especially those who work independently from home. By delineating different types of feelings of exclusion or isolation, such as lack of contact with colleagues or lack of recognition for their work, it helps us understand precisely what causes these feelings when working alone. Furthermore, what if the way people work changes in the future? Our research can aid in shaping new company policies or guidelines, suggesting ways for everyone to feel appreciated, even if they're not in the office every day. This could mean a more flexible and fair work environment for all. Ultimately, our research isn't just about people working alone; it's about improving working conditions for everyone. By understanding how to make remote workers feel more included and supported, our work paves the way for a future where everyone feels respected and valued, regardless of where they work.