Master's thesis

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Trust Building on Digital Labour Platforms: the Worker's Perspective

A contemporary multiple case study from the Norwegian IT sector

Master's thesis in Datateknologi
Supervisor: Babak A. Farshchian
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Abstract

Trust is regarded as an important factor both on digital commercial platforms as well as in working organisations. Digital labour platforms present a combination of elements from commercial platforms and working organisations and make up a large part of the platform economy. In this study, we conduct a qualitative and exploratory case study of two labour platforms active in the Norwegian IT and consultancy sector, in order to better understand how trust building between the workers active on the platform and the platform itself occurs. Through semi-structured interviews with workers and platform owners, as well as a supplementary document analysis, we find that easy adoption, transparency, the supporting network of peers and the availability and ability of platform owners are the main drivers of trust building on the platforms. This article contributes to trust literature on commercial digital platforms by focusing on labour platforms in highly-skilled industries from the perspective of workers, as well as combining this with earlier research on trust in both organisations and on digital platforms.

Tillit er ansett som en viktig faktor både på digitale kommersielle plattformer og i arbeidsorganisasjoner. Digitale arbeidsplattformer er en kombinasjon av elementer fra både kommersielle plattformer og arbeidsorganisasjoner og utgjør en stor del av plattformøkonomien. I denne artikkelen utfører vi en kvalitativ og utforskende case-studie av to arbeidsplattformer som er aktive i den norske IT og konsulentsektoren. Gjennom semistrukturerte intervjuer med arbeidere på plattformen og plattformeiere, samt en dokumentanalyse, finner vi at enkel bruk, åpenhet, det støttende nettverket av kolleger og platformeieres tilgjengelighet og kompetanse er de primære faktorene som bidrar til tillitsbygging. Denne artikkelen bidrar til litteraturen om tillit på kommersielle digitale plattformer ved å fokusere på arbeidsplattformer innen industrisektorer med høy utdanning fra arbeidernes perspektiv, i tillegg til å kombinere dette med tidligere forskning på tillit i organisasjoner og digitale plattformer.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate how trust building occurs in digital labour platforms, which has become a popular alternative mode of employment for many labourers over the recent years (Hong and Pavlou, 2013). Digital labour platforms and the digital labour conducted on such platforms have many labels associated with them such as: "gig economy" (Friedman, 2014), "on-demand economy" (De Stefano, 2015), "crowdwork" (Kittur et al., 2013) or simply as "labour platforms" and "digital labour" (Graham et al., 2017). These platforms are a subset of digital e-commerce platforms that focus on offering its customers a suite of services from individual contractors rather than selling goods (Frenken and Schor, 2017). Working relationships on these platforms are defined as market-mediated, open employment relationships (Kalleberg, 2011). These individual contractors are often not directly employed by the platform, but more often self-employed as freelance contractors, often called "micro-entrepreneurs" (Ravenelle, 2017) or "gig workers" (De Stefano, 2015). These individual contractors may be individuals that meet the skill set — if any — required by the platform or fully independent companies in their own right, offering their services through several labour platforms and their own channels.

The online labour index (Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2018), which aims to provide similar statistics for labour platforms as exists for more traditional labour markets, for instance, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Hussmanns, 2007), show a steady increase in projects on English speaking labour platforms such as Upwork and TaskRabbit. The index at its top at the beginning of March 2020 showed an increase in projects with 50 index points since May 2016. Another study from 2016 suggests the gig economy was already then affecting up to 30% of the working-age population in the United States and Europe (Manyika et al., 2016). Newer measurements suggest that the digital labour economy generated around 204 billion USD in gross volume in

2018, and projects to have more than doubled its volume by 2023. Other studies claim that digital labour will grow from $14 billion in 2014 to $335 billion in 2025 (Yaraghi and Ravi, 2017). The numbers are not very accurate because the field is still hard to define with regards to what platforms to include and exclude (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018), but almost all studies agree that digital labour is growing.

Labour platforms offer an attractive alternative to regular labour for business owners. The long reach creates a broader pool of potential labour. The business model for such platforms further drives down the cost as these labourers are more often than not paid for through individual contracts rather than full or part-time employment agreements. The platforms are also attractive for workers as they can offer new employment types in areas with a shortage of jobs. The models advertise more freedom and precedence given to the workers as they act more like self-employed and autonomous entrepreneurs (Kalleberg, 2011). However, with these changes comes also changes in trust-formation between workers and platforms. As workers often interact with labour platforms through digital interfaces rather than a more traditional setting.

1.1 Real World Problematic Situation

Due to the growth of labour platforms, much attention has been garnished from researchers, media, and governments. For instance, through its investigation, the Norwegian Department of Finance questioned whether the laws surrounding Norwegian work-life are prepared to handle the changes in working relations that labour platforms bring (Finansdepartementet, 2017).

As digital labour platforms increasingly become an attractive and realistic replacement for traditional labour, understanding how labourers interact with the platform should be necessary for both labourers and platform owners. Research shows that trust is a crucial factor in both workplace satisfaction (Helliwell and Huang, 2011), and is an essential antecedent for making a purchase on a digital commercial platform (Gefen, 2000). Therefore, understanding how to communicate trust through digital platforms and its surrounding tools should be crucial for the future development of labour platforms, both in terms of the adoption of potential buyers and potential service providers.

1.2 Related Area of Concern in Literature

Volumes of research have been written regarding trust building on digital platforms (Friestad and Opheim, 2019a) as well as research on trust building in labour organisations. Much of the

research regarding trust building on digital platforms stem from these studies on trust building in organisations, i.e., Mayer et al. (1995) and McKnight and Chervany (1996). The work of Mayer et al. (1995) and McKnight and Chervany (1996) focuses on defining trust as a framework for research that has later been applied when studying trust antecedents (Malone and Laubacher, 1999).

Trust research has also been conducted on digital labour platforms. This research has been mostly concerned with trust building between the customer and platform (e.g. Yoganarasimhan, 2013; Teubner et al., 2019; Kokkodis and Ipeirotis, 2016) through mechanisms that reduce *information asymmetry* between buyers and sellers. Notably, most of the studies regarding trust building on labout platforms are concerned with rating mechanisms, usually a 5-star scale that appears in labour platforms such as Uber.

The research has been split over several research subjects when looking at the research done regarding service providers on digital labour platforms. Early research was concerned with platform adoption, studying why workers started to take up work on the platform and why customers started to use the platform. Later research has been more focused on the role of the "gig economy" in the future of labour, in many cases questioning if the model of labour used by the platforms is sustainable for the labourers (e.g. Martin, 2016; De Stefano, 2015; Zwick, 2018). In contrast, others celebrate the platforms for the flexibility in working relations it offers (e.g. Sundararajan, 2016).

1.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand better what mechanisms on labour platforms and any auxiliary digital tools of a platform generate trust for service providers. We do this through an exploratory multiple case study of two labour platforms active in the Norwegian IT sector. The case study will consist of a series of semi-structured interviews with the workers and platform-owners on the two platforms. These interviews will be analysed in a qualitative manner using thematic analysis. We also analyse the website and other digital tools that make up the digital platforms to support the findings of the interviews.

The goal of the research is to link earlier research on trust building mechanisms to digital labour platforms, as mapped out in Friestad and Opheim (2019a) and using the framework for trust building relationships created by Mayer et al. (1995). However, we do not assume that the trust building mechanisms are the same on labour platforms as they are on other C2C-platforms

or that the same mechanisms that generate trust apply for both consumers and services providers. This study will therefore not assume what builds trust for workers of the platform based on previous literature in line with Jones and Leonard (2006), and will instead rely on its own exploratory research to look for links. The knowledge gathered in Friestad and Opheim (2019a) will, however, help guide the interviews and the questions asked during the interview.

CHAPTER 2

Background and Related Work

Especially from the perspective of trust research, labour platforms are fascinating as the nature of the work - i.e. labour done through digital interfaces - means that trust building draws from several fields of research. Trust building happens through TBMs in the interface (Friestad and Opheim, 2019a) and interpersonal and organisational relations. We can, therefore, draw on research conducted in fields relating to work-life and social life such as management research, sociology and both traditional and computer-supported cooperation. In this chapter, we discuss labour platforms from these different perspectives of research. We discuss how the platforms relate to traditional working relationships, how labour platforms came to be in the first place, different types of labour platforms and their many associated labels and also the challenges that are present on many labour platforms. We also discuss relevant theories both from trust research, as well as human capital theory. Finally, we discuss how trust building is done through digital interfaces as presented in Friestad and Opheim (2019a) and theories and frameworks this trust research builds on. Throughout the chapter, we also discuss how different aspects of the related work is relevant to trust research on labour platform and trust building in general.

2.1 Trust

2.1.1 Defining Trust

As we use the same definition of trust as in Friestad and Opheim (2019a), we include the reasoning from that study here in full. The entirety of the rest of subsection 2.1.1, including Figure 2.1, is copied from Friestad and Opheim (2019a).

Trust as a well defined concept that could be applied across different fields of research eluded scholars for a long time. This posed a major challenge to researchers, as previous research could not necessarily be counted on due to differing definitions and concepts around trust (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight and Chervany, 1996). Gambetta et al. (1988) note that: *"scholars tend to mention [trust] in passing, to allude to it as a fundamental ingredient or lubricant, an unavoidable dimension of social interaction, only to move on to deal with less intractable matters"*. A few years later, McKnight and Chervany (1996) recognise this as folly: *"In short, pursuing empirical work before adequately defining concepts is like putting the cart before the horse."*

In the mid-90s, several researchers independently tried to resolve this conundrum. Arguably, the most successful and widely adopted definition is the one proposed by Mayer et al. (1995):

"[Trust] is the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party"

This definition, while short enough, highlights several key points. Trust is a part of a relationship between several parties: the *trustor*, the party engaging in a trusting action, and the *trustee*, the target of the trusting actions of the trustor. The definition also stresses the need for vulnerability and importance in the action for it to be considered trusting – if the trustor does not lose anything in the event that the trustee does not act in the desired way or gain anything if they do, then there is no need for trust. Thirdly, it states that an action is only trusting if the trustor cannot meaningfully control or monitor the trustee to ensure positive outcome. These three components are all important for a complete and suitable definition of trust.

Based on their definition of trust, Mayer et al. (1995) define three factors that are considered by the trustor when engaging in a trusting action: ability, integrity and benevolence. In deciding whether to trust someone, the trustor evaluates whether the trustee has the ability to perform the necessary action, whether they have the integrity to perform an action without compulsion, and whether they wish the trustor well. Mayer et al. (1995) note that this necessarily makes trust a contextual decision, as these factors vary from action to action (perhaps most obviously seen in the ability to perform the action). It is also well to note that these factors are *perceived*, and may as such differ from person to person.

Figure 2.1 puts the trust factors into a conceptual framework. It also includes a person's individual propensity to trust (i.e. their innate "baseline" in any trusting relation) as a moderating factor between the three and the actual trust. It then recognises that this trust, moderated

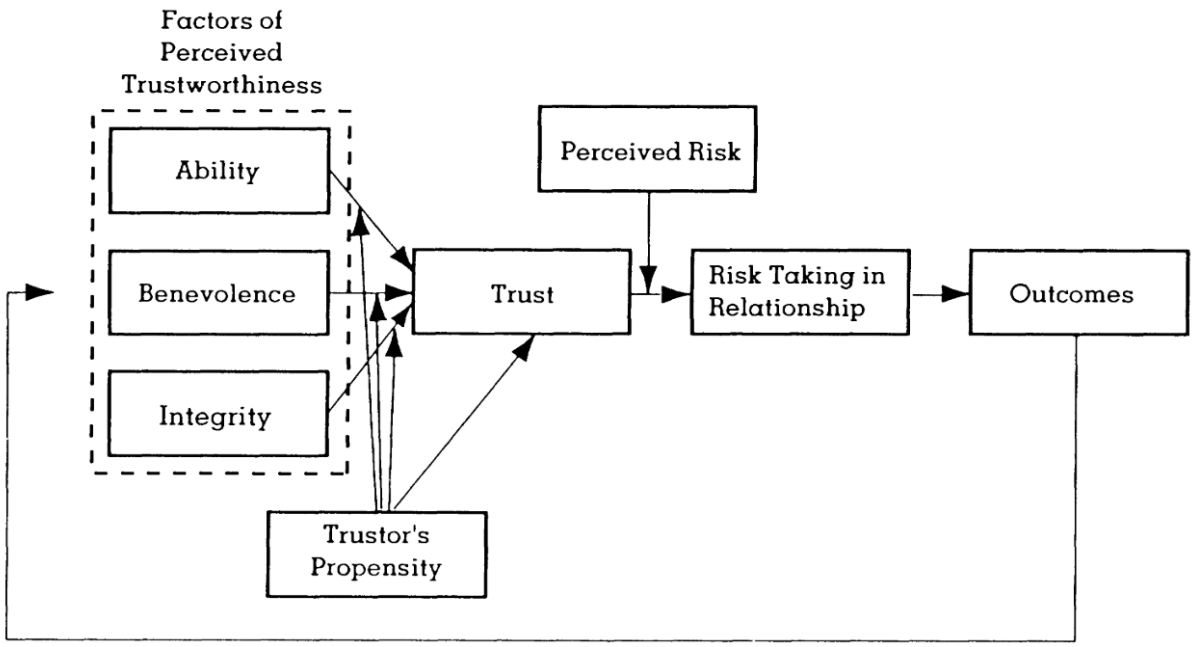

Figure 2.1: The model of trust proposed by Mayer et al. (1995).

by perceived risk, can lead to risk taking in a relationship. Mayer et al. (1995) argue for this based on the Theory of Reasoned Action, described in subsection 2.3.3. The outcomes of this then feed back into the trustor's perceived ability, benevolence and integrity of the trustee. This emphasises that trust relations change over time, as the trustor gets to know the trustee and gains experience in dealing with them.

2.1.2 Trust in Organisations

Trusting relationships both between peers and cross-rank in the workplace is desired in all levels of a working organisation. In their studies of the significance of trust in an organisation, Helliwell and Huang (2011) found that an 0.7 point increase in trust on a 10-point Likert-scale had the same effect on life satisfaction of workers as a 31% wage increase. Studies conducted with managers on different levels in firms also found similar importance placed in trust by managers (Mishra and Morrissey, 1990). Whether or not trust manifests itself differently between peers and different levels of management are, however, split. Some studies found that trust levels did not differ notably between peers and superiors in the same organisation (Spector and Jones, 2004), hinting at trust being a uniform factor in an organisation. While others found more substantial discrepancies in trust levels between different levels of management (Mackenzie, 2010), showing that levels of trust can be different towards different parts of an organisation.

Mishra and Morrissey (1990) pointed out in their research on trust antecedents in the work-

place the following four factors for generating trust: (1) open communication between peers in the organisation; (2) giving workers a part in decision making; (3) sharing critical information within the company; and (4) facilitating an open environment for perceptions and feelings about the policies and workings of the organisation. Especially communication and how it supports the organisation in creating workgroup cohesion has been backed up by further research (Gilbert and Tang, 1998). While these factors are more individual, focusing on each employee's part in the company, the context of the work environment, such as organisational structure and type of work, also has an impact on perceived trust in a company (Blunsdon and Reed, 2003).

The digitisation of the workplace has also affected trust in the workplace, with communication increasingly being done digitally. Communication over the web is more complicated than in a co-located working environment, with both managers and team members facing extra challenges in this regard (Latapie and Tran, 2007). Despite digital messaging increasing in organisations, workers still preferred face-to-face communication as digital messaging was perceived to be more prone to misunderstandings and errors (Mackenzie, 2010).

