

Independent Workforce on the Rise:

How a Maturing Talent Economy is Reshaping Business Success in Singapore

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Executive Summary

This report examines the landscape of independent work in Singapore, touching on the drivers, challenges, and opportunities associated with non-traditional work models. The independent workforce in Singapore has evolved into strategic talent pool, evidently seen from professionals operating at leadership levels rather than task-based gig work. This report highlights how independent work is no longer supplementary but a core component of modern workforce strategies that benefit both talents and organisations.

Key insights:

1. Singapore's Independent Workforce Skews More Senior Than the Global Average:

Independent workers are not junior talents but seasoned professionals embedded in strategic roles. Over 60% operate at the business owner, individual contributor, or senior leadership level, partnering with organisations to drive business outcomes rather than completing isolated tasks.

2. Independent Workers Earn on Par with Full-Timers: Independent talents with over 10 years of experience are more likely to earn higher income, with some surpassing SGD 250,000 annually. These experienced talents also report higher career satisfaction, citing autonomy, purpose, and flexible work-life balance as key drivers.

3. Thriving Independents Run Themselves Like a Business: Successful independent workers don't just see themselves as individuals offering a service—they operate as businesses. They invest in their brand, build long-term client relationships, and strategically manage their work to maximize growth.

4. Independent Work Isn't a Phase—It's a Career Choice: While many professionals enter independent work due to situational factors, most choose to stay. What may start as a short-term solution often evolves into a long-term career, driven by the autonomy, flexibility, and earning potential it offers.

5. Why Organizations Turn to Independent Talent: Speed and Expertise

Businesses turn to independent professionals for two key reasons—fast hiring and specialized skills. Unlike traditional hires, independents fill critical gaps quickly while bringing deep expertise for high-impact projects. This agility makes them invaluable in a fast-evolving market.

6. SMEs lead adoption, corporates lag behind: Startups, scale-ups, and SMEs dominate independent talent hiring. Budget constraints and workforce flexibility needs drive SMEs to adopt fractional, advisory, and long-term engagement models.

7. Independent Talent Takes on Bigger, Longer Roles: Companies are increasingly hiring independent professionals for senior and long-term roles, moving beyond short-term project work. Businesses recognize their expertise, leadership, and flexibility as valuable assets, allowing them to fill critical roles without the constraints of traditional hiring.

8. Government action can unlock further growth: Regulatory gaps remain a notable barrier. Clear worker classifications, portable benefits systems, and public talent platforms are some sampled ideas to creating a sustainable ecosystem for independent work in Singapore.



Introduction

The world of work is evolving, with independent talent playing an increasingly critical role. As digital technologies accelerate change and workforce preferences shift, Singapore is witnessing the maturation of independent work. Employers are not only hiring more independent professionals; they're seeking senior talent for strategic, business-critical roles, signaling a shift toward greater trust, value, and reliance on this growing workforce model. Recent global data reflects this shift: [86% of global business leaders](#) now consider the effective management of external contributors as critical to their organisation's success. Additionally, in the US alone, [4.6 million independent workers](#) are earning over \$100,000 annually from non-permanent work. This trend is also accelerating, with [40% of companies now hiring contractors to replace laid-off workers, while 53% have transitioned full-time positions to contract roles](#).

Although the distinctions between gig work, freelancing, and fractional roles are often blurred, our study uses the term independent work to refer to the various non-traditional employment arrangements (including professionals working part-time across multiple organisations, freelancers, independent contractors, fractional talents, and the like). Freelancers fall under the category of self-employed individuals engaged in entrepreneurial activities, who manage their own taxes, work on a project basis, serve multiple clients, do not hire employees, and often work remotely. We also refer to fractional work, which suggests a more deliberate allocation of time across multiple employers, rather than taking on projects sporadically. A key difference between fractional workers and freelancers lies in the amount of time within a work arrangement. Fractional hires are not centred around projects, and the duration of the contract is longer than that of a typical temporary work agreement. In this report, we also use the terms talent, worker, and employee interchangeably; and we sometimes use non-permanent work and independent work interchangeably.

For talents in Singapore, the rise of independent work offers professionals the chance to build fulfilling, flexible careers that align with modern work-life aspirations. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for widespread reevaluation of work-life priorities among employees. Many individuals faced unprecedented challenges, such as remote work complications, burnout, and job insecurity; leading to a critical reassessment of their career choice. As a result, a significant number of workers opted to leave their jobs in search of more fulfilling opportunities that offered greater flexibility and aligned with their personal values.

Independent work models particularly resonate with the post-pandemic workforce, as evidenced by the increasing resignation rates among professionals, managers, executives, and technicians ([PMETs reaching 1.5% in late 2021](#)), and many are motivated to search for greener pastures if their new expectations on flexible work arrangements and work-life balance are not met. Simultaneously, organisations can access specialised expertise more cost-effectively, potentially saving [30-40%](#) compared to traditional employment models. This is particularly valuable for Singapore's start-up ecosystem and established companies seeking to stay competitive in a digital age. For the economy, independent work presents a strategic solution to Singapore's aging workforce challenge. It enables experienced professionals to remain actively engaged in the economy while working on their own terms, which is significantly important in maintaining valuable expertise within the workforce.

While the opportunities of independent work are significant, several barriers also need to be addressed. Current employment regulations and benefits systems are primarily designed around traditional employment models. Moreover, both employers and talents need to adapt to new ways of engaging and managing new types of work relationships. Infrastructure-wise, Singapore needs robust platforms and systems to facilitate independent work arrangements effectively, as well as to provide social protection, such as ensuring adequate social security and benefits for independent workers. Social and cultural norms further challenge independent work adoption, as job stability and full-time roles are still perceived as highly valued.



Aims & Methodology

This research aims to provide a comprehensive framework to assist leaders in formulating intentional strategies for integrating independent workers into their organisations. By gathering insights from corporations, individuals, and government agencies currently engaged in independent work, the goal is to promote the adoption of these work models, which can enable flexibility and sustainable performance across the Singapore workforce.

This research was conducted over a four-month period from October 2024 to January 2025, using a mixed-methods approach. This included four in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion, covering stakeholders from 24 industries in Singapore. Participants included independent talents, human resource (HR) leaders, employers, and representatives from government agencies. Additionally, surveys were distributed to over 200 respondents, including employers and talents across various roles, work types, and industries. These surveys aimed to gather quantitative data on the prevalence, benefits, and challenges associated with independent work arrangements.



