

Human Resource Management in “Freelance Economy” for Freelance Workers in Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how workers in the freelance economy manage time management, skills, income uncertainty, and provide labor protection. The freelance economy offers flexibility for freelancers in determining their own work schedules, but also presents challenges in terms of income stability and labor protection. This study focuses on freelance workers in Surabaya, with research subjects including freelance photographers, website developers, and Gojek drivers. The research method used a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews with freelance workers. The information obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and strategies used by freelance workers in managing challenges in their work. The results show that freelance workers implement various strategies in facing their work challenges. In terms of time management, work flexibility allows them to set their own schedules, but without good time discipline, productivity can decline. In terms of skills management, freelance workers must continuously improve their skills through online courses or professional communities to remain competitive. In the face of income uncertainty, freelance workers adopt income diversification and financial planning strategies to mitigate financial risks. In addition, the lack of labor protection is a major problem, where freelance workers do not have access to social security and health insurance, forcing them to seek protection independently. This research has implications for freelance workers, digital platforms, and the government in building a more sustainable freelance economy ecosystem. Clearer regulations are needed to improve freelance worker protection, as well as more transparent policies from digital platforms regarding incentive and rating systems.

Keywords: *Freelance Economy, Freelance Workers, Human Resource Management*

INTRODUCTION

Rapid changes in information technology have had a significant impact on work patterns in various countries, including Indonesia. One such impact is the growth of a phenomenon known as the freelance economy. The freelance economy refers to a work system based on short-term projects or freelance work, typically obtained through digital platforms.(Jandy Luik, 2021)This phenomenon has become a global trend and created new job opportunities for many individuals. In Indonesia, particularly in metropolitan cities like Surabaya, the freelance economy has become a solution for various groups of people seeking additional income, managing their work hours more flexibly, and utilizing their skills.(Aditya, 2021).

Human resource (HR) management in the freelance economy presents distinct challenges and characteristics compared to conventional employment. Workers in this



ecosystem often must manage their time, skills, and work opportunities independently. Unlike corporate-managed employment systems, freelance workers often face income uncertainty, a lack of social security, and fierce competition in the digital marketplace.(Inspector General of Police Dr. Dedi Prasetyo, 2023).In addition, the existence of digital platforms such as Instagram, Fiverr, Gojek App, and Upwork are important elements in supporting the success of freelancers.(Lupton, 2014).

In Surabaya, various professions such as photographers, website makers, and online transportation drivers are utilizing digital technology to increase their chances of getting a job.(Siti Amirah Makarim, 2024)By leveraging these platforms, they can expand their client networks, market their services more effectively, and access job opportunities that may not be available through traditional methods. However, how these workers manage their human resources in such a unique context requires further research.(Siti Amirah Makarim, 2024).

This research focuses on the experiences of workers in the freelance economy, particularly in Surabaya, to understand how they manage their own human resources and the extent to which digital platforms help them achieve their professional goals. This focus will provide insight into the challenges these workers face and the solutions they employ to address these issues.((Jandy Luik, 2021)Research on the freelance economy is not only important for understanding modern work patterns, but also relevant for helping workers in this ecosystem become more competitive and professional.(Jandy Luik, Media Freelancers in the Digital Age, 2021)).Furthermore, this research is expected to provide insights for policymakers and digital platform developers on how to more effectively support freelancers. Using a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews, this study aims to provide a better understanding of the freelance economy and its contribution to human resource (HR) management at the individual level.(Jandy Luik, Media Freelancers in the Digital Age, 2021)

Freelance Economy

Freelanceeconomy is a term that refers to an economic system in which work is done on the basis of short-term contracts, part-time work, or freelance work.)(James Duggan, 2021)In the freelance economy, workers often lack formal employment ties with specific companies, but instead work independently, offering services through digital platforms such as online apps or websites. One of the main factors driving the growth of the freelance economy is technological advancements.(Alex de Ruyter, 2019)Digital platforms like Gojek, Grab, Fiverr, and Upwork are the primary medium connecting workers with service users. In Surabaya, many freelancers offer services like photography, website creation, and even online transportation. These platforms provide easy access for workers and customers to connect without having to go through a complicated recruitment process.(Jandy Luik PJ, 2021).