2.2 Trust Building Mechanisms in Commercial Platforms

Trust building mechanisms (TBMs) are mechanisms implemented into a platform with the intent to increase a potential trustor's perception of the trustee's ability, integrity or benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995; Gefen, 2000). A structured literature review of 400 scientific articles found there to be over 180 uniquely phrased TBMs that normalised into 38 unique mechanisms (Friestad and Opheim, 2019a). The most popular kind of TBM found were reputation systems, which to our knowledge seems to be the most popular subject when studying trust building for customers on digital labour platforms as well (e.g. Kokkodis and Ipeirotis, 2016; Teubner et al., 2019; Hong and Pavlou, 2013; Yoganarasimhan, 2013). Reputation systems are an easy way to reduce the effect of information asymmetry often encountered on digital platforms where the provider has more information about the product than a potential buyer would have. This uncertainty introduces risk in the transaction, and where there is perceived risk, trust is needed to mitigate its effects (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight and Chervany, 1996).

Other popular TBMs found by Friestad and Opheim (2019a) are social mechanisms (e.g. Hajli, 2013, 2015), structural assurance mechanisms (e.g. Verhagen et al., 2006), informative mechanisms (e.g. Greiner and Wang, 2010) and emotional mechanisms (e.g. Shanmugam et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2018). Previous experiences with one or more commercial platforms can also increase trust in other platforms.

There are several features of a digital platform that can support trust building while not being explicitly designed to build trust. As the data from Friestad and Opheim (2019b) shows, several papers discuss features that, while building trust, also have other aspects or features. Nevertheless, these are still essential trust builders and warrant study. Aspects such as the overall quality and aesthetics of a website (Jones and Leonard, 2008) increase trust levels. Keeping information asymmetry in mind, having information about (Greiner and Wang, 2010), or pictures of (Teubner et al., 2014) the product, can reduce the asymmetry and build trust. Tools such as a chat between a potential customer and seller can be a crucial feature to organise transactions on the platform. A chat also allows for customers to discuss the details of the product or service, thus reducing information asymmetry of the product (e.g. Kim and Park, 2013; Ou et al., 2008). Social presence on the platform, and in some cases, the inclusion of a social media system in the commercial platform, results in a so-called s-commerce platform. These platforms have their origins in leveraging social networks for advertisement and sharing of product and platform.

2.2.1 TBMs on Labour Platforms

As already discussed, there are many shared TBMs between labour platforms and other commercial platforms, especially ratings and user reviews. These reviews also play a crucial role as input for algorithms on the platform. Moreover, there is a set of TBMs for labour platforms that are mainly discussed in earlier research. Sutherland and Jarrahi (2018) conducted a literature review to create a research agenda on the sharing economy and labour platforms. Sutherland found that trust building was a key affordance for platforms to function as a mediator of transactions properly.

Furthermore, the review pointed out several essential TBMs on the reviewed platforms. Firstly, since labour platforms often involve more personal interactions rather than only purchasing products, a profile with a convincing picture of the service provider has shown to be a driver for picking that provider (Bente et al., 2012; Ert et al., 2016). Secondly, customers need to trust the ability of the workers on the platform to perform the tasks they provide. Of course, reviews play a vital role in this, but there are also other factors. For instance, some platforms have direct checks to evaluate the quality of work done (De Stefano, 2015). Other platforms provide well-performing workers with badges that often come with certain perks (Kuhn and Maleki, 2017). Lastly, trust also affects the platform, as they act as the matchmaker between customers and platforms. Just as the algorithms that find and assign labour are opaque for workers, so they are for customers, which some have expressed concerns about (Deng et al., 2016).

2.3 Theories

This section presents the theories regarding trust and labour that the study use. The theories written about in Friestad and Opheim (2019a) are included in this article, due to their importance for this study as well. The subsections that include section from Friestad and Opheim (2019a) in its entirety will begin with the prelude: *The following section is taken from Friestad and Opheim (2019a)*

2.3.1 Initial trust

The following section is taken from Friestad and Opheim (2019a). Mayer et al. (1995) notes the iterative nature of trust, and that it evolves along with a relationship. How, then, is the first iteration determined? Gefen (2000) finds that in such a situation, the trustor's propensity to trust is essential, along with their familiarity with similar situations or contexts. He also notes that familiarity is a distinct construct to trust, but that it has a significant positive relationship with initial trust. McKnight et al. (1998) also found that propensity to trust is essential and that it can indeed be quite high. Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004) note that this is especially important in the context of e-commerce since many initial transactions and future relationships will be dependent on the customer's first meeting with the site. It becomes even more critical in C2C platforms, where customers often have to decide whether to trust a new provider of goods or services each time they use the platform (Bente et al., 2012; Jones and Leonard, 2008; Lu et al., 2010).

2.3.2 Trust Transference Theory

The following section is taken from Friestad and Opheim (2019a). Trust transfer theory, based on attribution theory (Kelley, 1973), has been used to describe how trust in a particular entity or person can transfer to another entity or person (Chen and Shen, 2015). We see the effect of this theory when introducing a new product or service to someone within a community or network. A person learns about or enjoys a new product or service and tells someone else within the community or network he or she is trusted by about the experience. These new people try it, and the effect repeats itself until more or less everyone is familiar with the new product or service. Thus, trust transference can be a powerful tool to build trust in commerce platforms. The framework for initial trust proposed by McKnight et al. (1998) can be extended by adding trust transference to the cognitive processes (Stewart, 2003). In turn, this shows how to use trust-transference to influence a trusting action.

Trust transference as a mechanism can be leveraged in many ways in order to build trust on a commerce platform. Chen and Shen (2015) discussed how the perceived quality of a website (Jones and Leonard, 2008) and institutional e-commerce mechanisms such as safeguarding mechanisms (Fang et al., 2014) have a mediating effect on trust transfer in both the seller-buyer and seller-platform relationships. Social commerce constructs also use trust transference, but between users of the platform. Inter-customer communication shows a measured effect on both brand trust and brand loyalty (Bruhn et al., 2014).

2.3.3 Theory of Reasoned Action

The following section is taken from Friestad and Opheim (2019a). The theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) has been widely used in order to predict human behavioural intentions and behaviour (Madden et al., 1992). The theory proposes that certain beliefs lead to certain attitudes, which in turn leads to a behavioural intention which is a direct antecedent of the behaviour expressed by the individual. McKnight et al. (2002) used the model as a framework for describing how a trusting belief in a web vendor leads to trusting intentions with that web vendor which finally results in a trust-related behaviour - i.e. making a purchase. Mayer et al. (1995) also use this theory in arguing for their trust framework, as shown in Figure 2.1. Furthermore, using TRA as a framework it has been empirically shown that a consumer's trust towards an e-commerce vendor is positively linked to have a favourable attitude towards said vendor, which in turn affects purchase intentions (Teo and Liu, 2007). Thus, TRA provides a framework to explain how a trusting belief leads to a trusting action, which in turn gives merit to discussing how trusting beliefs are formed through trust building mechanisms.

2.3.4 Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory, first conceptualised by modern economic thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith (Kiker, 1968), suggests that individuals and societies not only derive economic value from investing in equipment, technology and processes of a company, but also in its people (Sweetland, 1996). This investment goes beyond just investing in peoples health and nutrition, but also education and improvement of skills valuable in industries (Schultz and Schultz, 1982). The theory implies that one can enhance the economic value of one's self in order to generate future welfare (Fleming, 2017). Human capital divides into two categories: *specific* human capital that is particular to a specific industry or firm and is non-transferable, and *general* human capital that is transferable between industries and firms (Becker, 1962). In a traditional working relationship, an employer would have invested in both specific and gen-

eral human capital as both are needed to complete tasks in any organisation, however with the specific skills being the ones needed for that particular working arrangement.

Concerning labour platforms, some economists have welcomed the trend of increasing opportunities for self-employment that such platforms allow (Sundararajan, 2016). The basis for this reasoning lies in human capital theory, as it potentially leaves the worker with more flexibility and therefore opportunity to invest in themselves, acquire new skills and make it easier to tailor their working day. On the flip side, however, it can be argued that the increase in labour platforms and the more temporary work engagement such platforms entail, allows companies to go around labour laws and put many burdens previously covered by the employer over on the worker (Fleming et al., 2019). Tying back to Becker (1962) one crucial question asked is who should pay for the development of general human capital. Other studies notes that several labour platforms have become very good at only paying for the special capital needed for the work on the platform (Fleming, 2017).

2.4 Digital Labour Platforms

At its core, the definition of a digital platform is a set of digital resources, services and content that enable value-creating interaction between external producers and consumers (Costantinides et al., 2018). In the case of labour platforms, the main value-creation done is through the tasks the platform enables its services providers to complete. Platforms are, however, defined in different ways by different disciplines. The definition can be of a purely technical artefact that is defined by software in an ecosystem that may or may not is supported by third-party modules (de Reuver et al., 2018). For a more socio-technical definition, the organisation and processes surrounding the software also encompass a digital platform (Tilson et al., 2012). For this paper, we will be using the definition provided by Costantinides et al. (2018) cited above.

2.4.1 Research on Labour Platforms

Research conducted on labour platforms varies in purpose and scope but has seen an increase in scientific interest over the last couple of years. By volume, the fields of research interested are management, business and economics, computer science, social sciences and environmental studies, as well as public administration and transportation (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018; Friestad and Opheim, 2019a). As this paper focuses on trust building on labour platforms from the perspective of computer science (CS) and information systems (IS), we will present some of the related work found in this field. In computer science, there are differing perspect-

ives and focuses in the fields of human-computer interaction (HCI), and computer supporter cooperative works (CSCW).

Information systems researchers may divide digital labour platforms as organisations into a core of platform-owners and maintainers, and a periphery of service providers enabled by the tools of the platform. Thus, a labour platform closely resembles a platform organisation or a network firm (Ciborra, 1996). The advantage of the periphery-core division is that the core can rapidly adapt to changes in the periphery. Depending on the scale and reach of the platform, it may have to accommodate many different settings and resources available and combine this. The model allows the platform to combine several components or aspects of the platform and match them to more efficiently exploit the available resources (Lanzara, 1999), in a process called Bricolage (Lvi-Strauss, 1966). An example of this is how Uber has in countries that do not allow for non-commissioned transportation workers, thus cannot operate their regular service. Instead, the platform offers food delivery through Uber Eats and a more high-priced luxurious version of Uber that employs commissioned taxi drivers called Uber Black.

With regards to trust research: by relating the platform organisation model to a more hierarchical organisational structure, treating the core as upper management and the periphery as the workers, we can make an argument for how trust relationships are formed and perceived. Due to a lack of direct communication between management and workers, trust forms through observations of the outcomes of strategic decision making by the management (McCauley and Kuhnert, 1992). Of course, in smaller organisations that allow for more personal contact, trust bonds may be formed this way as well (Scott, 1980). Nevertheless, this implies that workers interpret the decisions made in an organisation, or platform, to inform their own opinion, which in turn builds or break trust. By using this lens, we establish that trust can be between across a core and the periphery.

In the field of CSCW, labour platforms serve as an exciting evolution of labour as digital tools and platform replace traditional working relations, rather than support and augment it. CSCW research on labour platforms is mostly concerned with the cooperation between different peers and mangers on such platforms. As we will discuss later, see section 2.5, the outcome of this research is often critical with regards to the practices implemented by the platform, and further enforced by the governing models. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss other interchanges

An interesting parallel between CSCW research and labour platforms are found in volunteer

crowdwork platforms. These crowdwork projects are propped up by a community of practice that has the project. (Wenger, 2001, p. 1) defines a community of practice as *"a group of people who share an interest in a domain of human endeavour and engage in a process of collective learning that creates bonds between them"*. While such communities do not necessarily need to rely on digital tools for cooperation, they do due to the geographic distance between members of the community, primarily as these communities often form online. As discussed, we also see such communities form around specific labour platforms, often defying the lack of communication tools provided by the platform by providing the work-around and recreate their own environments (Gray et al., 2016).

2.4.2 Labour Platforms Compared to Commerce Platforms

As mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section, there are many labels for labour platforms and the economic sub-sector they make up. The labels are in part due to the different models of service that the platforms offer, but also that they blur the line between other types of e-commerce platforms. Frenken and Schor (2017) classify different labels based on three different factors: the interaction between provider and buyer, the goods in question, and access to the good in question. Presented in Figure 2.2 are the relationships and how they relate to each other.

A similar Venn-style diagram to the one presented in Figure 2.2 has been used to highlight the blurred lines between different types of commercial platform. Other studies have chosen to highlight the difference between for instance sharing economy platforms and traditional e-commerce (Yang et al., 2019). An example can be seen in Figure 2.3.

As we will see it can be argued that labour platforms share characteristics from several sections in both Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.2.

Friestad and Opheim (2019a) have written extensively about the different types of digital consumer to consumer commerce platforms. In short, they are defined by the common characteristic that items/services offered through the platforms are offered by individuals and companies affiliated with the platform as external providers, rather than being directly employed by it. The difference lies in the way items and services are offered and consumed. Collaborative Consumption (Botsman and Rogers, 2010) is an umbrella term for platforms that utilise idleness of abundant resources that providers are willing to share. It is under this term we find such labels as the sharing economy, with perhaps the most studied example being AirBnB. Social commerce is C2C platforms that, in some way, leverage online social network constructs in order to mediate e-commerce (Liang and Turban, 2011). Typically these use commerce features present on

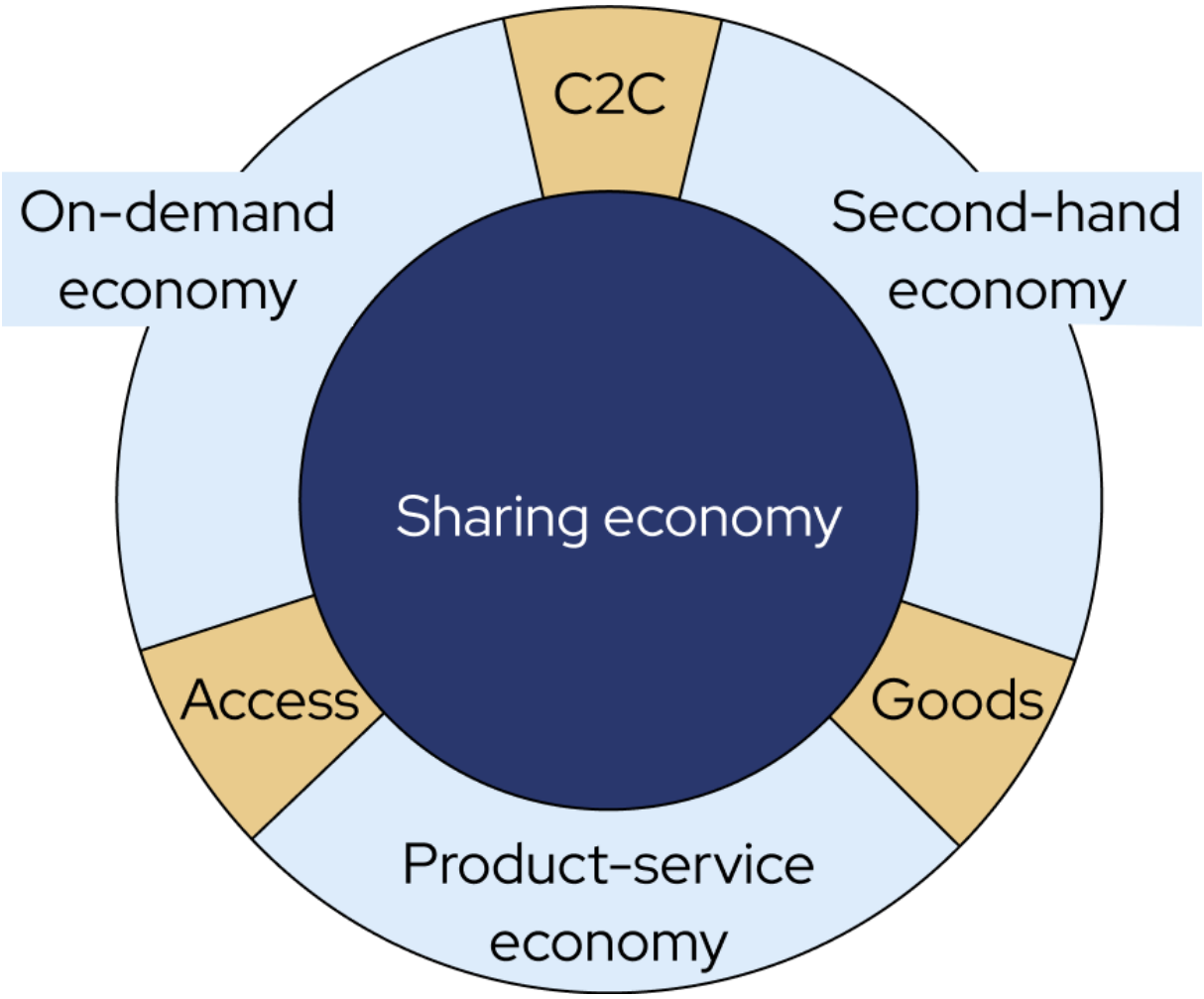

Figure 2.2: Frenken and Schor (2017) classification of commerce platforms

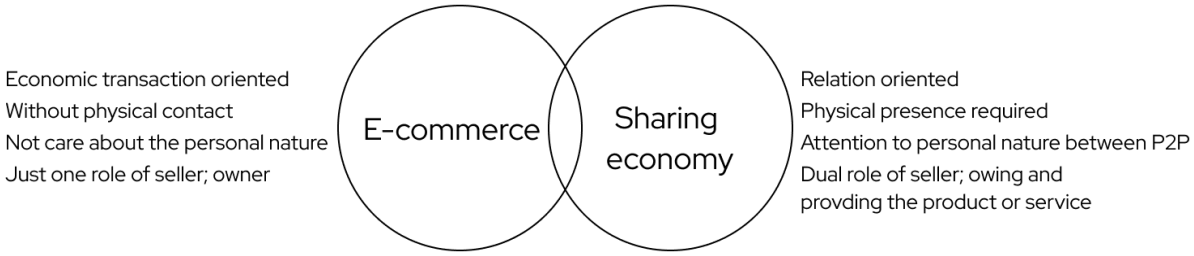

Figure 2.3: Yang et al. (2019) distinguishing features of the sharing economy and e-commerce

an already existing social network, or commerce platforms that have adopted social constructs (Hajli, 2013). For the former, a good example would be the many marketplaces present on Facebook, which started to get support with commercial structures in 2015. Sticking to Facebook, an example of the latter would be the widespread use of Facebook's like functionality on other commercial platforms (Lee et al., 2015a).