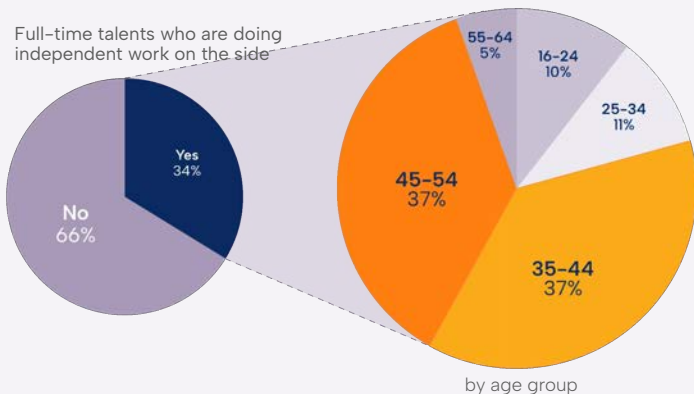
Understanding the Independent Workforce: Who They Are and What Drives Them





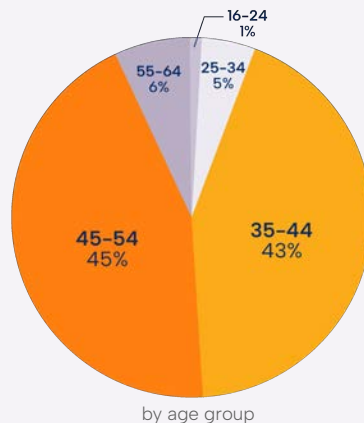
Independent work skews toward experienced talent, serving as a career strategy for mid-to-senior professionals seeking flexibility and diversification

Proportion of **permanent full-time talents** who are also doing independent work



What is your age group?
Which one of the following best describes your current employment status?
What other sources of income do you have in addition to your main job?

Overall age group distribution of **independent workers**



What is your age group?
Which one of the following best describes your current employment status?

Talents aged 35-54 make up the majority of independent work among both permanent full-time employees and full-time independent talents.

Individuals in the 35-44 age group often leverage their developing expertise to explore contingent opportunities alongside full-time roles.

They may view independent work, mainly in the form of freelancing, as a way to diversify income streams while continuing to advance in their primary careers. Professionals in the 45-54 cohort, who are often established in their career and have built robust professional networks, may view freelancing as a transition into independent consulting or semi-retirement without sacrificing financial stability. On the other hand, our survey suggests that younger talents may prioritise gaining experience in structured roles, while older talents aged 55 or above may seek stability or be approaching retirement. Other [research](#) complements our data, with findings suggesting that millennials and Gen-X workers contribute to the highest freelance participation rate in the US by more than twice of Gen-Z. Our interview with Workforce Singapore (WSG) also highlighted that some organisations re-engage senior staff who have entered retirement to do project work, or to assume certain roles on a specific basis.



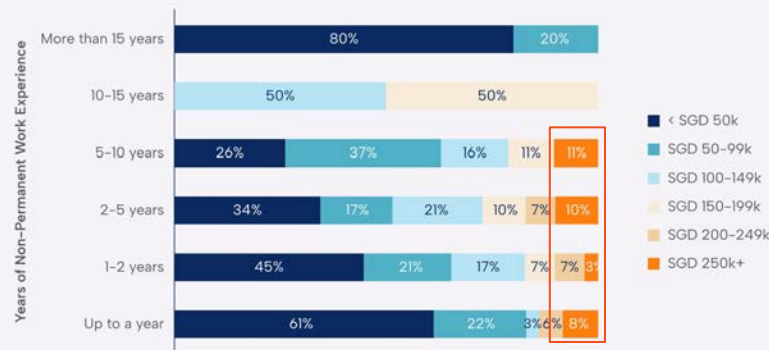
Organisations are increasingly hiring senior independent talents and, consequently, spending more budget in engaging these talents.

Talents' annual earnings bracket from non-permanent work against total years of overall work experience



In total, how many years' working experience do you have in your current field?
What was your total income from non-permanent work in the last calendar year?

Talents' annual earnings bracket from non-permanent work against total years of non-permanent work experience



In total, how many years' experience do you have in non-permanent work ?
What was your total income from non-permanent work in the last calendar year?

Talents with over 10 years' experience exhibit a progression into higher income brackets, with those in the 15-20 years range beginning to penetrate SGD \$250,000 in annual earnings from non-permanent work. On the contrary, talents with less than 2 years of work experience are predominantly earning less than SGD \$50,000 annually from non-permanent work. [Research](#) highlights experience, education, and skills as critical factors in determining the likelihood of independent talents earning higher incomes from their work. In addition, experienced talents not only demonstrate better income success, but also report higher levels of career and life satisfaction.

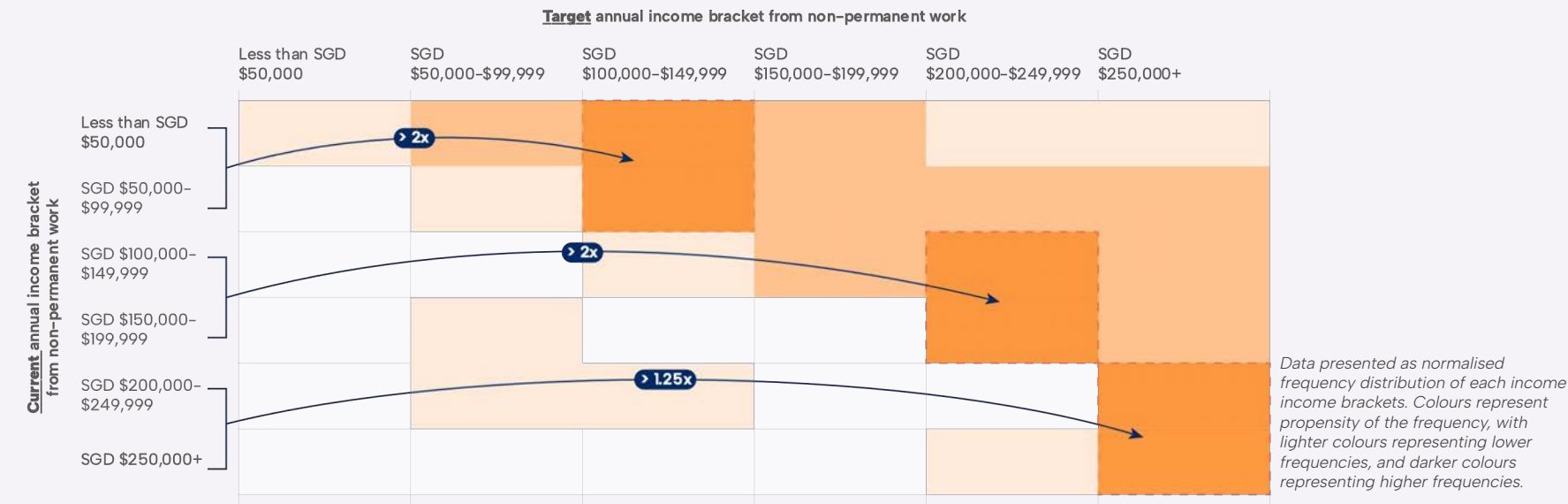
This pattern may be attributed to several factors. Newer independent workers may possess in-demand technical skills and leverage modern platforms more effectively, while possibly being more aggressive with current market-rate pricing. This contrasts with longer-term independent workers who may be anchored to historical rates with existing clients. Selection bias may also play a role, as successful corporate talents might transition to independent work only when presented with highly lucrative opportunities.