Human Resource Management in the Freelance Economy

Human Resource Management (HRM) in the freelance economy has different characteristics than HR management in the formal sector. In the freelance economy, workers must perform these functions themselves.(Mulcahy, 2016)For example, a freelance photographer needs to plan a shooting schedule, develop a portfolio to attract clients, and maintain good relationships with customers to get positive reviews. (Jandy Luik PJ, 2021)This differs from formal workers, who typically receive support from the company's HR department. These platforms provide tools such as work schedules, performance appraisal systems, and online training that enable workers to improve their skills. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2022), more than 70% of freelance workers in Indonesia admitted to utilizing the training features provided by platforms to develop their skills.

METHODS

The research method used is to use human resources in the freelance economy, with a case study of freelance workers in Surabaya. The freelance economy is a digital-based work system that allows individuals to work flexibly without long-term contractual ties to a company.(Schüring, 2021)

1. Time Management
 - a. How freelance workers manage their work schedules without fixed working hours regulations.(Sundararajan, 2016)
 - b. The impact of flexibility on work-life balance and mental health of freelance workers(Sundararajan, 2016)
2. Skills Management
 - a. Freelance workers' strategies for improving skills to remain competitive in the job market(Scholz, 2017).
 - b. The role of self-training, professional communities, and digital platforms in developing freelance workers' skills(Scholz, 2017).
3. Income Uncertainty
 - a. Fluctuations in freelance workers' income and how they deal with it.
 - b. The influence of digital platform policies on the stability of freelance workers' income (Kenney & Zysman, 2016).
4. Labor Protection
 - a. Work risks faced by freelance workers, such as the lack of health insurance, work insurance, or pension funds((Setiawan, 2020).
 - b. The role of government and digital platforms in creating a fairer protection system for freelance workers((Setiawan, 2020)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Time management is a crucial aspect of the freelance economy. Unlike office workers who have fixed schedules and a more structured work system, freelancers have the freedom to determine their own working hours.(Sloane, 2007)While this flexibility is one of the main attractions of the freelance economy, it also demands a high level of discipline to keep work running smoothly and productively.(Vallas, 2018). Irregular work schedules can also impact the productivity and mental health of freelance workers, which ultimately affects the quality of their work.(Sundararajan, 2016).

*Freelance*The freelance economy offers workers extensive freedom to determine their own working hours. There are no bosses setting schedules, no strict time limits, and freelance workers can choose when they want to work.((Jandy Luik, 2021)However, this freedom has two sides: on the one hand, workers can arrange their working hours according to their needs, but on the other hand, they must have high discipline to ensure that the work continues to run smoothly.(Y Sutrasna, 2023)Work-life balance is also a challenge for freelancers. The lack of clear boundaries between work hours and personal time often makes it difficult for them to truly unwind. Some freelancers report finding it difficult to truly disconnect from work because they constantly feel the need to seek out new opportunities or pursue additional projects.(Debora Oktaviani Hutapea, 2021). To overcome challenges in time management, freelance workers develop various strategies to work more effectively and maintain their work-life balance.

Overview of Research Object

This study aims to identify how freelance workers in Surabaya, including photographers, website developers, and Gojek drivers, manage their human resources within the context of the gig economy. The study used in-depth interviews to obtain relevant data.

The following are the results of interviews with three research subjects:

Subject 1: Freelance Photographer (Andi, 29 years old)

Platforms Used:

Andi uses Instagram to market his portfolio and gain clients. He also joined a local photography community WhatsApp group that frequently shares information about photography projects.

Work experience:

Andi has worked as a freelance photographer for five years. He began his career by offering photography services for weddings and small events, then progressed to professional photography for corporate events and products.