Labour platforms can also make use of the same characteristics, but the key difference is that

labour platforms offer a service in the form of labour rather than a product. Labour platforms can still offer products as the final delivery to the customer, but the emphasis is on the labour done by the affiliated workers on the platform. The product in question does not even have to be physical. Instead, it can be a digital product such as transcriptions, analysis or translations.

The distance often created by digital platforms between supplier and customer can interestingly also help to empower certain groups to enter the labour market or secure better jobs for themselves. When looking at gender, some studies claim there is a hiring bias by first-time employers towards female workers in developing countries (Chan and Wang, 2018). Furthermore, despite accessibility issues encountered on labour platforms workers with disabilities have been able to participate on such platforms (Zyskowski et al., 2015). From a geographic viewpoint, it is clear that labour platforms have provided an opportunity to work in developing nations. Especially countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia with a population of proficient English speakers as there is a language barrier for using labour platforms (Hong and Pavlou, 2013). However, case-studies of labour platform impact in such areas show that despite the opportunity that labour platforms present, many workers still struggle to make ends meet (Wood et al., 2019b).

2.4.3 Labour Platforms in Relation to Traditional Working Relationships

Looking at the economics of labour from an organisational perspective, paid labour can be differentiated into employment — either directly or through an intermediary — and contract work that is either a direct contract or a subcontract (Cappelli and Keller, 2013). Digital labour, excluding volunteer crowd work, can also be fitted into this framework as contract work, or in some cases co-employment.

One of the challenges that digital labour creates is the physical distance between "employer" and "employee". Alongside other factors such as increased worker autonomy and less direct management, it is harder for platforms to enforce rules and regulations on the workers, compared to having workers and managers under the same roof. Instead, platforms leverage governance models in order to promote, incentivise or enforce a particular type of behaviour on a platform (Schreieck et al., 2016). The chosen governance model of a platform can affect how decision making is handled based on the views of different stakeholders (Costantinides et al., 2018) but also affect cooperation and communication on the platform (Farshchian and Thomassen, 2019). The relationship between trust and governance models has to our knowledge not been studied.

Digital labour has also been a popular way of crowd-sourcing large and voluntarily maintained

projects. Perhaps the earliest example of this is the Linux kernel, which in turn produced git as a popular way of maintaining software in a distributed setting (Al-Ani and Stumpp, 2016). We see other examples of such volunteer-based crowdwork in crowd-maintained knowledge bases such as Wikipedia (Kittur et al., 2013).

A key difference when comparing work on labour platform to traditional entrepreneurial employment or self-employment is that in the case of entrepreneurial self-employment, the worker would own all critical assets needed to complete the job. Entrepreneurial self-employment relations will often have a higher payout for the self-employed individual when doing a good job. However, it also carries more of the risk should something go wrong. This working arrangement is called an independent worker in a classic market (Williamson, 1991). On the other hand, there is hierarchical employment where the worker has few self-owned assets and receive the same rewards whether or not anything goes wrong. Companies usually have a hybrid arrangement of these two models for governing the workers (Makadok and Coff, 2009). Labour platforms are quite similar here, as the worker usually owns some assets needed to complete the tasks on the platform (e.g. a car for Uber or software needed for design work through TaskRabbit). However, the platform owns the critical technology for putting workers into contact with customers (Kuhn and Maleki, 2017). There can still be varying degrees of governance, with the most managerial platforms assigning work to workers, such as mTurk, and more loose arrangements where the workers can themselves choose which tasks they take.

2.4.4 Why Workers Choose Labour Platforms

Despite the many pieces of research that are sceptical towards digital labour, workers still choose to work on the platforms. Understanding why people choose this work is essential for understanding both initial trust formation, and other antecedents of trust on the platforms. This field of research is somewhat scarce when considering that engaging employees to take up work on the platform is similarly essential to engage customers. Labour platforms are a two-sided market when defining a two-sided market as done by, for instance, Rochet and Tirole (2006). As pointed out in Friestad and Opheim (2019a), there is an overweight of studies looking at the consumer-side rather than supply-side. Nevertheless, the research that exists has identified some reasons for adoption. These reasons are not uniform across all labour platforms, and some of the claims as we will see are disputed.

Adopting any form of occupation is inherently linked to the perceived quality of said occupation (Burchell et al., 2012). However, what constitutes quality in an occupation, have in recent years been challenged by, for instance, the rise of digital labour platform (Deranty and

MacMillan, 2012). Monteith and Giesbert (2017) compared how the views of job quality in developing countries coincided with the views in developed countries. This was done by first compiling a list of qualities identified by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2012), Dahl et al. (2009) and (Burchell et al., 2012), see Figure 2.4. In the developing world, after income, the most important characteristics involved healthcare and the health impact of work as well the right to work, especially for women, and reassuringly for our study, it found trust to be an important characteristic (Monteith and Giesbert, 2017).

With regards to labour platforms, a study of the platforms mTurk and Crowdflower work-

	Characteristics of work	Outcomes of work
Economics	Working hours	Income
	Job security	Fringe bene
		Health insurance
Sociology	Autonomy and control	Autonomy
	Skill utalisation	Occupational status
	Diversity of tasks	Well-being
	Opportunities of learning	
Psychology	Challanging work	Social recognition
	Meaningful work	Job satisfaction
	Trust at work	Well-being
	Relationships at work	
Interdiciplinary (ILO Decent Work Initiative)	Working hours	Income
	Job tenure	Health insurance
	Non-discrimination	Social security
	Health and saftey	Pension contributions
	Healthcare provisions	
	Union coverage	

Figure 2.4: Monteith and Giesbert (2017) compilation of quality work characteristics from (ILO, 2012; Burchell et al., 2012; Dahl et al., 2009)

ers found that many of the surveyed workers used the income as a supplement to other jobs. Others took up work on the platforms due to lasting unemployment, health issues or being the

caretaker for other sick family members. A decent percentage of the surveyed users preferred to work from home and were grateful that platforms could help facilitate that. Surprisingly, a significant portion of surveyed workers had enjoyment or leisure as the primary reason for picking up labour platforms (Berg, 2016). Other studies found autonomy in choosing when and where to work to be a boon of work, despite the organisational structures and monitoring of the platforms. Some preferred the algorithmic control, rather than constant supervision often found elsewhere (Wood et al., 2019b).

Furthermore, Wood et al. (2019b) found that in areas where the demand for labour was outpacing supply, labourers often had more benefits and experienced better quality work. All of these findings can be flipped on the head, however, as several workers have no choice but to work from home due to, for instance, lack of affordable transportation or adequate infrastructure to possible employers. Workers may also be forced to work at unsociable hours, due to employers in other time zones, leading to social isolation and loneliness (Monteith and Giesbert, 2017). Despite the isolation from the employers that poses both social risks as well as health risks, workers would often form communities either virtually like Turkopticon (Irani and Silberman, 2013) or in their local communities (Wood et al., 2019a).

One of the significant benefits of the loose relationship between workers and platforms is that it puts a degree of flexibility into the workday for labourers. Due to the global scope of some labour platforms, there is work available 24/7, which makes it possible for people to design their workday around other time-sensitive factors and can for instance help reduce work-family conflicts (Shockley and Allen, 2007). Digital labour combines more efficiently with more volatile life changes, due to it often allowing for more remote and self-scheduled work (Kuek et al., 2015). This flexibility depends on whether or not the platform was designed with flexibility in mind. Flexibility also depends on if the income earned on the platform allows for days where the labourers can work less than usual (Lehdonvirta, 2018). Lastly, it depends on the model of the platform and if work is allocated to or offered by workers, and if it is feasible to pass on allocated work.

Summing up, these factors may or may not lead to job satisfaction depending on whether the worker has power on the platform to determine these arrangements on their own, or if they are forced onto them by the platform or circumstance. According to (Kalleberg, 2011), this comes down to if a worker has the desired skills or has a high enough reputation on the platform to leverage more power on the platform.

2.4.5 Algorithmic Management And Automation

Algorithmic management is a crucial feature of many labour platforms, as it plays an integral role in distributing work to workers based on for example the collected feedback from previous assignments, rather than having this work done by HRM or sales departments (Lee et al., 2015b). The algorithms that govern these processes on labour platforms vary from platform to platform, collecting different data and weighting them differently (Hassan et al., 2013). This is often called invisible management, as almost all platforms keep the inner workings of the algorithms opaque (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016). The most common input for such algorithms, however, is through processing feedback from the customer. In the case of ride-sharing apps such as Uber and Lyft, the rate of acceptance of passenger, and the subsequent rating of the trips are most important. Interviews conducted with drivers on the platforms reveal that both of these factors are a major source of stress. For the workers, anything else than a five-star (out of five) rating can be detrimental to the continued success for drivers (Lee et al., 2015b).

The anonymity created by the algorithms can also provides a layer of protection from hiring biases in working relations. However, these findings as shown are not conclusive, and there might very well exist other biases and latent discrimination of race, genders and minorities on labour platforms and digital marketplaces that are reflected in the algorithms (Edelman et al., 2017; Schor et al., 2016; Hannák et al., 2017). Moreover, studies show that workers generally have little trust in the algorithms and prefer personal recommendations when compared to algorithmic suggestions. Psychology studies have shown that humans have a lower tolerance for errors in algorithms than in humans, even if the algorithm overall has a higher rate of accurate results than a human (Dietvorst et al., 2015).

2.4.6 Evolution of Labour Platforms

Labour platforms were early theorised as a logical conclusion to the digitisation of tasks and labour that started around the turn of the millennium. Early predictions discussed how the internet could facilitate for electronic freelance workers or "e-lancing" (Malone and Laubacher, 1999). One of the earliest identified ways to leverage digital labour was through outsourcing tasks to countries with lower labour costs (Gefen and Carmel, 2008). Using digital tools to allocate work to more cost-efficient areas has been dubbed "global labour arbitrage" (Roach, 2004). This arbitrage, created by reduced barriers in international trade brought on the by the internet connecting all parts of the globe, have in turn given labour platforms an advantage by providing buyers access to cheap labour. This availability has in turn created digital platforms such as Amazon mTurk, TaskRabbit and Freelancer.com (Hong and Pavlou, 2013).

Horton (2010) also discusses how labour platforms can emerge in new markets and points to how they allow for greater specialisation in human capital as well as allowing for the optimisation of tasks. This specialisation has created the situation of labour platforms we see today, with a plethora of labels for different types of platform De Stefano (2015), and different business models both in incumbent markets and emerging markets (Ciulli and Kolk, 2019).

2.4.7 Type of Labour Platforms

As seen earlier, there are many labels for the type of commercial platforms we have chosen to call digital labour platforms. A review of the sharing economy and digital platforms identified a dozen different labels throughout the study (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018). The labels are attributed to the type of labour on the platform and the level of involvement that the platform has in said work. There are several taxonomies used to differentiate labour platforms. One taxonomy used consists of a quadrant-scheme, where the platforms are being differentiated by how local the service is and if the labour performed is high-skill or low-skill (Jabagi et al., 2019; Teodoro et al., 2014).

Another scheme for classifying the type of platform looks at workers' autonomy and workers' dependence on the platform (Kuhn and Maleki, 2017) for completing the work. The scheme has the advantage of decoupling the actual type of work done on the platform from the platform itself. Such a scheme and the characteristics of the different quadrants can be seen in Figure 2.6. Not only does this scheme decouple the work done from the platform, but it also shows that the platform acts more as an intermediary or mediator of work, rather than a direct employer. The platforms first and foremost act as a connector for customers and workers rather than themselves offering actual services (Fish and Srinivasan, 2012).

An interesting note after discussing the classifications and characteristics of labour platforms is that there is seemingly little research done regarding the size of digital platforms. To our knowledge, not much has been written on the subject of size and reach of a labour platform. Size and reach may have an impact on the trust relationships with both customers and workers.

Another type of distinction of labour platforms is in what markets they emerge. The more popular platforms such as Uber (transportation), AirBnB (housing and tourism) and several crowdwork platforms, all exist in already established markets. Some platforms seek to create a new market using a platform to formalise previously loose working relations. Examples include private child care and elder care Ticona and Mateescu (2018). From an economic point of view,

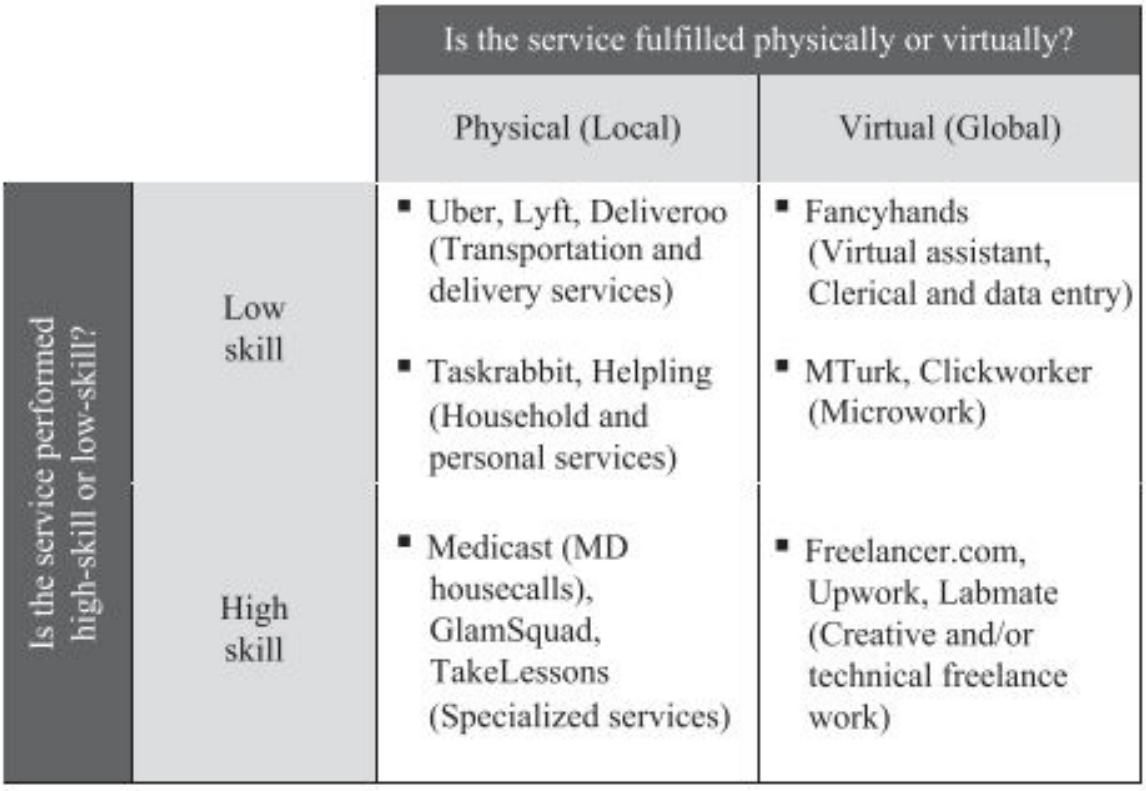

Figure 2.5: (Teodoro et al., 2014) Quadrant taxonomy for types of labour on labour platforms

such platforms have the opportunity to make such work more visible to both customers and authorities by reporting the work and paying taxes on the wages earned.