Our research found that while talents with more overall work experience tend to earn higher incomes from independent work, those newer to independent work often out-earn their more experienced counterparts.

Independent workers show strong income ambitions, aiming to double earnings even from high income brackets.



Independent workers' current vs. target annual income bracket from non-permanent work



What was your total income from non-permanent work in the last calendar year?
What is your target annual income from non-permanent work?

Independent workers are highly optimistic about their earning potential, with majority aiming to double their income from non-permanent work. This ambition is not limited to lower-income brackets; even those earning over SGD \$100,000 annually are targeting notable growth, with some expecting a 1.25X to 2X increase. Such confidence suggests a maturing market where independent work is no longer viewed as supplementary but as a viable path to sustainable financial growth. This upward trend reflects both the resilience of the independent talent economy and the expanding opportunities within it.

Referrals and online platforms play a critical role at both entry-level and high-income stages of independent work.



Independent workers' annual income from non-permanent work against client sourcing channels



How do you typically find your clients?

What was your total income from non-permanent work in the last calendar year?

Independent workers rely on referrals at two key stages: at entry-level income and when earning higher incomes. For those earning less than SGD \$50,000, referrals are Key for building credibility and securing initial work. As incomes rise, reliance on referrals decreases as talents establish stable client relationships. The near-parity between referrals and online platforms signals a maturing independent work ecosystem. Platforms are no longer just supplementary but are evolving into core infrastructure, suggesting increased market organisation and competition.

As talents further mature into higher rate projects to earn more than SGD \$150,000 per year, we see a resurgence in the reliance on referrals from personal network and previous employer(s). Hence similarly, this trend highlights the dual-channel approach: platforms drive growth, while referrals reinforce trust for high-value engagements.

In the US, 40% of independent talents had used an online platform in the last 12 months, and 47% planned to in the next 12 months. Of those who were already using platforms, 34% said it was their primary source of work (versus 29% in our findings) ([MBO, State of Independence, 2023](#)).

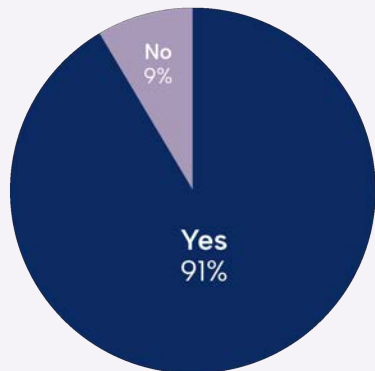
Our data also mirrors the [US 2024 State of Fractional Industry Report](#): networking is paramount, with 93% of fractional workers finding clients through referrals from their network and 73% of fractionals indicating that they plan to grow their business through networking. Additionally, 73% rely on client referrals.

For those earning less than SGD \$50,000, referrals are key for building credibility and securing initial work. As incomes rise, reliance on referrals decreases as talents establish stable client relationships



While situational factors still play a role, independent work has become a personal choice for the majority.

Proportion of independent workers who prefer their current work type

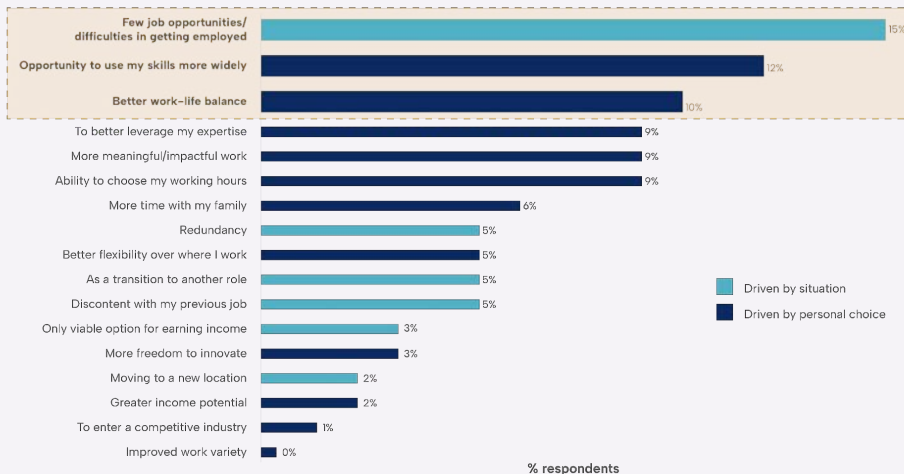


How do you typically find your clients?
What was your total income from non-permanent work in the last calendar year?

While 91% of independent workers report that they now prefer independent work, the data reveals that many were initially driven by situational factors. The top reason for choosing independent work is the lack of job opportunities, followed by personal motivations such as the opportunity to use their skills more widely and better work-life balance. This suggests that while independent work eventually becomes a preferred career choice, it often begins as a necessity rather than a personal shift.

In the US, 78% of independent workers plan to keep working independently. Our interviews further revealed “the flexibility to optimise time” and “opportunity to use my skills widely” as the main reasons for talents choosing to work independently. Compared to full-time talents who are doing ‘side gigs’, reasons around work-life balance are not top of their list – unlike the findings from independent workers. One potential reason behind this is that full-time talents may view going 100% independent as taking up extra working hours, unlike a structured 9am–5pm work engagement in a full-time role.