Time Management:

Andi uses the Google Calendar app to manage his project schedule. "I make sure there are no scheduling conflicts by setting reminders on my phone," he said.

Challenges in the Gig Economy:

Andi's biggest challenge is maintaining client satisfaction. "Sometimes clients are dissatisfied even though the work meets their expectations, and that requires me to provide additional revisions."

Hope:

Andi hopes the government or private sector will provide free technical training to improve the quality of freelance photography in Surabaya.

Subject 2: Website Creator (Rina, 35 years old)

Platforms Used:

Rina uses Upwork, Freelancer, and LinkedIn to find projects. She also has a personal website as her digital portfolio.

Work experience:

Rina has been a freelance website developer for seven years. Her projects include e-commerce websites, personal blogs, and educational platforms.

Skills Management:

Rina regularly takes online courses on Udemy and Coursera to master new technologies, such as AI-based website development. "If I don't learn new things, I'll be left behind in technology," she said.

Challenges in the Gig Economy:

Rina revealed that one of her biggest challenges is dealing with clients who don't provide clear specifications. "Some clients only provide general instructions, so I have to guess at their needs."

Hope:

Rina hopes there will be a local platform specifically for Indonesian freelancers that is easier to use and supports domestic payment methods.

Subject 3: Gojek Driver (Budi, 40 years old)

Platforms Used:

Budi works as a driver using the Gojek app. He also uses Telegram groups to share tips and information with fellow drivers.

Work experience:

Budi has worked as a Gojek driver for four years. He chose this job because of the flexibility it offers. "I can choose when I want to work and when I want to rest," he said.

Revenue Management:

Budi manages his income by recording every income and expense using the Money Lover app. He also sets aside a portion of his income for self-insured insurance.

Challenges in the Gig Economy:

Budi's main challenge is competition among drivers. "When the area is busy with drivers, I have to be smart about finding the right time to pick up."

Hope:

Budi hopes that there will be special protection, such as more affordable health insurance, for gig workers.

Aspect	Subject 1 (Andi, Photographer)	Subject 2 (Rina, Website Creator)	Subject 3 (Budi, Gojek Driver)
Platforms Used	Instagram, WhatsApp Group	Upwork, Freelancer, LinkedIn	Gojek App, Telegram Group
Work experience	5 years	7 years	4 years
Time Management	Google Calendar	Flexible schedule, task management app	Self-shift management, record keeping application
Challenge	Client satisfaction, additional revisions	Project specifications are unclear	Competition between drivers
Hope	Technical photography training	User-friendly local platform	More affordable health protection

1. Using Time Management Apps

Many freelancers use apps like Google Calendar or Trello to organize their work schedules. This way, they can ensure they have a structured schedule and avoid procrastinating (Scholz, 2017).

2. Determining Work Priorities

Andi always makes a to-do list before starting his workday so he can complete projects step by step. "I don't work haphazardly. I always determine which tasks are more urgent," he said. This strategy helps freelancers avoid the stress of piling up work (Pratama, 2021).

3. Implementing Working Hour Limits

Some freelancers are starting to implement more structured work hours to avoid burnout. Rina tries to work no more than eight hours a day to ensure adequate rest. "I consider myself like an office worker. There are work hours and there are break times," she said.

The Impact of Irregular Work Schedules on Mental and Physical Health

Irregular work schedules can negatively impact the mental and physical health of freelance workers. Those who work without a clear schedule often experience fatigue, anxiety, and even sleep disturbances.

1. Sleep Disorders

Many freelance workers sacrifice their sleep time to work longer hours, which ultimately impacts their health (Dewi, 2019).

2. **Stress and Anxiety**

Income uncertainty often causes excessive stress for freelance workers, especially those with family responsibilities.

3. **Physical health problems**

Freelance workers who work long hours without rest often experience health problems such as back pain, migraines, and chronic fatigue (Setiawan, 2020).