Looking at the relationship between labour platforms and traditional work some schemes treat the relationship as a spectrum with full platform labour - i.e. algorithmic management and all contact managed through the platform - at one end and more traditional work at the other (Spreitzer et al., 2017). Spreitzer et al. (2017) categories "forms of alternative work" based on Kalleberg (2011). The basis of the framework (see Figure 2.7) are the three dimensions of flexibility: employment, work scheduling and task completion. This flexibility presents two resulting working arrangements that polarise the workforce into low-skill and high-skill labour (Autor et al., 2010). For high-skill labour, the flexibility benefits the workers as firms have to compete for them. Workers may, to a larger extent, choose their working arrangements which seemingly provide a more positive outlook on their working arrangement. For low-skill labour, the situation is flipped, putting the flexibility in the hand of the employers, who can create working arrangements that favour the platform.

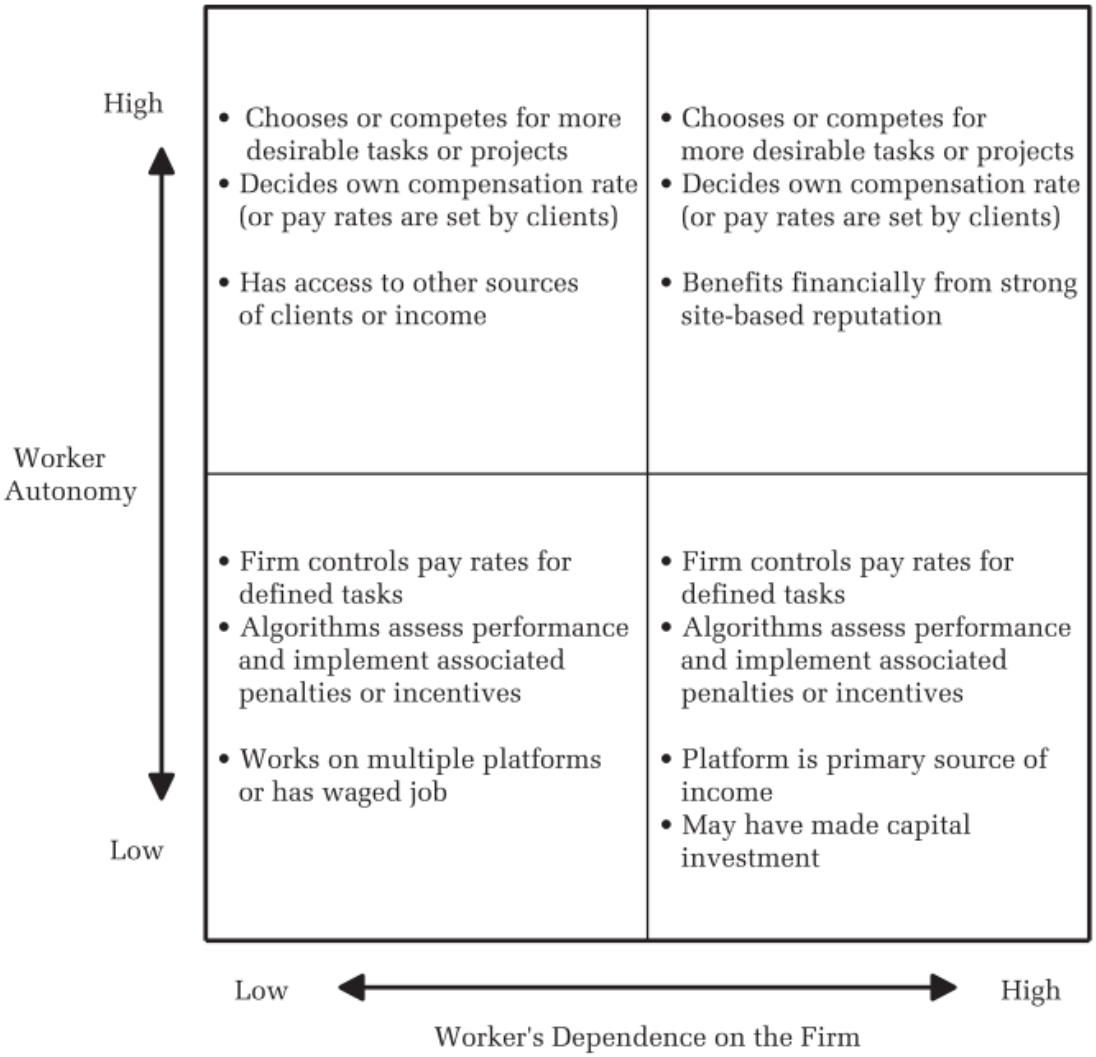

Figure 2.6: Quadrant taxonomy for types of platforms (Kuhn and Maleki, 2017)

2.5 Critiques of Labour Platforms

As mentioned earlier, labour platforms have been the topic of several sceptical works, highlighting the need to address the workers situation on labour platforms both from media outlets (e.g. Weber and Silverman, 2015; Scholz, 2014) and from policymakers and governments (e.g. Finansdepartementet, 2017; Weber and Silverman, 2015). Despite this, projections show that more and more workers are active on labour platforms (PwC, 2016). Despite this, questions have arisen on whether or not this is the form of work that we as a society want to replace traditional working relations (Ahsan, 2020).

The main selling points made by advocates for online labour has already been mentioned throughout this paper, but to summarise: proponents advocate that digital labour is a path to

Table 1 Categories of alternative work arrangements

Categories of workers	Standard workers	Standard workers with flexible schedules	Standard workers with flexible location	Part-time workers	On-call workers	Agency workers	Direct contracting	Platform mediated contracting
Description	Full-time employees, fixed schedule (e.g., 8–5), on-site	Full-time employees, flexible schedule, on-site	Full-time employees, fixed schedule (e.g., 8–5), off-site for some/all of work week	Less than 35 hours per week, fixed schedule, on-site	No regular schedule, required to be available during on-call periods, less than full-time, on-site	Employed by agency who assigns to client work, usually full-time and on-site at client, returns to agency for next assignment	Work for self, contract for a project directly with client(s); may be on- or off-site	Work for self, contract with consumer for a specific short-term task or assignment, may be virtual or at client location
Examples	Many occupations	Those with flextime work schedules	Telecommuters, consultants who travel	Those wanting reduced hours for child care/school, seasonal retail workers	Substitute teachers	Agency temporary or leased workers (e.g., temporary secretarial or legal help provided by an agency)	Freelancers, independent contractors, day laborers	Gig workers who find work via online platforms such as Uber, Upwork, and Care.com
Relevant dimension(s) of flexibility	Not applicable	Schedule	Location	Employment relationship and schedule	Employment relationship and schedule	Employment relationship	Employment relationship and possible schedule and/or location	Employment relationship, schedule, and/or location
Pfeffer & Baron (1988) classification	Physical, temporal, and administrative attachment	Physical, temporal, and administrative attachment	Limited physical attachment	Limited temporal attachment	Limited temporal attachment	Limited administrative attachment	Limited administrative and possibly temporal and physical attachment	Limited administrative, temporal, and physical attachment
Cappelli & Keller (2013) classification	Direct employment	Direct employment	Direct employment	Direct employment	Direct employment	Co-employment	Direct contracting	Not included, but is a mediated form of direct contracting

Figure 2.7: Categories of alternative working arrangements (Spreitzer et al., 2017)

self-determination, empowerment of workers and promoting entrepreneurship in a more decentralised economy (Martin, 2016; Gillespie, 2010; Sundararajan, 2016). Platforms such as AirBnB and other platforms in the sharing economy often present themselves as a more environmental viable option to their larger and more established counterpart. Due to sharing platforms being leveraging unused resources (Botsman and Rogers, 2010), platforms present themselves as more environmentally sustainable and part the circular economy (Pouri and Hilty, 2018).

There are also several challenges with algorithmic management and the way that these governing algorithms give little opportunity for workers to feedback on their evaluation (Lee et al., 2015b). Especially ratings are criticised as a poor way to evaluate workers since different users have different standards when rating. Ratings are not ideal when not having close to top rating can mean a dramatic downturn in tasks provided by the platform (e.g. Farshchian and Thomassen, 2019). In the case of for instance Uber, the need for a five-star rating has pushed drivers into not only providing a mean of transport but also go above that and provide for their customers social and emotional needs. This need creates an added workload in the form of

emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012), that can cause added stress for the workers. A solution here is the more qualitative approach taken by some platforms, for instance, Upwork that looks independently reviews the work done and determine if the feedback from customers were unfair or not. This more qualitative way of rating workers has also found support in research (e.g. Glöss et al., 2016; Raval and Dourish, 2016).

One major challenge of labour platforms is that the laws surrounding labour are in most countries not adequate to protect the workers in the same way it does for more established kinds of work (Stewart and Stanford, 2017; Harmon and Silberman, 2018). This inadequacy stems mostly from the fact that most platforms do not employ workers on their platform; thus, the relationship is not a traditional employer-employee relationship. The platforms are therefore not obligated by law to provide the same benefits or protections that other employers face. To use Amazon mTurk as an example, the Participation Agreement (Amazon Mechanical Turk, 2020) states the following:

> *(...) You [the worker] will not be entitled to any of the benefits that a Requester or Amazon Mechanical Turk or affiliates may make available to its employees, such as vacation pay, sick leave, and insurance programs, including group health insurance or retirement benefits; and (v) you [the worker] are not eligible to recover worker's compensation benefits in the event of injury. As a Requester, you will not engage a Worker in any way that may jeopardise that Worker's status as an independent contractor performing Tasks for you. Neither Amazon Mechanical Turk nor its affiliates have any duty or obligation in respect of Tasks other than those expressly set forth in this Agreement.*

As one can see, this leaves little protection and security for the workers, whom the agreement points out are independent contractors. Insecurity and little protection come on top of the fact that both the requester and Amazon can withhold payment if they are not satisfied with the work performed (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2014). Furthermore, there is no requirement to pay minimum wage on many platforms, due to the loose employment arrangement (Felstiner, 2011). This latter aspect is most alarming as these kinds of platforms are increasingly becoming a method of full-time employment for many people, in developing countries with digital infrastructure such as India (Ross et al., 2010). A final challenge for the workers of mTurk is the fact that the demand to work on the platform is still at a level where the platform does not face any significant need to reform its policies (Irani and Silberman, 2013). Paying more for the labour is probably not something the platforms want to do, as the low price of on-demand labour is one of the major factors of why the platform-adoption by customers (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2014). Continuing with the socio-economic theme, even on labour platforms that offer geographically bound services such as Deliveroo, the people who take up work are often on

temporary visas. They may also face other challenges with gaining other full-time employment in the country they work in (Goods et al., 2019).

In summary, not every criticism of labour platforms described here affect every digital platform. One of the significant challenges when discussing digital labour is that there are many different platforms which fit the same description while varying broadly in size and scope. Digital labour encompasses both small, locally-minded platforms and larger, multi-billion dollar profit-minded companies (Calo and Rosenblat, 2017). However, as De Stefano (2015) argues, these platforms can still be treated as a homogeneous entity of platforms because all labour platforms leverage their digital tools to meet supply with demand in a frictionless and cost-efficient manner.

2.5.1 Conceptual Framework For Trust

Identical to the one we proposed and used in Friestad and Opheim (2019a), the framework in Figure 2.8 is based on the conceptual framework first presented in Mayer et al. (1995). We use the model in this project as well, to attempt to start bridging the gap between labour platform and e-commerce platform trust building. The model proposes that trust building mechanisms found in digital platforms either in some way enhance the trustor's perception of some combination of the trustee's ability, integrity and benevolence, or reduce the perceived risk that requires trust to be present in the first place. Figure 2.9 shows the relationships we propose exist on digital commerce and labour platforms that engage workers and sellers who are not directly employed by the platform. Friestad and Opheim (2019a) revealed that most of the studies done on trust relationships examined the customer as the trustor and either seller or mediator (i.e. the platform) as the trustee. We found that few studies focused on relationships where the seller is the trustor, which in turn served to motivate this study.

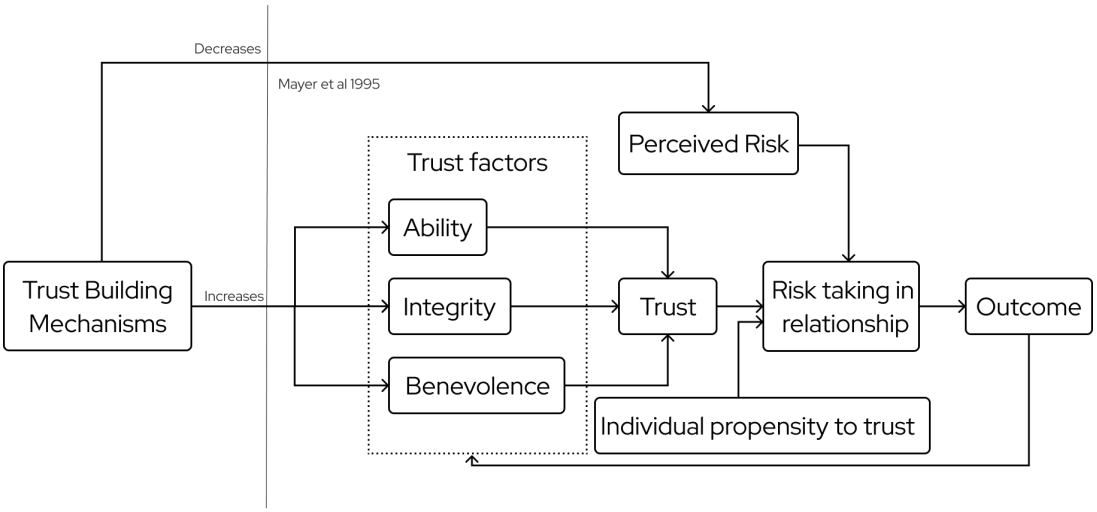

Figure 2.8: Extended conceptual framework based on Mayer et al. (1995)

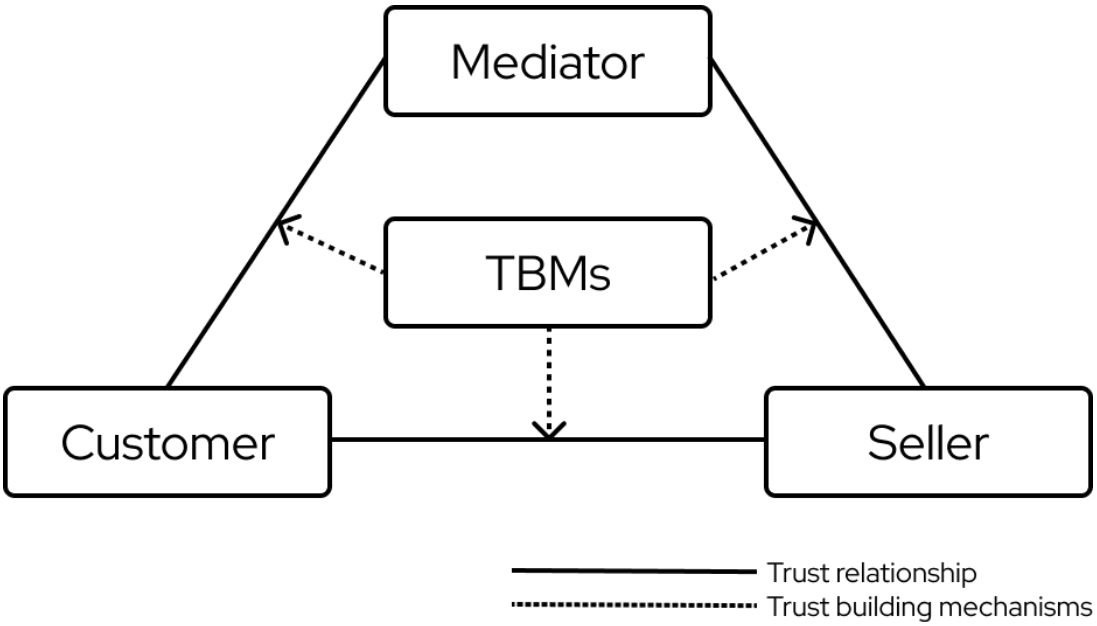

Figure 2.9: Triadic trusting relationships found on digital platforms

CHAPTER 3

Case Description

The research performed in this project is a qualitative case study. In it, we study the workings of two digital labour platforms operating within the Norwegian IT consulting sector: BrainBase and Folq. We perform data generation through interviews with both consultants (i.e. workers) and platform owners on both platforms. A supplemental document analysis of the internally and externally available parts of the platform web sites, along with example contracts governing relations between both platforms, consultants and customers are also conducted. The two data sources are combined in the thematic analysis in the following chapter.