Reasons behind independent workers choosing their current work type



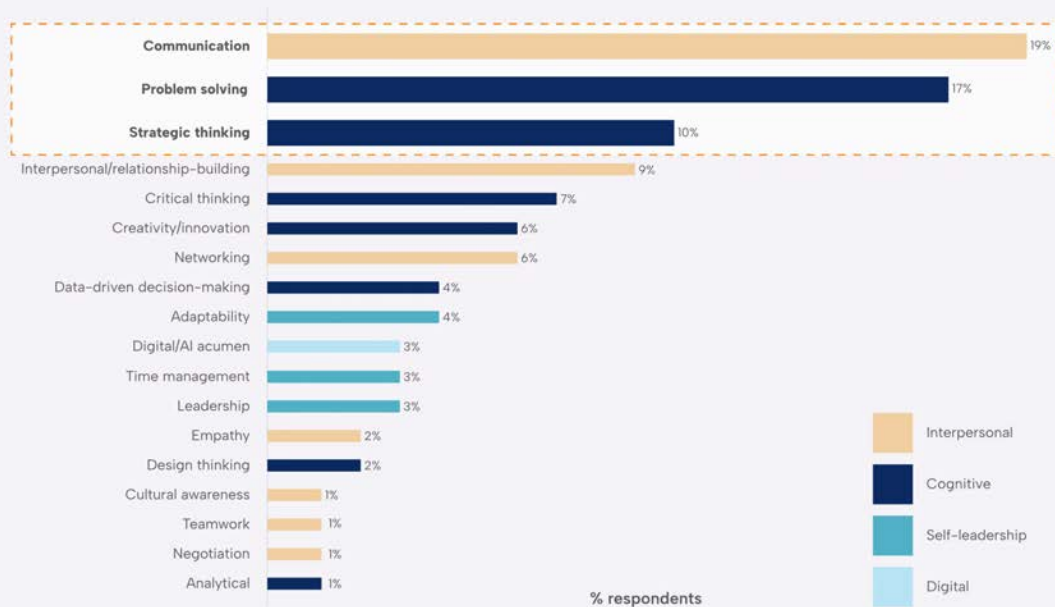
What were your main reasons for choosing non-permanent work?

While many independent workers initially enter the field due to situational factors, 91% now prefer independent work, citing flexibility, career control, and the opportunity to apply their skills widely. In the US, 78% of independent workers plan to keep working independently.



Independent workers operate in strategic roles that require cognitive and interpersonal skills beyond task-based work.

Skills that independent talents believe are most important in their type of work



Which of the following soft skills would you say are most important in your work?

The consensus among independent workers where cognitive and interpersonal skills are placed as their main focus suggests their strategic roles within organisations. These are not task-based gig workers but senior-level contributors driving projects, facilitating decision-making, and building client relationships. Communication, problem-solving, and strategic thinking top the skillset list.

The relatively lower emphasis on digital acumen presents an interesting gap. This could be due to the immediate demands of their roles, which may lean heavily on human-centric tasks rather than technical expertise. [McKinsey's future-citizen report](#) corroborates this trend, with digital skills receiving the lowest score in global citizens' self-evaluation.

An experienced fractional worker who our team interviewed further mentioned communication (interpersonal), data-driven decision-making (cognitive), and time management (self-leadership) as the top skills required to do well in this work model, which resonate with [another similar study](#).

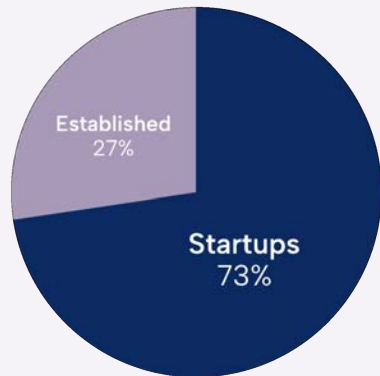
The Organisations That Independent Talents Collaborate With and Their Engagement Models



Corporates show interest in hiring independent talents but evidently, Startups are the early adopters of this new way of working.



Size of clients served by independent talents

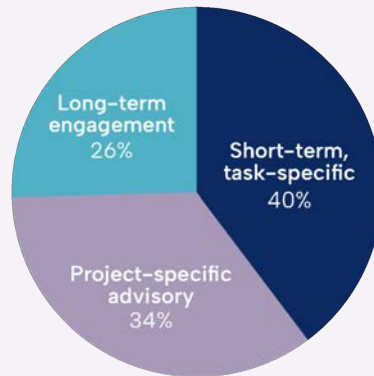


What growth stage are your current clients in?

Startups: relatively young companies with less than 3 years of operations.

Established: companies that have been around for several years and have a long track record of success.

Independent work engagement type



Which of the following best describes your main way of working with clients?

Short-term: task-specific or project-based, focused on deliverables, limited team interaction.

Long-term: embedded as part of the team, focused on strategic planning and execution.

Project-specific: variable duration, focused on strategic advice with minimal execution

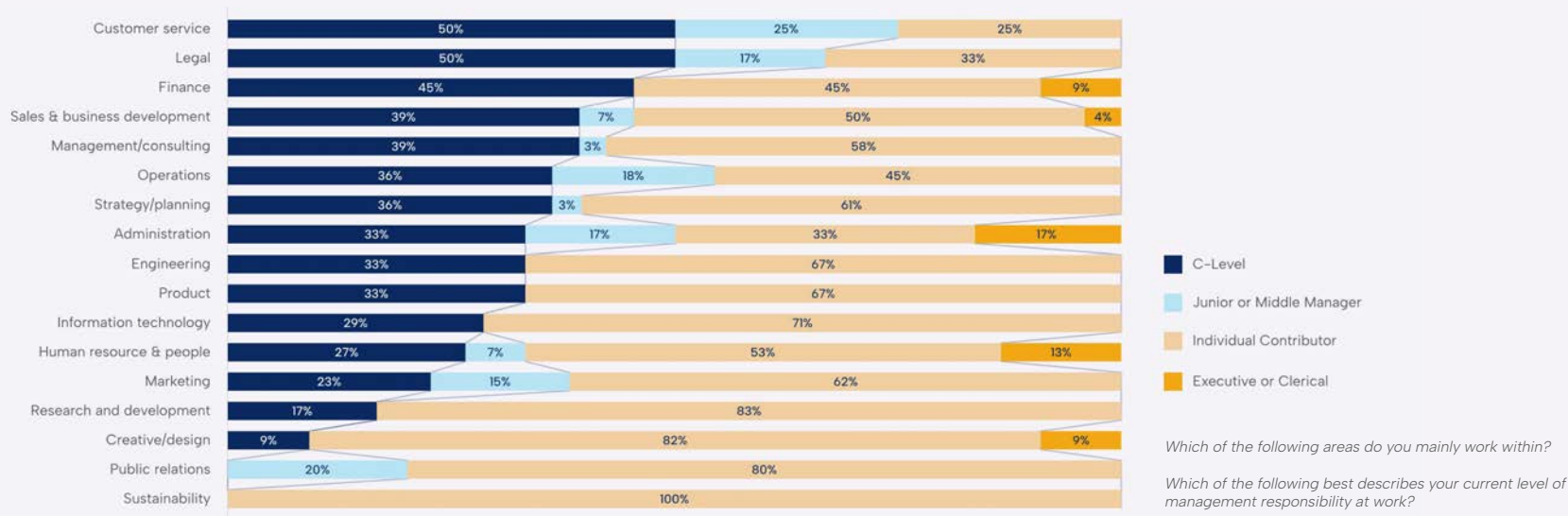
Contrary to the history of hiring cheap, fast, and short-term independent workers to fill non-core role gaps, our research indicates that the majority of independent workers are involved in more meaningful, long-term advisory roles that are focused on business results rather than specific tasks.