Skills management is a key factor in the success of freelancers. Unlike office workers, who often receive training from their companies, each freelancer has a different approach to managing their skills, continually improving their work techniques. Freelancers need a variety of skills to compete in an increasingly competitive job market. The skills required vary depending on the type of work they undertake. Some common skills needed by almost all freelancers include:

1. **Technical Skills (Hard Skills)**

- a. Photographers like Andi need skills in photography, photo editing, and digital marketing to attract more clients.
- b. Website creators like Rina need to master programming languages such as HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, as well as understand UI/UX design to increase the attractiveness of the website to clients (Sundararajan, 2016).
- c. Gojek drivers like Budi need to have good road navigation skills, good communication with customers, and an understanding of the platform's ever-changing policies.

2. **Soft Skills**

- a. Good communication skills are essential, especially for freelancers who frequently interact with clients online.
- b. Time management and discipline are also important skills to ensure projects are completed on time without sacrificing the quality of work.
- c. Negotiation skills are an important aspect for freelance workers to get decent pay according to the value of the services they offer (Kalleberg, 2009).

Skills management in the freelance economy is a complex challenge. Freelancers must independently improve their skills through self-study, online courses, or professional communities. Despite challenges such as limited access to quality training and intense competition, there are many ways to stay relevant and competitive.

Work Risks Faced by Freelance Workers

Every job has risks, but freelance workers face unique challenges that often lack adequate protection. Some of the main risks they face include:

Health Risks

Many freelancers have to work in precarious conditions. Online transportation drivers, for example, often spend hours on polluted roads, which can impact their health. Budi, a Gojek driver, said he often experiences back pain from sitting on his motorbike for too long. "If I'm sick, I can't work, and if I don't work, I have no income," he said.

The lack of paid sick leave for freelancers is also a major issue. If a freelancer falls ill, they don't receive the same pay as office workers, so many continue working despite poor health (Scholz, 2017).

Workplace Accident Risk

Some freelance jobs, especially those based on transportation, carry a high risk of accidents. Online transportation drivers face the possibility of accidents every time they work. The government has a significant responsibility to ensure that freelance workers receive adequate protection. However, this study shows that to date, regulations related to the freelance economy are still insufficient to provide adequate protection for freelance workers (Dewi, 2019). The government needs to establish clearer regulations to ensure that freelance workers receive better protection. Social security for freelance workers: The government can expand the scope of social security programs to include freelance workers, whether in the form of health insurance, pension funds, or protection against work accidents (Hutapea, 2021).

Regulations on employment contracts: Although the freelance economy is based on flexibility, the government can set minimum standards for employment contracts to avoid exploitation of freelance workers (Pratama, 2021). Many freelance workers do not have sufficient understanding of their tax obligations. The government can develop a simpler tax system and provide incentives for freelance workers who comply with taxes (Setiawan, 2020). A more flexible tax scheme: The government can implement a more flexible tax scheme for freelance workers, considering their unstable income (Dewi, 2019). Assistance programs for low-income freelance workers: The government can also provide assistance programs for freelance workers who experience economic difficulties due to their unstable income (Sundararajan, 2016). This research also contributes to the academic world, especially in understanding the role of HR in the freelance economy. This study adds a new perspective to the literature on the freelance economy, especially in the Indonesian context. Analysis of the challenges of freelance workers: This study provides deeper insights into the challenges faced by freelance workers in terms of time management, skills, and labor protection (Scholz, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

This research uncovers various challenges faced by freelance workers in Surabaya, particularly in terms of time management, skills, income uncertainty, and labor protection. Freelance workers must continuously develop their skills independently to remain competitive in an increasingly competitive market. However, challenges such as limited access to training and rapid technological change make this process challenging. The lack of social security for freelance workers is also a major concern. Most freelance workers lack health, pension, or employment insurance, leaving them vulnerable to occupational risks. Therefore, the role of the government and digital platforms is crucial to creating a fairer and more sustainable system for freelance workers.

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