3.1 About the Platforms

Before continuing, we first need to establish the similarities and differences in the companies that cooperated with us in this case study. This study does not pay particular attention to worker satisfaction or aim to critique aspects of the platform, so we will not compare and contrast the platforms along those lines. This section is merely to present the platforms, and how they differ in terms of organisation, what they offer their customers and workers and what resources they collect and manage to be able to offer these services.

3.1.1 BrainBase

BrainBase is a consulting platform where consultants can register an account and upload their CV and other information. Companies can add projects for consultants to apply to or directly contact the consultants. The company was founded in 2017. The network of workers that forms the core of the company was already active the previous year. As the company state in their

statutory purpose:

> *"To help independent consultants and companies that need assistance from external consultants to find each other. To convey assignments directly between consumer and producer, without costly mediators."* (BrainBase (2017))

BrainBase's focus is on software development, and testing. The platform has a narrower focus than that of the other platform in the case study. BrainBase also has an internal communication system where member consultants can speak with each other, and the platform owners and information about projects are posted. BrainBase has two payment models: the consultant and the customer have a direct contract, and the consultants themselves passes on the cut to the platform. In the other model the platform works as a mediator in establishing the contract, collects payment from the customer and pays the consultant, similarly to an ordinary consultancy brokerage firm. Of the two, BrainBase recommends the first. In either case, the platform takes 3% of the contract sum in payment.

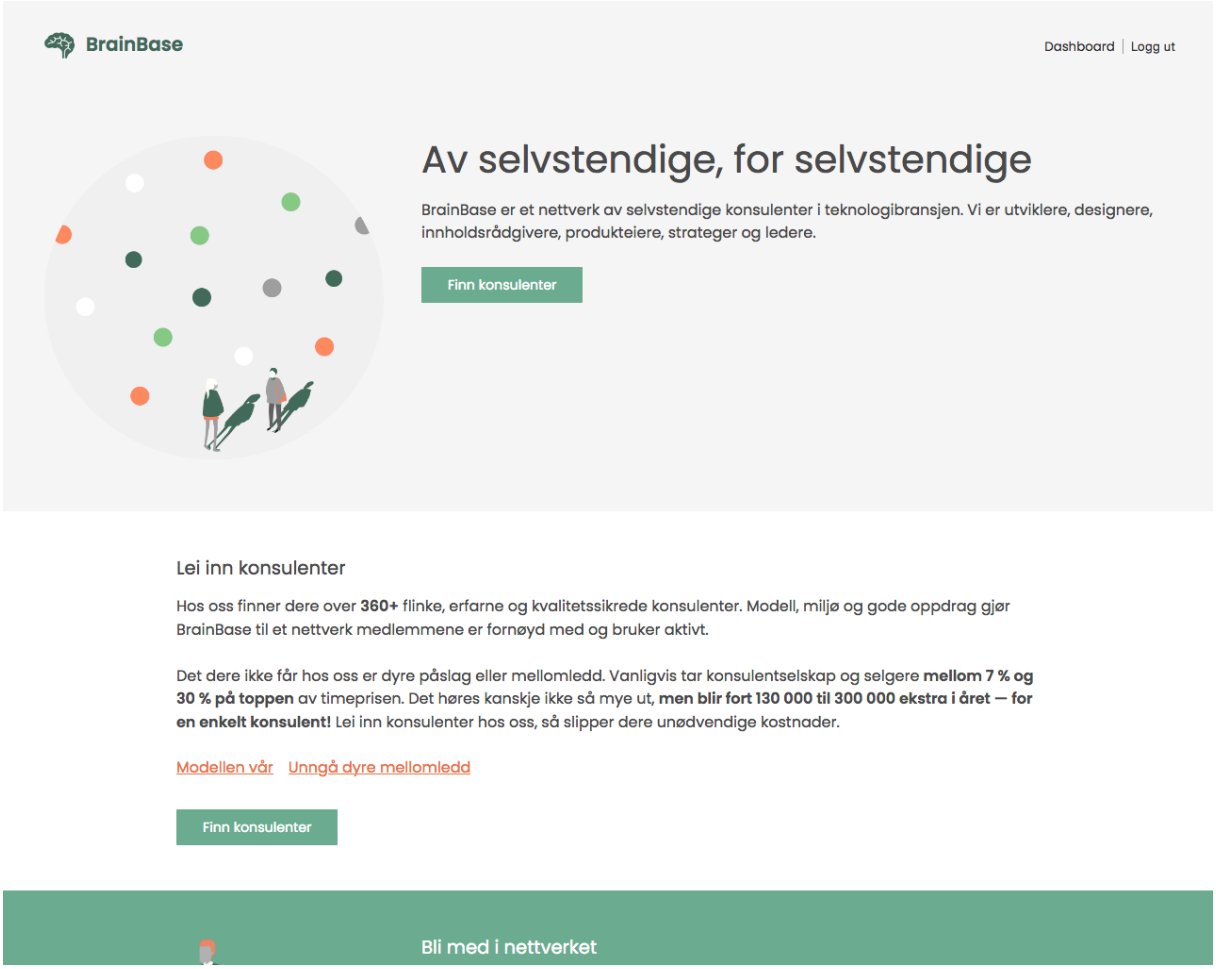

Figure 3.1: Front page of the BrainBase website

3.1.2 Folq

Folq is a platform for independent consultants and smaller companies, also founded in 2017. It offers consultancy services within the realms of design, technology, testing, project management and business consulting - a much broader set of areas than that of the other platform. Folq also allows consultants to register on the platform, and if they pass the qualification process, they get consultant accounts. Member consultants enjoy access to an internal communication system with other consultants and platform owners, and where some information about projects is posted. In-depth information is posted on the platform's website. Folq has a single payment model: the platform works as a mediator in establishing the contract, collects payment from the customer and pays the consultant, similarly to an ordinary consultancy brokerage firm. Folq takes a 7% cut of the contract sum for the first six months a consultant works through them, 6% the second 6 months, and 5% after a year.

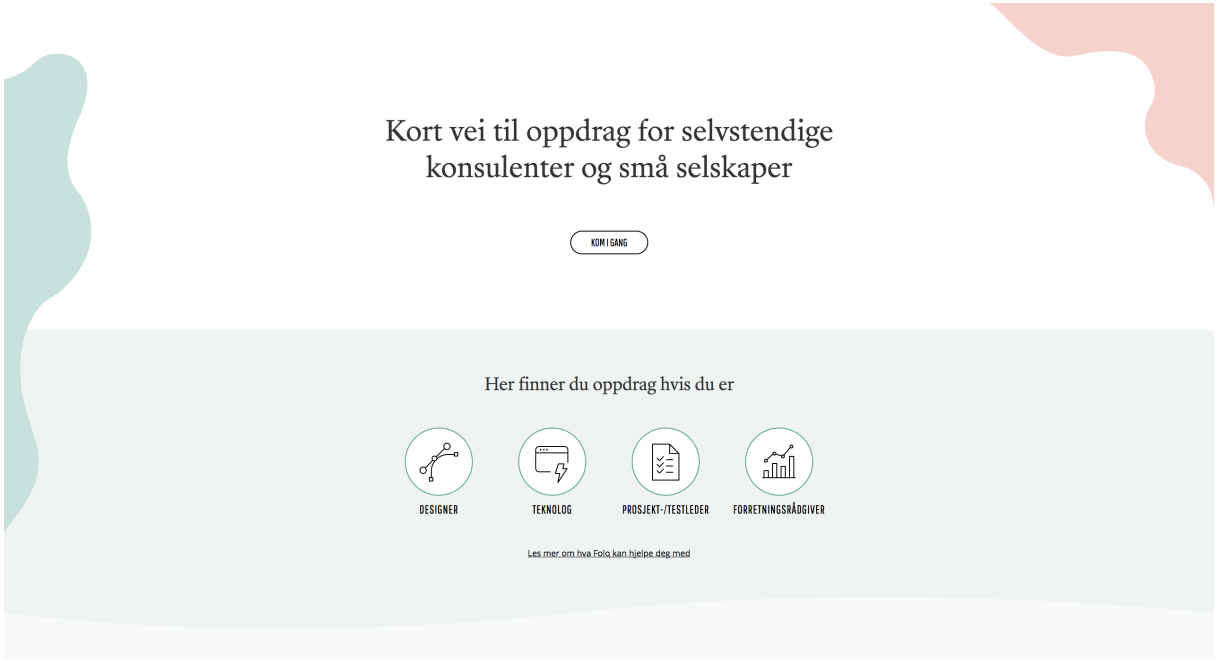

Figure 3.2: Front page of the Folq website

3.1.3 Similarities

Both companies offer services that revolve around their platforms, where consultants register to post their CVs and look for projects, and where companies register to post projects and look for consultants. The platforms then both perform some matching between consultants and companies to suggest matchups, and either the consultants or the companies can initiate contact with the other party. Usually, a meeting is then held to discuss the project, and if there is a match, a set of contracts are drawn up and signed, and the task starts. Both companies also have an internal

communication system where consultants can chat with each other and the platform owners. In essence, a place for the "community" to keep in touch with each other and ask questions, chat about work or other things. The platforms both have regular community-building events where both member consultants and externals can participate. Both companies pride themselves on being more transparent on price and offered services than traditional consultancy brokerage firms, as well as taking a lower cut.

3.1.4 Differences

Although there are many similarities between the platforms, there are also some differences. Folq takes a higher cut of contract sums than BrainBase does. In return, they also offer more services to member consultants. Despite this difference, both take a significantly lower cut than most consultancy brokerage firms, which BrainBase claim on their website to be between 7 and 30% (seen in bold text in Figure 3.1, albeit in Norwegian). There is also some difference in their payment models. BrainBase mainly offers a model where the consultant contracts directly with the customer, and pays the cut to the platform themselves, but can also function as a mediator. Folq offers only the mediator approach, where the consultant bills Folq, and the platform adds the cut and then bills the customer. Finally, BrainBase offers consultancy within a smaller area of competences than Folq, mainly focusing on software development and testing.

Another key difference is that BrainBase has no full-time employees, whereas Folq has a development team that works on the platform, as well as a sales department and an administrative core. According to the interviews with the CEO of the company, their statutory purpose is research and development of digital solutions (Folq, 2017).

CHAPTER 4

Method

In this section, we introduce and explain the research method used for data generation and analysis in this articles' case study. We also present the research objectives and the research questions for the study.

The method constructed for this interview is inspired by Glöss et al. (2016), who conducted semi-structured interviews with several kinds of workers on Uber and other, regular taxi businesses. In the same manner, we will conduct semi-structured interviews with labourers on several labour platforms operating in the Norwegian IT sector. With a focus on consulting, this study look at digital labour that requires a degree of education and previous experiences. Using Figure 2.5, this places the labour in this study in the lower quadrants. Document analysis of the website and other documents that workers make use of while working through the platforms will also be analysed to ground the research more in computer sciences studies.

4.1 Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to discover what, if any, mechanisms generate trust between workers and labour platforms. The data will be analysed inductively, i.e. without making assumptions about what builds trust on the platform. We do this to bridge this research with the previous research in Friestad and Opheim (2019a), where we analysed existing literature in a deductive manner using the trust frameworks in subsection 2.5.1. By using an inductive method in this research, we aim first to establish a solid foundation of trust research on labour platforms that can then later be unified with or differentiated from existing trust research. Our final goal is to discover whether the trust mechanisms identified on labour platforms match those found

on e-commerce platforms. The goals are further specified in 4.1.

ID	Research Objective
RO1	Discover trust building mechanisms in online labour platforms
RO2	Discover how sellers of services on the platforms experience trust building mechanisms
RO3	Bridge the research done in this study to previous trust research

Table 4.1: Overview of research objectives

4.2 Research Questions

Based on the objectives listed in 4.1, the following research questions were formulated: RQ1 revolves around discovering what mechanisms on and surrounding online labour platforms generate trust. Looking at surrounding mechanisms is also essential, as many platforms use third-party tools and software as part of their infrastructure. A sub-question RQ1.1 focuses on bridging the gap done in this research with earlier trust research on e-commerce. We do not assume whether or not such a link to earlier research exists, and this is therefore well suited as a research question.

To further link this study to previous research, RQ2 asks how identified trust building mechanisms (TBMs) in this study relate to the trust factors identified in Mayer et al. (1995). As a majority of the papers reviewed in Friestad and Opheim (2019a) used either Mayer et al. (1995) or McKnight and Chervany (1996) as their basis for defining trust, doing the same in this study will make it easier to relate to earlier research, and give the study a solid foundation in trust literature.

Finally, we believe it important to find how the users who interact with the labour platforms and its surrounding tools experience and respond to these TBMs. RQ3, therefore, focuses on understanding how users respond to different types of TBMs and whether there are any similarities or trends across different platforms.

ID	Research Question
RQ1	What mechanisms that exist on or immediately related to digital labour platforms generate trust between workers and platform owners?
RQ1.1	How do these mechanisms relate to TBMs in earlier research?
RQ2	Which trust factors do these mechanisms relate to?
RQ3	How do service providers on labour platforms respond to different TBMs?

Table 4.2: Overview of research questions

4.3 Data Generation and Analysis

For this case study, we used two main methods of data generation: semi-structured interviews with both workers and platform owners, and an analysis of relevant documents from those same platforms. We use thematic analysis to find themes among the findings from interviews, and compare these with findings from the documents.

4.3.1 Interviews

We conducted Semi-structured interviews with both workers and platform owners. We had little knowledge of how these platforms functioned, and so we aimed to inductively find out through exploring both the concrete and emotional aspects of working with and through the platform.