Potentially driven by budget constraints, small organisations lean towards hiring independent talents in the form of freelancers or part-timers due to their specialised and non-permanent nature. This was reflected by a representative from Workforce Singapore (WSG) in our interviews, who mentioned that start-ups in Singapore are more keen on onboarding fractional talents due to tight budgets. Another HR specialist in the consumer goods space also mentioned that the adoption of this 'new' work model is expected to be faster among SMEs than large corporations. Moreover, [scale-ups are leveraging freelancers to meet specific operational and strategic gaps during growth phases](#).

Additionally, across business functions, the majority of independent talents engaged are at Proprietor and Consultant levels.



Distribution of business functions that independent talents work in, against client engagement type



Our findings highlight the distribution of independent talents across various business functions, with a significant concentration at the consultant level, followed by senior roles such as C-level, director, or partner levels. As organisations seek flexible and cost-effective solutions to access global talent pools while maintaining workplace engagement, this finding suggests the trend of increasing fractional work adoption in Singapore. Furthermore, this also aligns with the broader trends of remote yet collaborative work setups and the growing appeal of fractional hiring models as observed by [Yeo Puay Lim \(commercial director at Glints\)](#), and [Samir Khadepaun \(founder and CEO of Wizly\)](#).

Independent talents in Singapore are concentrated in the professional services fields, diverging from the global trend of such talents being in creative fields.



Independent talents' industry distribution



The restructuring may have prompted companies to adopt a more cautious approach, leading them to hire independent talents instead of permanent employees to address business needs and workforce requirements as needed (Singapore Ministry of Manpower).

The prevalence of independent talents in Singapore is highest in industries such as Professional Services, Information and Communications, and Education.

It is worth noting that these sectors also experienced relatively high rates of retrenchment due to restructuring in recent years. The restructuring may have prompted companies to adopt a more cautious approach, leading them to hire independent talents instead of permanent employees to address business needs and workforce requirements as needed ([Singapore Ministry of Manpower](#)).

These findings differ from the situation in the [US](#), where the majority of independent talents work in the Arts, Design, and Marketing industries; while very few work in Professional Services and Consulting.



Flexible engagement models allow organisations to fill skill gaps without permanent full-time commitments.



The short-term assignment and bridging model

Short-term assignments are project-based and typically last under six months, enabling the organisation to fulfill specific business needs without long-term commitments.

The bridging strategies act as a transitional approach where independent talents are engaged on a short-term basis and later offered permanent roles based on performance and cultural fit. This approach is deemed effective in addressing critical skill gaps such as digital marketing and automation engineering, whilst also reducing hiring risks.

In one of the companies we interviewed, engaging these talents falls under the "borrow" model within the organisation's "4B framework" (Buy, Build, Borrow, Bot), which integrates both internal and external talent mobility. However, organisations' reliance on external talents remains cautious and focused, targeting niche tasks and non-traditional roles like Graphic Design that are not part of their permanent workforce.



The fractional model

Fractional talents often fulfill strategic and operational roles, such as fractional Chief Finance Officers or Chief Marketing Officers, making them particularly valuable for start-ups and SMEs seeking high-level expertise without incurring the costs of full-time hires. Unlike traditional outsourcing or consulting, fractional roles are integrated into the organisation, often assuming internal titles, using company tools, and participating in company meetings. These engagements are typically open-ended and evolve according to the organisation's needs.



The in-house gig work model

Another type of independent work model is in-house gig work, where teams identify specific projects that need to be completed. A project manager then assembles a team by either tapping into internal talent from other departments, or sourcing skilled professionals externally. This approach is commonly used in larger organisations with multiple departments and distinct functions operating independently.

Real world example:

How a fractional leader can help break through international expansion barriers

Zenith, an online insurance company, had established dominance in its domestic market. Despite their success, they struggled to scale further internationally, with weak performance in three new markets and limited sales growth. Recognising the need for specialised expertise, Zenith engaged Stephen, an experienced fractional talent, for a 12-month assignment to address these challenges. To unlock the company's potential, Stephen proposed spinning off an untapped technology into an independent entity. Alongside this, he focused on restructuring the brokerage business, which included divesting underperforming units, acquiring new businesses, and strengthening management and training in both domestic and international markets. Towards the end of the engagement, the spinoff of the technology business was completed, including the establishment of a separate tech company and securing regulatory approval, while the brokerage operations were revitalised and expanded. These actions enabled Zenith to grow its market presence and increase international sales.

(Example adapted from a real-world case by [Masters of Scale](#))



Example: different engagement types of a fractional Chief Information Officer (CIO) and their value propositions

Engagement type	Description	Example client situation	Value proposition
Strategic IT management	Fractional CIO with strong communication skills. Focusing on strategic matters including enabling the business through IT.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Missing connection between IT and the business.● Need for strategic IT management.	Establishing a good relationship and collaboration between IT and the business/ Board.
Restructuring	Fractional CIO with restructuring experience. Focusing on audit and turnaround.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Severe problems in IT such as over-budget or under-investment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Solving urgent problems and restructuring the IT business.● Building up IT capabilities.● Transitioning into steady-state by hiring a new CIO.
Rapid scaling	Fractional CIO with a focus on building an entire IT department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Start-up with no IT yet but expecting rapid growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Setting up proper structure and architecture.● Building an IT department and providing leadership.● Hiring a full-time CIO to take over.
Hands-on support	Fractional CIO with technical skills and a day-to-day operational focus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● No in-house IT (everything outsourced).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Long-term role.● Helping to run IT smoothly.