The interviews with workers consisted of two into two parts: The first part was a more structured interview which mostly concerned the particular aspects of a regular working day. The purpose of this section was to inductively discover how the workers interact with the various digital tools offered by the platform, as well as any tools used by personal initiative. The latter part of the interview was more loosely structured. The purpose of this section was — through follow-up questions on statements from the first part of the interview — to discover how the workers experienced TBMs that they have mentioned, and to glean how those mechanisms either decrease perceived risk or increase the workers' perception of the trust factors from Figure 2.8. This section attempted to uncover the workers' subjective perceptions of their relationship with the platform and their peers on it. The complete interview guides are found in Appendix A.

Interviews with platforms owners were conducted in parallel with interviews of the platform workers on the different case platforms. The goal of these interviews was to see if the workers perceptions on the platforms aligned with the platform owners. As trust relationships are often

mutual, it was deemed relevant and in the interest of the research questions and objectives of this study. These interviews also served to supplement the document analysis to understand better the purpose behind the features implemented on the platform. In short, the interviews with the platform owners were to support further and to provide context for the other data generated in the study. The data from these interviews were analysed using the same method in subsection 4.3.2. The interview guide for these interviews also followed a similar semi-structured form. The guide can be seen in Appendix B.

Also, an opportunity presented itself to interview a worker who had initially started to work with one of the case companies, but decided instead to work for a more traditional company in the same sector. We decided to take this opportunity to better compare and contrast their thoughts around risks, boons and other factors with those who did decide to work through the platforms.

The findings from the interviews served as a context in which we could explore the documents in the document analysis explained below. The document analysis thus functioned as a tool for iterative corroboration, generalising, expanding or specification upon these findings.

4.3.2 Thematic Analysis

Qualitative approaches to research are often criticised for lacking the same rigour found in quantitative studies (e.g. Gioia et al., 2013). To mitigate the lack of rigour, we used a thematic qualitative analysis in line with the guides provided in (Oates, 2005, p. 268) and Attride-Stirling (2001). The analysis was conducted iteratively with the first step consisting of coding the following steps:

- Segments that appear relevant to the research questions in Table 4.1.
- Segments that provide general descriptive information that helps to describe the research context.

We used thematic network analysis as described by Attride-Stirling (2001) to organise the identified items. This network analysis produced a set of trees, each organised around a global theme. The children of the global themes represent the organising and basic themes that formed the principal results and the basis for this paper's results and discussion.

In order to achieve this tree structure, Attride-Stirling (2001) describes a six-step method of analysis divided into three stages, as presented in Figure 4.1. We detail the steps further in the following sections.

Code Material

True to the exploratory nature of this case study, we devised the coding framework iteratively. Using the frameworks in Figure 2.9 and Figure 2.8, we coded each interview based on fragments of text that fit into these frameworks. As we built the coding framework during the initial analysis, multiple iterations of this stage were required to analyse all the transcripts fully. The analysis was done by marking meaningful chunks of text and assigning them to a node in NVIVO. We created the nodes iteratively as well.

Identify Themes

Theme identification was done by first grouping and refining the underlying themes of several nodes in NVIVO. With these themes in mind, the transcripts could be re-read in the frame of those themes, to identify more patterns and structures further. The re-reading and refinement produced a set of themes that spanned several documents and transcripts.

Construct Network

The procedure described above naturally created a baseline for the thematic network that could be refined further into basic and organising themes. This process of refining and combining themes produces a set of global themes, that formed the basis of the results. In the main, the goal of this process was to summarise themes in order to create broader, unifying themes that capture specific ideas of how trust building on labour platforms.

Describe and Explore Thematic Network

The thematic network produced the outline for the results and discussion. By using segments from the transcripts and documents, each theme could be described, explored and presented in the results. These results then formed the basis of the discussion, where we explored the underlying causes and relationships and how they relate to previous trust research, based on the emerging patterns identified in the results.

Summarising and Interpreting

After completing the analysis, a summary was written and presented to summarise the results of the analysis. Finally, we interpreted the results and discussed them, resulting in a discussion and conclusion grounded in the research questions, research objectives and the discussed results.

4.3.3 Document Analysis

The documents were treated as vessels of information (Oates, 2005, p. 239) and analysed in a qualitative matter using inductive thematic analysis. We constructed a method for performing this analysis using the guidelines proposed by Bowen (2009), as well as ideas proposed by Wood et al. (2020). The method comprised several steps, as detailed in Figure 4.2. The themes found were then compared with those in the thematic analysis of the interviews. We explain the steps of the document analysis in more detail below.

Establish A Corpus of Documents

The corpus of documents was established through cooperation with the platforms. Firstly, we analysed the publicly available parts of the platform, i.e. the parts that can be reached from the front page of the platform web site without logging in. Secondly, we asked the platform companies for access to their platforms, from a workers point of view, and analysed those parts. Thirdly, we asked each company and some of the consultants working through them for some example contracts and analysed the terms and structure within.

Categorise Documents

There was an initial prominent type of distinction in our corpus between web pages and contracts. However, we also endeavoured to examine whether a more specific or completely different type of distinctions would be more useful or appropriate in practice. We categorised each type of document categorised according to the five categories established by Bowen (2009), i.e.: (1) does the type of document provide data on the context within which participants operate; (2) does it suggest questions that need to be asked or situations that need to be observed; (3) does it provide supplementary data not encountered elsewhere; (4) does it provide a means of tracking change and development; (5) does it verify, corroborate or help triangulate evidence or findings from other sources.

Pre-Analysis Evaluation

Before performing the analysis itself, we wanted to give ourselves some context around the documents. It is prudent, according to (Bowen, 2009), to determine who produced the documents, the reason they were produced, and for whom the documents are meant. This context can be valuable to the findings from the analysis steps.

Inductive Analysis

In line with the thematic analysis, we analysed the corpus in several passes. The first pass was a skim of all documents, which allowed us to find meaningful passages that could be useful later, and gave an overview of the corpus as a whole. This pass was not entirely without context: as we used the findings from the interviews as a context through which to look for meaningful *in vivo* extracts.

The second pass was a more thorough reading of documents in the corpus, especially those with identified meaningful passages in line with the identified themes. This pass allowed us to more appropriately identify parts where there is a significant difference or similarity between any of the platforms and any other themes we found. Since the reason for the document analysis was to complement the analysis of the interviews, this analysis stopped short of creating thematic trees of height three, instead of stopping at the second layer of abstraction. We could then merge the themes into those found in the previous iterations of the thematic analysis of interviews, and see if there were any that did not fit into those themes.

Post-Analysis Evaluation

After we performed the second pass of analysis, we were able to answer more analytical questions about the documents in the corpus. In this step, we assessed the completeness of each document, as described by Bowen (2009). We could also evaluate the document as *" social actors in their own right, interacting with other human and non-human [sic] actors to both mirror and generate social reality. (...) influencing human behaviour and even identity - for example, in constructions of ethnicity or gender"* (Wood et al., 2020, p. 459). Additionally, we were able to accurately assess how relevant the documents are to our research objectives and purpose. Finally, we re-evaluated why the documents were produced and to whom they are aimed.

4.3.4 Combining Document Analysis and Interviews

The primary purpose of the document analysis was to ground the interviews in the tangible interfaces and documents that the workers interact with when working. The results of the document analysis served to support the themes in the thematic network to better relate the findings to TBMs that exist on the platforms. This relation is vital to our research, as the objective of this study is to bridge this research back to previous trust research. Therefore, we aimed to use the documents as this bridge between existing research and this study, as this was the common denominator between labour platforms and e-commerce platforms, as in both cases the end-user or worker interact with an interface.

4.4 Recruitment

Recruitment of case study platforms was done in an exploratory manner (Yin, 2013). We established contact with the first platform company through our supervisor. We were able to interview two consultants from the platform, one of which pointed us in the direction of a second platform company. We established contact with that company as well, and they helped us find interviewees from their platform. In these interviews, we were pointed towards several other consultant brokerage firms and platforms. However, due to time constraints and signs of already diminishing returns with two platforms, we elected not to include more companies. The companies provided volunteers for interviews with labourers and the platform owners themselves. They also gave temporary access to several digital tools relevant to the workers.

In the early parts of the recruitment phase of this study, the world was hit with a pandemic (WHO, 2020). The SARS-CoV-2 virus forced most countries in the world to shut down a majority of their economic activity and enforce social distancing for several months in the spring and early summer of 2020, which made recruitment significantly harder. The pandemic has resulted in fewer interviews than we would initially have liked.

4.4.1 Theoretical Saturation

When performing qualitative research in an exploratory or grounded manner, one of the prime principles is that of *saturation*. Saturation has been described in many ways, several of which are noted and discussed by (Saunders et al., 2018). The first two they list are as follows: *the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data. There are mounting instances of the same codes, but no new ones* (Urquhart, 2012); "[the point where] additional data do not lead to any new emergent themes" (Given, 2015). In other words, one should gather data until new data does not impart much new knowledge. It notes that saturation should not be regarded as an event, but as a process (Saunders et al., 2018). Through the exploratory, iterative research approach described earlier; we should, after some amount of interviews, see a diminish in return. That is, each new interview imparts sharply diminishing returns in terms of new insights, and increasingly repeats findings of the earlier interviews. This will, then, be a sign that we are nearing saturation in our data and analysis.

For each of the two platforms, we ended up interviewing one or two platform owners, and two or three labourers associated with the respective platforms. This resulted in a total of eight interviews - five with consultants and three with platform owners - on the two platforms combined. We noticed sharply diminishing returns in new findings while analysing the last half of

the interviews, with almost no new findings in the final interviews with consultants and platform owners. This result gave us some confidence that we had reached theoretical saturation, as described in subsection 4.4.1, despite COVID-19-related difficulties in recruitment as described in section 4.4.

Analysis Stage A: Reduction or Breakdown of Text

1. **Code Material**
   (a) Devise a coding framework
   (b) Dissect text into text segments using a coding framework
2. **Identify themes**
   (a) Abstract themes from coded text segments
   (b) Refine themes
3. **Construct Thematic Networks**
   (a) Arrange themes
   (b) Select basic themes
   (c) Rearrange into organising themes
   (d) Deduce global themes
   (e) Illustrate as thematic network(s)
   (f) Verify and refine the network(s)

Analysis Stage B: Exploration of Text

4. **Describe and explore thematic network**
   (a) Describe the network
   (b) Explore the network
5. **Summarise thematic network**

Analysis Stage C: Integration of Exploration

6. **Interpret patterns**

Figure 4.1: Stages of thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001)

1. Establish a corpus of documents
2. Categorise the possible uses of each type of document
3. Pre-Analysis Evaluation
4. Inductive Analysis
5. Post-Analysis Evaluation

Figure 4.2: Method of document analysis

CHAPTER 5

Results

From the interviews and the subsequent thematic analysis, we identified five global themes. In this section, we will describe these findings further and back them up with quotes from the interviews with the workers and the platform-owners, and further support the results with documents wherever possible. For a complete overview of the identified themes, see Table 5.1.

- **Ease of adoption by workers** - Easy to get started on the platforms.
- **Connecting workers with customers** - The platforms offers the same quality in their service as a traditional firm would
- **Network of Peers** - facilitating a network of peers creates a strong connection to a specific platform
- **Transparency** - Transparency and honesty in the stated goals of the platform, as well as in its internal workings
- **Low risks** - Few perceived risks and little to no new risks introduced by the platform

5.1 Ease of Adoption by Workers

Before looking at trust building when workers are on a platform, it is also interesting to note the reasons why workers consider the option in the first place. Perhaps the most important aspect of adopting work on labour platforms is that based on the interviews, this way of working is entirely voluntary. None of the workers interviewed joined the platform due to unemployment or having difficulty finding a task through their networks.

Global Themes	Organising Themes	Basic Themes
Ease of Adoption by Workers	Low Risk of Entry	No Large Commitment for Workers
		Low Cut
		Ease of Use
		Voluntary to Join the Platform
	Autonomy	Fits Existing Working Arrangements
		Not Exclusive
Connecting Workers With Customers	Competent Platform Owners	Platforms Are A Safe Mediator
		Platforms Are A Transparent Mediator
		Platform Owners Are Peers
		Alignment of Interests
		Flexibility
	Automation	Use of Technology to Assist in Matchmaking
		Streamline Clerical Processes
		The Platforms Are Cost Efficient
	PWSQ and Information	Easy Access to Customers
		Low Barrier for Contact
Network of Peers	Social Bonds	Loneliness As An Independent
		Not Part of the Company Where Task Is Done
		Network As A Union
	Knowledge Sharing	Network of Consultants in Similar Situation
		Meet Ups
		Resources from Platform
		Size
	Easy to Get in Contact with Platform	Platform Owners Are Peers
		Availability of Platform Owners
Transparency	Insight Into Governance	Open Flow of Information in Negotiations
		Clear Price Model
		Insight on Platform
	Can Affect Governance	Ownership of Platform
		User Participation
		Feedback
Low Risk	Risks on the Platform	Not many Interactions on Platform
		Availability of Humans to Talk to
		Information Asymmetry
		Concern about Growth And Scalability
	Risks of Being Independent	Not Learning
		Not Getting Tasks

Table 5.1: Overview of identified themes

5.1.1 Low Cost to the Worker

The amount a task or assignment pays is one of the primary reasons why workers choose to become independent. The way consultancy and brokerage firms, platform and otherwise earn their money is through taking a cut of the payment the worker receive from the customer. One of the main selling points of a platform, and something that features prominently on the front pages of both platforms in the case study, is that the platforms take a much lower cut than what a more traditional firm would. For reference, see Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2. The platforms offer these prices while still being able to provide the critical service of getting customers. These sentiments were noted by the executives at BrainBase and Folq when asked what the platforms can offer the workers:

> (I) *"The best model for consultants, we think, in the form of taking a minimal cut, really as little as possible while still being able to keep running the platform."*

> (II) *"It is that we secure good access to buying customers. (...) Folq is a showcase for [the consultants], but that is not worth much if there are no customers to look at them. So we have a constant focus on recruiting new customers and focus on creating mechanisms that trigger the customers to become active and take contact, and become active in the form of offering assignments."*

The same sentiment is also expressed by several of the workers interviewed. Some also expressed distrust or being less satisfied with how more conventional firms did their practice:

> (III) *"So I asked my boss [in a former job] for a higher salary, and he said that was impossible, so I left and started on my own. And now I make much more money, more than what I asked for in the [previous] job."*

> (IV) *"If you get a task [on the platform], then that is better. And those... those broker-type people are a hopeless gang. It is not very fun to have to deal with them. It is a bit of a clown hour with people who have no grasp of anything that broker consultants, it is more of a necessary evil."*

> (V) *"(...) they have a lower cut, so that it was okay to try [BrainBase] first"*

The consequences and reasons for why platforms take lower cuts compared to more traditional firms will be presented in further detail in the later sections of this chapter, as they play a key part of several of the major themes identified.

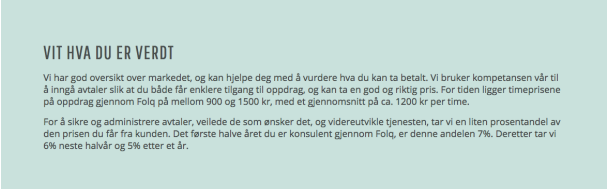

Figure 5.1: Body text from website that explains how much Folq takes as a cut

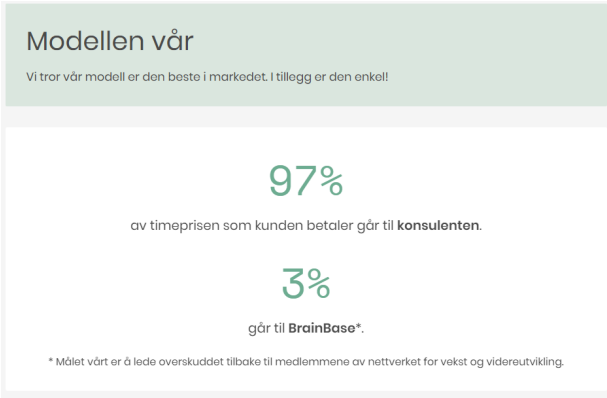

Figure 5.2: Text from website that explains how much BrainBase takes as a cut

5.1.2 Already Self-Employed

Several of the workers interviewed were already independent consultants before they started to work on their adopted labour platform. According to the co-founder of BrainBase, nearly all of the workers on the platform are independent consultants with prior experience in the field, as stated when discussing the value proposition of their platform to their customers:

> (VI) *"[We offer] talented and experienced consultants, often people who have worked a while and built up experience and who want to work, (...) they are often very engaged because they are self-employed and hence depend on doing the best that they can do in order have a chance of survival."*

As will be discussed in section 5.5, most of the risks associated with working on a labour platform are similar to those faced as an independent consultant. When being self-employed, an important part of the work done is to acquire new contracts and assignments from new or repeat customers. As we will see in section 5.2, this is essentially the main service labour platforms offer their labourers, and also a service that many labourers welcome and are willing to pay for. The workers in general stated that they did not experience many new risks that where exclusive to working through the platform.