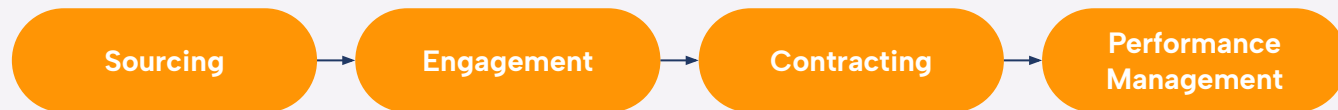
Adapted from The Fractional CIO in SMEs: conceptualization and research agenda (Kratzer et al., 2022)

Efficiency and agility surpass financial motivations when it comes to choosing to hire independent talents.



Organisations' motivation for adopting independent work models stems from business **efficiency, agility, and talent acquisition challenges**. With potential cost savings as a secondary factor, organisations prioritise the ability to respond quickly to dynamic market needs and reduce time-to-hire. This benefit is experienced at [NASA](#), where traditional procurement at other US federal agencies takes on average 9-12 months – whereas with NASA's current contract with gig platforms, the whole process for a specific assignment can be completed within 3-4 weeks. Skills of independent talents have also met or exceeded expectations in 92% of projects. Additionally, independent hiring serves as a solution to overcome the limited tenure and high attrition rates in specialised roles such as Digital Marketing.

Typical process of hiring a full-time employee



Engaging independent talents accelerates this process

When it comes to sourcing, organisations typically leverage existing independent talent platforms and marketplaces, alongside their alumni networks. Company alumni, particularly retirees from technical roles, are considered a valuable pool for independent engagements. As one of our interviewees mentioned, "former employees, including those who are retired, are occasionally re-hired as fractional talents." Interestingly, [companies are observed to prefer platform-based engagements over direct fractional talent hiring to avoid adding unnecessary organisational layers](#). To make the hiring process more robust, an independent programme manager is typically hired and is responsible for managing the operations of independent talents. From the talent side, we saw a similar trend with social media and online platforms as the main channel for securing independent work.



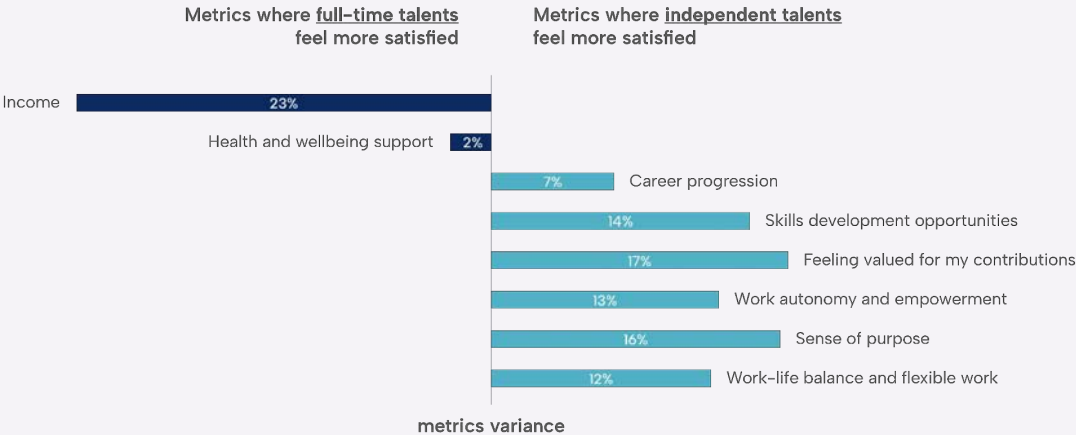


Benefits, Challenges and Barriers to Independent Work Adoption

Flexibility and autonomy lead to higher satisfaction for independent talents.



Percentage variance of self-scored metrics between full-time talents and independent talents



To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of your work?

Independent talents rate their satisfaction moderately higher than full-timers across the majority of metrics — even feeling more empowered to make a decision and valued for their contributions, as well as skills development opportunities. This data indicates the appeal in **prioritising control and adaptability in independent work**. Additionally, non-permanent work allows talents to work with different organisations and types of projects, which provides them with diverse experiences and opportunities for professional growth.

On the contrary, permanent work arrangements, which typically emphasise financial stability and structured support systems, result in full-time talents feeling more satisfied with these factors than independent talents. When these metrics are compared among independent workers versus full-time talents who are doing ‘side gigs’, the variance is even greater, which suggests that full-timers who are also doing independent work are less satisfied than those who are only working in their full-time jobs. Parallel observations to our findings have pushed employers to adopt hybrid work models, which blend freelance-like autonomy and flexibility with the stability of full-time employment.

[PWC](#) reported that in Australia, only 10% of the nation’s total workforce works in a fully traditional environment. Other research highlights that [51% of](#) independent workers say no amount of money would convince them to return to a traditional job.



Organisations gain more than just cost savings with independent talent models. They unlock flexible access to specialised and senior expertise.

The adoption of independent talent models offers organisations compelling strategic and operational advantages that extend beyond traditional cost considerations. While the immediate financial benefits are significant, with companies typically saving 30% – 40% on payroll costs by avoiding traditional overhead expenses, the value proposition covers far broader organisational benefits. These models **enable companies to access specialised expertise and senior talent that might otherwise be unavailable or prohibitively expensive on a full-time basis**; which is particularly beneficial for organisations requiring niche skills or specific industry experience.

A key strategic advantage lies in independent talent models' inherent flexibility for workforce planning and risk management. Organisations can effectively **evaluate talent and cultural fit through fractional arrangements before making longer-term commitments**, essentially creating a sophisticated 'try-before-you-buy' approach to senior hiring. This is particularly valuable in today's evolving business environment, where skill requirements can shift quickly and the cost of poor hiring decisions can be substantial. Furthermore, the independent talent model presents a unique solution to the challenges of an aging workforce, by providing a structure for experienced professionals to remain engaged in meaningful work while facilitating valuable knowledge transfer across generations.

These models also address immediate operational needs while supporting longer-term strategic objectives. Companies can rapidly **deploy specialised expertise for specific projects or initiatives without the lengthy processes typically associated with permanent hiring**. This agility is valuable for start-ups and scale-ups that require high-calibre talent, but may not have the resources or need for full-time senior positions across all functions. The ability to access a global talent pool also helps organisations to bridge critical skill gaps in an increasingly competitive market.