5.1.3 Autonomy

Compared to working for traditional firms, the labour platforms in this case study allow for much greater autonomy in the day-to-day work of the labourers active on the platforms. This autonomy mostly results from the fact that the workers are independent contractors and that the platform does not put many restrictions on the day-to-day. The BrainBase Co-Founder described the platform's relationship with their workers like this:

> (VII) *"That is a quite complex area, since we are in reality an umbrella over several independent consultants, so it is really the consultants themselves... they run their own company because they wish to be independent, so we do not get involved in how they (...) run their own store, so to speak. But what we really do is provide options and choices to be able to perform even better, or have it even better as independent consultants."*

This is also mirrored by one of the workers on the BrainBase platform when asked why he chose to work on a platform such as BrainBase instead of a more traditional firm:

> (VIII) *"So when you feel like you no longer need the stability that comes with a traditional consultancy firm, then you can just as well start on your own and cooperate with others in a similar situation."*

The same sentiment was also expressed by a worker on the Folq platform, when asked how the platform facilitates their work. More or less the same sentiment was mirrored by all of the workers on the same question:

> (IX) *"In a way, they don't really facilitate me doing my job at all. Because they focus on how I am going to find a job, or switch jobs, and that whole bit. The way it is now they really facilitate very little in the day-to-day."*

We find this autonomy in several stages when workers interact with the platform. As already seen, the platform does not interfere much in how the worker does the actual work.

Joining a platform is more or less voluntary, as there are many other options for employment in the labour market. When joining up, the workers do not need to be exclusive to the platform as an employer either. The primary explanation for this is that the labourers are mainly looking for assignments, rather than finding a single platform to approximate an employer. As stated by a worker on Folq:

(X) *"I do not think that Folq can be your one go to place and that they will take great care of you for ever with regards to assignments. So as an independent consultant you need to pay attention on all the five or six large Norwegian platforms, the way I see it. If you want the good assignments.*

"There is no exclusivity. I go to all of them. (...) Because I hunt the assignments, not necessarily the platforms.

"When the end of my assignment comes up I am going to fan out quite widely, that is, not only through Folq, but also directly to contacts and other networks."

This lack of exclusivity is something that the platforms understand and do not intentionally interfere with. The platforms instead work to get exclusive assignments by winning contracts with customers that consultants are interested in working on. As stated by an executive at Folq:

(XI) *"Many of the consultants, by far most of them, are registered with other brokers who obviously are our competitors. If we can achieve exclusivity with many customers, (...) that will make the consultants think: 'okay, but this is where we must be, it is Folq that has the good contracts'."*

To sum up, there are many reasons for choosing to start working through labour platforms, most centred around getting a more significant cut from the pay for their work, and more autonomy in how the workers can manage their workday. The key point regarding the autonomy of work, however, is the freedom and flexibility that the workers have. The workers choose this arrangement and what platforms to work with, if any, rather than having it be their only avenue for finding work. We explore this in greater detail in the discussion in chapter 6.

5.2 Connecting Workers with Customers

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most substantial concern for the workers is the platforms ability to acquire new customers and connect with the consultants, as put from these two workers on the BrainBase platform:

(XII) *"Getting customers is what is make or break. If they help with that then that is 95% [of the job done]."*

(XIII) *"I get my payments on time, that is the important thing."*

From the data, we find three main models for how this process is done on the two platforms. Both platforms in this case study offer one or several of these processes, but each platform have

particular implementations and details that make them unique. Most of these implementation details did not come up in the interviews and turned out in the document analysis to have little variance with regards to our research objectives. As this paper is interested in the workers' responses to these processes, we will avoid discussing details about applications and underlying systems that are not visible to the workers. Nevertheless, the main models for finding wore are:

- Customer adds tasks description on platform, and it shows up in a feed of available assignments, workers can then apply for the jobs and engage in a potential hiring process.
- Customer contacts workers directly and either offers them the job or engage in an interview process.
- Workers leverage their own network to find jobs on their own and either offer the task on the platform or recommend other platform workers directly, through the mechanisms of the platform.

The first method was noted as the more traditional way of conducting business on a digital platform. In such a setting, the labour platform acts more as a feed or wall where the labourers can look up or search for tasks and apply for them. Using Figure 2.9, we find little interaction between seller and customer directly, at least in the initial search process. The platform here takes the role of a broker and mediates the contact between the two parts.

The second process, where a customer directly contacts the labourer, seems to be the preferred method of establishing content and getting assignments on the platforms, and is popular among consultants:

> (XIV) *"I was actually very positive to being contacted by the customer, for that is a bit 'too good to be true'."*

It is also something desired by the platform owners, as stated by the co-founder of BrainBase:

> (XV) *"This is the classic intermediary position [in the industry] which we try to challenge because of administrative costs it takes a lot in terms of time and capacity. I do not know if you have looked at the platform, but our platform have no employees, we are all independent consultants on the side of running the platform. This means we need to spend our time wisley."*

In such a setting, the platform changes its relationship from a traditional broker to more of a facilitator. This process shifts the responsibility of matching from the worker and platform over

to the customer. In order to justify this change for the customers, the platforms spend resources in improving the ease of use of finding suitable workers. Matching customers with workers is a challenge that the two platforms have different strategies for solving. However, both platforms emphasise the use of robust search algorithms rather than humans for the process.

While this removes some of the responsibility of the platforms, they are still often involved in contract management and negotiations. Some workers find this part of the platforms' involvement to provide security and also time-saving since they do not have to create or negotiate the finer points of a contract with a customer. The security is also supported by both platforms tending to base their contracts on the nationally standardised Norwegian contract for selling consultancy services, called "SSA-B Enkel"(Difi, 2015). As one worker described the experience with the contract handling on the Folq platform:

> (XVI) *"(...) instead of me having to negotiate a contract or that the customer created and sent me one, Folq made one based on a standard template for contracts, which went to both parties and which we just had to sign, so that was very practical for both me and the customer that we could both just sign, after we had agreed on price and scope."*

The final way of communicating tasks over the platform was one unique to BrainBase, where workers could leverage their networks and offer tasks through the platform and take part in a profit-sharing scheme with the platform. This way was interesting because it highlights the need for reciprocal trust on the platform, rather than the worker merely having to trust in the platform. As a worker on the platform, involved in such a scheme, responded after hearing the goals and RQs of this study:

> (XVII) *"(...) but I could have easily just gone behind their back in that case, but when one actively demonstrates that one is honest, I think that is good way of building trust. It is a very interesting question, it certainly is very important for BrainBase. If they can trust the consultants, they can save vast amounts of time, money and resources, if they do not have to pay attention to or handle billing and such."*

5.2.1 Competent Platform Owners

In general, the people who run the platform enjoy the confidence of workers interviewed. Through the network, we find several reasons that create this general sentiment. One of the key reasons for this is that the workers and platform owners in this case study have similar

background and experiences. As this point is more important for later sections in the chapter, it will be further discussed in subsection 5.3.3. Another critical point is the platforms' transparency in negotiations and other processes. We discuss this in section 5.4. Finally, the platforms were also seen as a safe and professional mediator, while flexible enough to handle the workers particular needs.

Through their role as a mediator in the contract negotiations, the platforms provide a sense of security. As stated by a worker on Folq:

> (XVIII) *"I thought it was nice and time saving that they did [the contract negotiations], and maybe also reassuring in the sense that if the customer had drawn up a contract for me to sign, I would have had to think about: 'wow, what if the customer has written something in fine print that makes me worse off'. Meanwhile Folq is seen as a mediator which is on the side of both parties, so then I trust that everything is in order, when it goes through Folq. So both safety and time savings then."*

As seen, this security is established further in the contracts that both the platforms use, both platforms use a contract based on the standard "SSA-B Enkel" contract that is developed by the Norwegian government used for employing workers in the public sector in Norway (Difi, 2015).

There is also a general alignment and understanding between the workers on the platform and the platform owners. Both the platform and the platform owners when interviewed expressed similar expectations of the other party, and also what the other party expected of them. This alignment is presented in the examples below:

From the Folq executive, when asked about what expectations they had to the worker:

> (XIX) *"For us it is that they behave professionally and do a good job for the customer, and that they build good relations with the customer so that they want to continue with the assignment, if the consultant wants the same. That is the most important thing. I do not think we should have that many expectations either, that we should not demand too much of them."*

The last sentence express this alignment of expectations regarding the autonomy of the workers. We can also see the same sentiment of expectations from different workers on the Folq platform when asked how the distribution of tasks was between them and the platform. While not explicitly mentioned, the platform expects them to do their assignment as described from

these sentiments, but as we have already seen from other quotations we know the workers have their assignments as their top priority:

> (XX) *"They expect me to keep to the deadlines that are present for billing and time keeping, I think. And they probably also expect me to keep my date of availability updated, and outside of that they don't really have any expectations."*

And also the expectation that the workers have towards the platform, when asked how the platforms facilitated their work:

> (XXI) *"It feels to me that they are a sort of lead generator, but I do not feel that they facilitated me in the assignments themselves."*

In general, the workers did not express much need for feedback or assistance from the platforms themselves, and preferred to get feedback from the customers.

The platforms were also noted to be both flexible and professional in their interactions with workers. The interviews show that several of the workers either had some situation that was new to the platform, or had some special arrangement already in place due to other circumstances. This flexibility and professionalism were mostly associated with the onboarding of the workers and when acquiring tasks. Examples of this can be shown below. First, a worker explains their particular working arrangement with a customer, an arrangement which was preferred by the worker due to also working several other contracts in parallel with this one:

> (XXII) *"It is actually slightly uncommon from Folq, they usually do longer assignments, which last quite longer or are not time limited. But here was someone who only needed someone for (...) five weeks. So then it is a sort of time restriction and maximum number of hours which is a bit uncommon. But I think [Folq] also thought it was interesting to experiment with."*

And another worker when explaining the particulars of another contract:

> (XXIII) *"The way it was for me was a little special, because I was working at my customer at the time I became self-employed. And the customer explicitly stated that they wanted me to continue there, so it became a somewhat special arrangement. So, in a way, I have not followed an ordinary cycle, I have more or less continued being where I was, but through Folq, and that made fixing contracts and such quite straightforward."*

And when elaborating about why the worker found the process on the platform to be professional:

> (XXIV) *"The contract for the assignment with the customer (...) was built on the default contract of that company, and when I then asked to have that delivered they gave it to me at once. So I thought that was very professional in that it was transparent also. That they were so transparent in the process, while at the same time handling all the formalities in an efficient manner, and when I asked to have an index regulation as part of the contract that was solved in a smooth manner. So I think that was good, and is not a given that everyone has the benevolence and ability to solve that as quickly as [Folq] did."*

The professional aspects were also associated with the onboarding process and the way the platforms handled negotiations efficiently and transparently. The platforms use quality assurances when looking at potential new members to the platform. The different platforms have different processes. Folq has several stages in their qualification process, with first a screening interview and in the case of developers an online quiz, and then finally an interview with the platform's in-house staff. BrainBase has a somewhat more relaxed process than Folq, but there are still humans qualifying new members before allowing new workers in on the platform. This process was generally received well by workers, exemplified by one worker describing the onboarding process:

> (XXV) *"It was actually quite fine. I got a feeling it was very professional. I though it would a more classic process where you just found the platform on their website, created a profile and filled in a bit about yourself. But it was nice that it was more professional and that you did not just create a user, but you had to apply first."*

5.2.2 Automation And Streamlining of Tasks

An interesting finding was that several of the workers expressed gratitude for the automation done on the platforms, which goes slightly against other findings such as Califf et al. (2020), and which will be explored more in chapter 6. We have already seen how some of the workers prefer the model of putting customers and workers in direct contact. This process is assisted by algorithms and other features that make it easier for fitting customers and workers to find each other. There are other tasks, however, such as clerical and administrative tasks, that are also fully or partially automated. The platforms do this in order to keep the price of operation low as the platform and organisation scale to handle more customers and workers while being able to keep their cut low. As described by a worker on BrainBase:

(XXVI) *"(...) that those who work on the platform automate many things and think outside the box. It is about minimising what is called overhead, i.e., administrative tasks, and many people use for instance Fiken* for accounting, I don't use it, but if you use Fiken there is an interface or API that allows for partially automating accounting for instance, so you do not need an employed accountant. So I find that attitude and approach to this very inspiring."* *an accounting software

And when asked to elaborate further on why the worker found it inspiring:

(XXVII) *"One takes a lot for granted. After all, I do not send invoices to BrainBase. I upload my worked hours and my report on the platform, and then I just create an invoice for sake of my own accounting, and then, I do not know if the process is fully automated or semi-automated on their side, but an accounting record is nevertheless saved automatically with Fiken's API on their side, and then they send that either manually or automatically to the customer. But most companies do have a person that receives invoices and go through them and process them again, and that takes time. And here this time is removed."*

5.2.3 Access to Customers

Access to customers is, as discussed, the main selling point of the platforms to the workers. It is what most of the tools that the workers interact with revolve around. The interviews unveiled little to no grievances with the process of finding an exciting customer and getting in contact with them. One consultant noted that the platform could function as an extension of their own company:

(XXVIII) *"You can view a platform such as BrainBase as a place where [the consultant] outsources a part of their sales department, a part of their (...) PR department."*

Another interesting finding regarding this is that the initial information about a customer did not seem too important. As a worker on Folq stated regarding the subject:

(XXIX) *"My experience is that you look at the overarching description and often what you end up doing is in many ways defined by yourself, within certain boundaries, of course. So I see a [customer], often I will know a little bit about the place whose assignment it is, and if I see that it is from a place that I think is fun to work with, then the specific text isn't exactly the most important thing."*

One of the reasons for this is due to the ease of contact with the customers. Both platforms support messaging features that allow for direct contact with a customer that the worker found interesting or vice versa (Figure 5.3). Messaging makes contacting less formal, and the customers and workers can establish contact even if the result of that may not end up being a signed contract, as described by a worker on BrainBase:

> (XXX) *"I have been in talks with [some companies] and sent some messages back and forth, and it has varied who initiated the dialogue, but nothing has come of it because the timing has not been good."*

The workers often also have other sources of information, such as colleagues or someone with experience with a company, as stated by another worker from BrainBase:

> (XXXI) *"(...) and then I contacted people I know work there, and asked how it is [to work] in the company. Then I updated my resumé, uploaded it to the platform and wrote a personal letter. That does not go directly to the customer, because it has to, I don't know, it needs to be approved by the founders of BrainBase. Then I got an interview and I met the customer."*

Figure 5.3: Screenshot of the on-platform messaging system of BrainBase

5.3 Network of Peers on Platform

The people that make up the platform and surrounding network, and how those people communicated, was a recurring theme in the interviews. This global theme was formed from what

several workers and platform owners emphasised as crucial regarding the network and communication. Thus, not all findings here were equally emphasised in the interviews, and different workers had different levels of expectation for both themselves and others regarding communication and participation. In the following section, we present the different aspects of the network that were found to be in line with regards to the research questions.