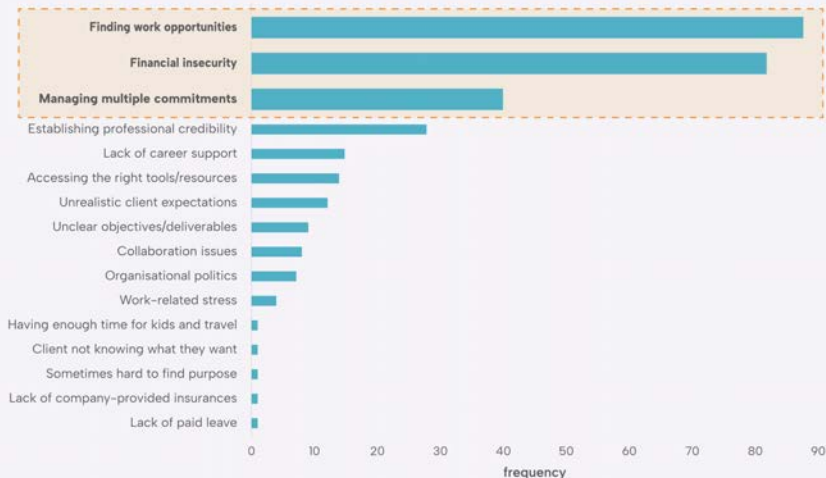
Organisations gain more than cost savings with independent talent models—they unlock flexible access to specialised and senior expertise, reduce hiring risks through fractional arrangements, and bridge skill gaps to accelerate projects and maintain agility in a competitive market.





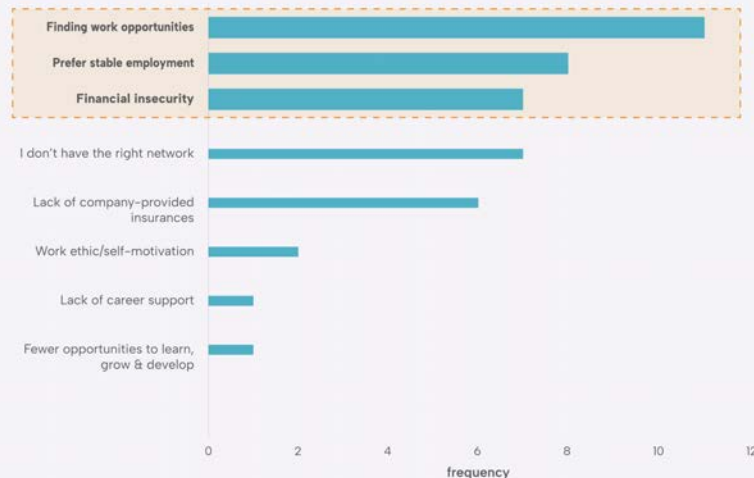
Independent talents face challenges around economic security, career growth, and managing workloads.

Perceived challenges of independent work for independent talents



Which of the following challenges/ barriers are you currently facing in your work?

Perceived challenges of independent work for full-time talents who are doing independent work



What do you see as the main barriers to working in non-permanent employment?

Our data reveals three critical dimensions impacting both independent talents and full-time professionals engaging in non-permanent work: **economic security, professional development, and operational effectiveness**. The most **pressing concerns** revolve around **market access and financial stability**, with the majority of both independent and full-time talents citing difficulty in finding work opportunities and financial security as two of the top challenges around independent work. In the US, business development and finding clients remains the primary challenge for a majority (60%) of fractional workers. These challenges are compounded by the challenge of establishing professional credibility, particularly in markets like Singapore where rigid working culture and preference for traditional employment create additional barriers for independent workers. The prevalence of operational challenges among independent talents, such as managing multiple commitments and time management across various clients, indicates that **success depends not only on securing opportunities, but also on developing good operational capabilities**.



Organisational gaps in workflow, inclusion, and compliance inhibit effective use of independent talent.

Employers also face **significant challenges** in adopting independent work models, mostly stemming from **operational and cultural barriers**. The onboarding process for independent talents is often cumbersome, as **organisations may lack streamlined systems to integrate them into existing workflows**. HR and procurement departments can encounter complications due to the non-standardised nature of independent hiring, commonly in the form of indecisiveness as to who is responsible for hiring and engaging these talents. **Team dynamics** presents another issue: **without proper inclusion strategies, independent workers may remain peripheral, which can lead to disconnection between permanent and independent talents within a team**. This lack of cohesion not only hampers productivity but also diminishes organisational culture. When independent talents exit, the absence of formalised knowledge transfer process also exacerbates the risk of losing important insights.

Internal equity concerns present another critical challenge. Offering higher compensation to independent talents compared to full-time employees can strain workplace morale and come across as unfair. Additionally, **the absence of clear career trajectories for independent talents raises questions about their long-term commitment and alignment with organisational goals**. These issues necessitate a mindset shift among HR leaders and managers, who ought to view independent talents as integral contributors rather than temporary resources.

Without proper inclusion strategies, independent workers may remain peripheral, which can lead to disconnection between permanent and independent talents within a team.

Managing independent talents requires distinct skill sets that differ from traditional employee management. Task allocation, performance monitoring, and adherence to rigid schedules become more complex when dealing with professionals engaged on tightly defined terms. The lack of standardised guidelines for handling independent hires, coupled with legal ambiguities surrounding independent workers classification, compounds the challenge. Retaining independent talents for extended periods without formalising their status also risks exposing organisations to legal and ethical liabilities.

Cultural and social norms further inhibit the adoption of independent work in markets like Singapore. Traditional employment models remain deeply ingrained, with stability preferred over flexibility by both employers and talents. This cultural resistance, coupled with limited awareness of the benefits and practicalities of independent work, creates a learning curve for organisations. **Without established frameworks for tax handling, HR involvement, and long-term integration, companies may remain hesitant to fully embracing this model.**



Strategic integration of independent talent requires tailored policies, not traditional approaches.

Developing an effective strategy for integrating independent talents requires organisations to align their independent workforce approach with broader business objectives, while addressing the unique needs and motivations of independent workers. First, **employers must recognise the strategic value of independent talents beyond cost-saving measures. Independent talents often bring specialised skills, agility, and fresh perspectives that can drive innovation.**

[Previous studies](#) highlight the importance of creating tailored value propositions for independent workers. Unlike full-time employees, these individuals (as we have also found in our research) prioritise autonomy, flexible work arrangements, and opportunities for professional growth. Offering competitive compensation packages, including non-monetary benefits like access to training and networking opportunities, can significantly enhance the attractiveness of independent work within an organisation. Furthermore, segmenting the independent workforce based on skill levels and strategic importance allows organisations to allocate resources effectively by making sure that each project receives the necessary talent skill and experience. **Cultivating a supportive ecosystem** is equally important for integrating independent workers into the organisation. This involves fostering a culture that values inclusivity and collaboration, which encourages independent workers to feel integrated into teams without being overshadowed by their non-permanent status.

To build robust processes and governance structures for optimum integration of independent talents into the workforce, a critical first step is to **establish clear policies and frameworks that define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of independent workers.**

Employers must recognise the strategic value of independent talents beyond cost-saving measures. Independent talents often bring specialised skills, agility, and fresh perspectives that can drive innovation.

For example, distinguishing between contractors and employees in terms of rights and obligations is important to avoid legal challenges such as misclassification lawsuits. With regards to onboarding independent talents, organisations need to recognise that traditional onboarding methods often fail to accommodate the transient nature of these workers. Organisations should consider adopting flexible, technology-driven onboarding platforms that allow for rapid integration into projects. These can include self-paced training modules or digital access to organisational tools.

Knowledge transfer mechanisms are another critical component of governance structures. One major risk with independent workforces is the **potential loss of institutional knowledge when contractors transition out.** Coming up with **formalised knowledge-sharing practices, such as documentation protocols, can mitigate this risk.** Investing in digital tools that centralise knowledge repositories can also help to ensure continuity and minimise disruptions in the long-run. When it comes to performance management for independent workers, traditional metrics that focus on long-term engagement or hierarchical alignment may not apply. Instead, organisations should implement project-based evaluation systems that focus on deliverables, timeliness, and quality.

Conclusions



Recommendations for independent talents



1

Expand business development channels to overcome client acquisition challenges

Finding work opportunities remains the top challenge for independent talents. To address this, independent workers should adopt structured business development strategies, such as leveraging digital platforms, expanding professional networks, and building a strong personal brand. Consistently sourcing new opportunities will help stabilise income streams and career sustainability. Additionally, consider diversifying engagement models rather than relying solely on one-off projects by offering retainer-based projects or productised services.

2

Invest in soft skills to strengthen client relationships and win more projects

Independent talents already recognise the importance of soft skills, ranking communication, problem-solving, and strategic thinking as the most critical in their work. However, excelling in these areas is what differentiates top performers, allowing them to better sell their expertise, manage complex client relationships, and secure repeat engagements.

3

Target startups, scaleups, and SMEs for greater opportunity access

The report highlights that startups, scaleups, and SMEs are the most active adopters of independent work models, which are often driven by budget constraints and the need for specialised expertise. Independent talents should highly consider focusing business development efforts on these organisations, which are more likely to engage independent talents for advisory, project-based, and fractional roles.



Recommendations for employers



1

Develop multiple talent engagement strategies

There is no one-size-fit-all solution when it comes to working with independent talents. Our findings shows that organisations with a range of flexible engagement models – such as the short-term assignment and bridging model; fractional and long-term model; and in-house gig work model – are more likely to meet their business objectives. This requires the development of a proper governance framework, talent capability mapping, and also organisational processes that are welcoming to external talents.

2

Start small, but take risks

Most organisations may not get it right the first time they engage with an independent talent. From our findings, the most likely success can be found in working with previous employees on a flexible project-based model. This is a good starting point that minimises cultural and operational friction. As the organisation accustoms itself with such talents, take more risks by expanding the scope of work, extending the engagement, and broadening the access to such talents to more teams.

3

Formalise documentation activities to ensure seamless transition

Poor knowledge transfer impedes the onboarding and productivity of independent talents, and is also a source of expertise loss when a talent completes their work. Developing a culture of proper documentation simplifies the process of knowledge sharing between internal and independent talents, preserving work continuity and safeguarding intellectual property.



Recommendations for **policy makers and advocacy groups**



1

Establish clear worker classifications to protect both talents and employers

Our findings highlight legal ambiguities around independent work, with many employers unsure whether independent talents fall under employee, contractor, or freelancer classifications. This uncertainty increases the risk of misclassification disputes and limits talent engagement. The government should establish standardised worker classifications that clarify rights, obligations, and tax treatment for independent workers, which results in fair treatment while protecting employers from legal risks.

2

Introduce portable benefits to address economic insecurity

Independent talents identified economic security as a core challenge, often citing the lack of health insurance, retirement savings, and unemployment protections. To close this gap, the government should introduce portable benefits systems which enable workers to accumulate protections across multiple engagements without being tied to a single employer. This system would reduce vulnerability while promoting independent work as a sustainable career path.

3

Facilitate talent-employer matching through government-led platforms

The report reveals that client acquisition remains a significant challenge for independent workers. To address this, the government could establish a public talent platform that connects independent professionals with employers across sectors. This platform would promote transparency, streamline the process of sourcing and onboarding talent, and prioritise industries critical to Singapore's economic growth.



Research limitations

This research provides insights into the integration of independent talents into organisational structures. However, certain limitations must be acknowledged to contextualise the findings. The relatively small sample size of employers limits the generalisability of the results, as it may not adequately capture the diversity of challenges and practices across industries in Singapore. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through surveys and interviews introduces potential response biases, which may influence the accuracy of the reported challenges and strategies. There is also the absence of longitudinal analysis, which restricts the study's ability to assess the evolution of independent work models in Singapore over certain periods of time. Furthermore, this research does not address the transformative potential of current emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, in shaping the future of independent work.



Acknowledgements



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How They Support HR Efforts

Providing businesses with on-demand independent expertise in research and strategy. Enhancing workforce flexibility by connecting organizations with specialized independent professionals.

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Who We Are

At Flexer we deploy top independent professionals to growth companies in Asia. Our growth and transformation experts deliver value creation as a service. They are A-listers with a stellar track record and deep local market experience across Asia. Highly adaptable & hands-on, they embed with high growth SMEs, Enterprises and Private Equity funds. Find them on flexer.ai

How They Support HR Efforts

Enabling companies to access highly skilled independent professionals. Providing expert-driven value creation with deep market insights. Supporting transformation initiatives with adaptable and hands-on talent solutions.

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How They Support HR Efforts

Addressing workforce challenges with tailored HR solutions for startups and innovators. Facilitating growth through strategic talent acquisition and development. Enhancing hiring, upskilling, and workforce expansion with a holistic approach.

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Who We Are

HumanCloud bridges the gap between talent and technology, unlocking the full potential of digital workforce solutions. With expertise across 800+ talent platforms, HumanCloud helps enterprises integrate AI-driven matching, compliant talent pools, and modern workforce strategies. Find them on humancloud.work

How They Support HR Efforts

Facilitating the transformation of workforce models by integrating technology with talent solutions. Assisting Fortune 500 companies in designing, building, and scaling future-ready workforces. Supporting businesses, governments, and investment firms in leveraging digital workforce solutions for industry-wide impact.

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Who We Are

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Thank you