Both of the platforms studied made use of the third-party communication and collaboration platform, Slack. Slack is a chat application which allows for accessible communication between people and groups in an organisation and communities. Slack is particularly popular in the IT sector and used by several firms in business as well as communities surrounding the field, such as open-source frameworks and libraries (Enlyft, 2020). Most of the interviews agreed that Slack was where a majority of the communication between themselves and other peers, as well as between themselves and platform owners took place. Both platforms also support messaging on the website, but the workers generally used this less for communication with peers.

5.3.1 Size and Word of Mouth

Tying into the topic of acquiring new tasks to offer on the platform, the size of the network associated with the platforms played a role in what tasks from what customers the platform could offer. A more extensive stock of consultants ready for assignments gives the platforms more leverage when negotiating with customers, and in general, will be able to offer more tasks on the platform since the platform is more attractive to customers. This, size created a positive feedback-loop which attracted more workers to the platform, which again allowed for more tasks to be offered on the platform. This sentiment is shared by both workers and platform owners, as stated by workers on both Folq and BrainBase:

> (XXXII) *"There is potential here. Especially with regards to what is called the platform economy."*
>
> (XXXIII) *"(...) but there is a bit of that classic platform economy where you sort of need consultants to get tasks, and you need tasks to get consultants in a sort of circular version."*
>
> (XXXIV) *"I think it is going very well. There are more projects, more assignments and more possibilities for work than what I initially thought. The network on BrainBase is growing quickly. So there is a potential, a large potential."*

It is interesting to note that while the size was seen as an essential factor in making the platform attractive for both workers and customers, the platform owners did not want growth at any cost.

So far, neither platform has performed much advertising at all, relying on word of mouth to grow their consultant base. The platforms also maintain strict QA-processes.

> (XXXV) *"We don't really [actively market]. Everyone coming has usually heard about us through someone else. So you could say that we market ourselves by doing good things for consultants, and consultants who are members of the network know this. We have a high degree of trust, we think, among the consultants [in the network], and that makes members of the network talk well about us to other people they meet that are also interested in becoming consultants. One example of that, (...) one i saw here the other day had heard about us in a bar while talking with another consultant, another had heard of us from a neighbour working in the same industry, and so on. So there are lots of different ways in, and we have felt that this kind of marketing is really the best kind of marketing you can get, when you talk about your product to others. So it is really much more valuable than us going around and making big advertisements, so we haven't done that, we haven't spent a dime on advertising."*

> (XXXVI) *"We have some outgoing marketing, very little, so really all our growth until February 2020 has primarily been based on word of mouth and networking effects. (...) So what happens is that a consultant hears about us from a friend, that's probably the most common case, and then they probably google and register on our website. Our website is quite sparse on information, but the information is designed so that they'll understand whether this is something that fits them."*

As we can see, both platforms regard this as a sufficient way to recruit new consultants that eventually get accepted on the platform. They also both have financial incentives for the consultants to actively recruit consultants to the platforms, although with some differences. Folq has a flat payout of 20 000 NOK per new consultant referred by an existing member that starts an assignment through the platform (see Figure 5.4). BrainBase, on the other hand, offers 1% (i.e. 1/3 of their cut) from projects performed by referrals to the referring member (see Figure 5.5).

5.3.2 Availability of Platform Owners

As already stated, both workers and the platforms' managers and owners are available on the communication channel used by the workers on the platform. This availability, as well as the platform owners' background related to the workers, were noted in several interviews

The need for personal contact with administrators or other individuals were still crucial for

Figure 5.4: Screenshot from Folq website, describing how current members can receive a payment for referring new members to the platform.

Figure 5.5: Screenshot from BrainBase website, describing ways they share income back with their community. * 1 out of 3% goes to the member that helps somebody else into an assignment; * Members can be paid to perform tasks for the platform; * Owners on the platform get paid dividends.

workers when discussing how they preferred to interact with the platforms, especially in the initial and final steps of a new contract negotiation with a customer. The workers experienced this part of the process of acquiring new work from the platform as the one most prone to friction and the need for communication with the platform was needed the most. Having the staff active on the same communication platform created a low barrier for contact, as these types of communication application, such as Slack, were often perceived as more informal. As stated by a worker on Folq:

> (XXXVII) *"(...) and maybe even more so than access to information, one has very easy access to [the platform owners], so if I have any questions they answer quickly. They are available both by mail, phone and Slack."*

And as stated by a worker on BrainBase:

> (XXXVIII) *"(...) but in practice one has relations with humans that are quite crucial, so what I try to do in any case, is that if I have doubts about something,*

whether something is okay or not, I will call and ask rather one time too many than one time too few."

5.3.3 Who the Platform Owners Are

Perhaps more interestingly, the background, vision and experiences of the people founding and managing the platform was something noted by the workers during several answers in the interview. Firstly, when discussing how they ended up choosing to work on the particular platform they were working on:

(XXXIX) *"(...) at that time we were occupied with how to get leads, and I was googling, and remembered (...) platforms, did some googling about that and ended up on Folq by coincidence. Because I have studied at NTNU*, so I knew a few of the people who worked there, so then I became very curious about it."* *Norwegian University of Science and Technology

(XL) *"In that way I came across Folq, when I was looking for different consultancy firms online for myself. And I knew, in a way, I saw where a couple of [the people behind Folq] had their background from, I have friends who have worked in [other Norwegian consultancy company] themselves. So through that... I simply found them online and then I looked around a bit and I saw who [the platform owners] were and then I could double check with a friend on what [Folq] was and such things. And that is how I came in contact with Folq."*

And a worker on BrainBase when asked to elaborate on why the platform gave him a good initial impression of the BrainBase platform:

(XLI) *"It is another type of company, it is more of a network than a brokerage firm, and the people [running it] have much more competency, or rather, the people behind BrainBase have a much higher level of competency, typically, compared to those who have brokers. I have an impression that the people who started BrainBase are experienced consultants, and not just junior salespeople and such."*

Here we see two different perspectives on background: one being a peer from the same school, and another that the owners have the same background in the field as the workers.

5.3.4 Support in the Network

One of the major differences between traditional employers and labour platforms is the lack of structures that surrounds social interactions with employers and peers and knowledge sharing. As stated by one of the executives at Folq:

(XLII) *"One thing the consultancy firms are very good at is exactly building up a social and professional community. So that is something that you give up when you decide to go independent, so we try to kind of make up for what you lose like that. It is of course a little more loose with us, but we facilitate meeting people to talk a bit about work and have a beer."*

Social isolation and loneliness is a risk when taking up work as an independent consultants on labour platforms. As stated by one of the labourers on BrainBase:

(XLIII) *"It is more lonely, I would say, to work as an independent consultant, because... this assignment now is of a sort where it is just me and my one colleague each doing our own thing, so to speak, because we have different areas of knowledge. And then the customer is not very technical. I have had much more feedback on the code I write, for instance, in earlier projects."*

Both platforms try to mitigate this by arranging for social events for their workers to participate. These are advertised through the channels of the platforms, either on-platform (see Figure 5.6), on Slack, or elsewhere. We found mixed results regarding whether or not the workers experience trust building through social interactions and experiences facilitated by the platform. For instnace, one worker found them so important that he chose not to take up work on the platform as an independent but rather found a small consultancy firm to work in instead. As stated by the worker:

(XLIV) *"The reason I chose to quit being an independent consultant now is because the entire time I have had a plan about, I think one needs to be a part of something bigger. And then you can decide what that 'bigger' is, be it a network or a company. (...) So I do not get much utility from the other consultants, with helping me get new assignments, but in a way you get that if you are employed in a company, and there is a much larger interest in helping each other, and you need each others' networks to get hold of assignments, too. And I am a social animal and in that regard I want colleagues with whom I can have a good time. And [because of that] it made sense for me to be employed [in a company] instead."*

While another who did work through the platform said they were nice, but that he did not feel that they would ever be able to replace what a traditional, brick-and-mortar company could offer:

(XLV) *"The people who are on the platform give a certain social network, so that you can go out for a beer on Fridays and stuff like that. And I would like to say*

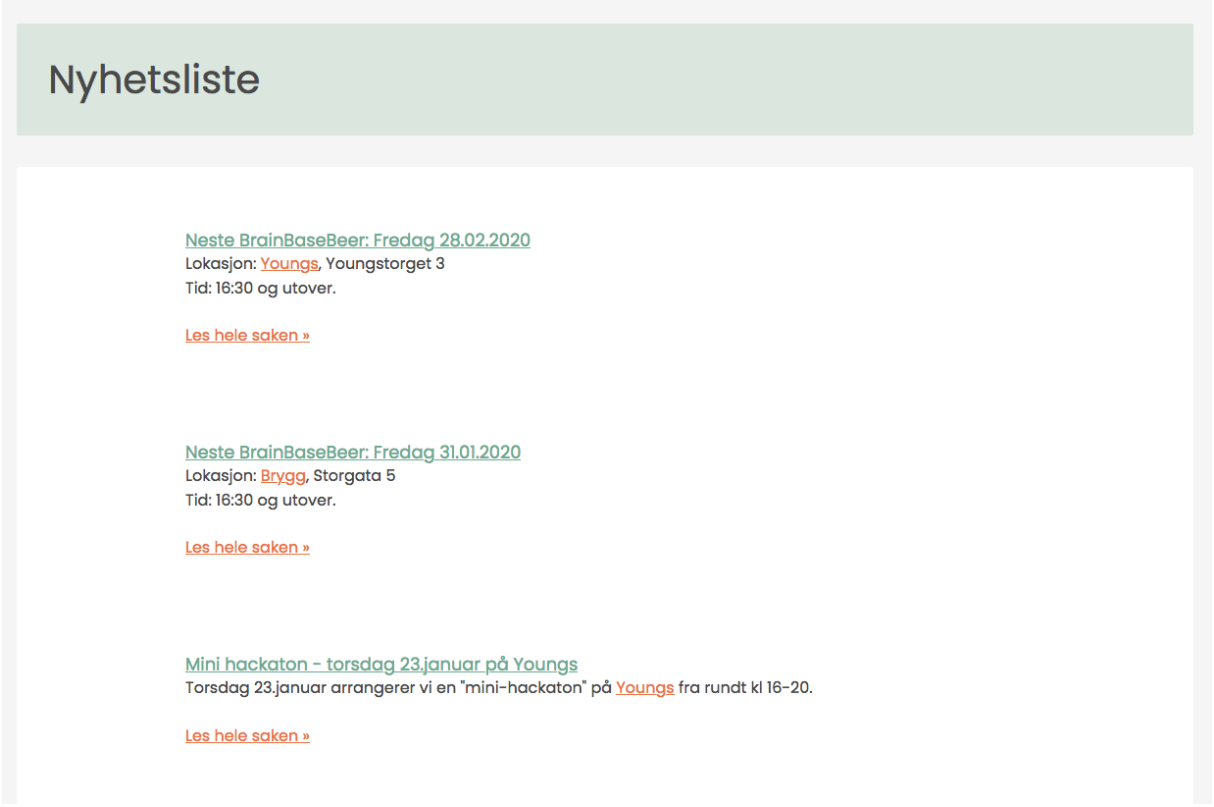

Figure 5.6: Screenshot of news feed on BrainBase, advertising internal social events

> *that is fine, but it is not as good in practice as in theory, because some of what you miss as a consultant is the social unity in the work place from being a part of team and such. It does vary from customer to customer, but in general you will not become as much a part of a team as a permanent employee would. But then, it is not like such a consultancy network can quite make up for that, because only meeting someone one day a month, for instance, for a Friday afternoon beer, is obviously not the same as meeting someone you work with every day for an afternoon beer. So you do not have those shared experiences of the work and such to talk about and which made you familiar with them and such, so it is a nice social gathering, men compared to hanging out with friends or spending time on some sort of hobby, I do not really think it has that much going for it."*

On the other hand, other workers found that the network was better both with regards to social interactions and knowledge sharing. As stated by a worker on BrainBase:

> (XLVI) *"In our field we aren't unionised, so then there is a need to organise ourselves, and that can be done through these kinds of organisations to convey your own job."*

And from the same interview:

(XLVII) *"I know there have been a couple of discussions regarding possibly buying [real estate] and others wanting offices where they [can] work together, and then you get ripple effects that affect other areas too. That is cool to work with."*

And from a worker on Folq:

(XLVIII) *"I actually think it is great. I think it is cool that [Folq] work to be a gathering place for [workers]. So I think it is very good, I have been to a couple of meets-ups, and it has both educational and I got to meet people."*

Also, the amount of active users varies. Not all members are active all the time. The interviews from both platform owners and workers confirm this. Rough estimates on the engagement for BrainBase on Slack, provided by the platform owner during the interview, showed that about 30% of the networks participators were active in the Slack channel. Moreover, several of the workers interviewed described themselves as "passive members" of the network, where they would look at messages now and then, but not interact particularity with the rest of the network. This distinction between passive and active members and the impact it has on trust building through social constructs on the platform will be discussed more in chapter 6.

5.3.5 Knowledge Sharing

As we have seen, there is a link between social interactions and learning on the platforms. One of the reasons for this is that knowledge sharing and learning events are often combined with social activity to make the events more appealing. These events are hosted by the platform, as described by a worker associated with Folq:

(XLIX) *"(...) for me, Folq is a sales channel, in addition to them trying to make something social out of it. It sort of is a sales channel with some fun, and that can definitely work well."*

This knowledge sharing is something that the platforms themselves take an interest in, as it is vital for workers to be able to learn new skills and technologies while working in order to stay relevant in a field that evolves as quickly as the IT sector does. Some workers, however, expressed a concern that they may not learn as much as they could in a more traditional working arrangement, as stated by a worker on Folq when discussing risks:

(L) *"(...) [O]ne way to decompose it slightly: risk not to learn, and risk to lose money."*

The risk of losing money is something that will be discussed further in section 5.5. We have already seen how the network and platform can support knowledge sharing through meetups. However, another dimension that is special to independent consultants is learning more about how to succeed as an independent worker. Here, the network and platform offer support since the workers are not only peers as consultants, but also peers by the fact that they are independent workers, as an example described by one worker on BrainBase:

> (LI) *"There have been long discussion threads that of over a hundred comments, and people have spent much time about whether to buy an electric bike, a moped or a car on the company, and if you are to buy, should you have a company car or privately owned, and what way should you do it: down payments or not."*

Such discussions have also been saved on the BrainBase platform in order to be better accessible for future workers and to prevent the knowledge from disappearing in the chat application, as stated by a worker:

> (LII) *"(...) and then it is nice to have Wiki to go to. I have used it, for instance, when I was registering for VAT, there was a good compilation there on how you do it in the context of BrainBase and a Norwegian corporation."*

Similarly, Folq offers guidance and assists their consultants in how to run their own company, as stated by a Folq executive regarding what they offer the workers on the company:

> (LIII) *"Talking business: that is a thing which is very relevant for these independent consultants, as almost all of them have a personal corporation. The way we do it is that (...) once a month we have a meetup which is open for all consultants, and often people from outside the Folq community as well."*

In order to further support the independent consultants, both platforms offer discounts or access to various discounts and bonuses. As described by the BrainBase co-founder:

> (LIV) *"(...) but we have something we call services. So there we have services - or usually discounted services - one can have, which have usually been negotiated by members of the network. So, for instance, we have a pension savings agreement with KLP, which was negotiated by a consultant because he felt that he needed better terms on his savings agreement."*

5.4 Transparency in Organisation

Being transparent in governance direction and justification of economics was expressed as very important by workers on both platforms. First, we see that transparency helps to justify for the workers on the platform how the platforms spend their resources. As shown in previous sections, both BrainBase and Folq publicly show how large of a cut the platform takes from the payments received trough assignments on the platform, with some explanation as to why they take the cuts that they do (BrainBase in Figure 5.2, Folq in Figure 5.1). Transparency is vital for workers as they do not want to treated dishonestly and earn less than they could. As stated by a worker on Folq when asked why transparency was so important:

> (LV) *"Often a lack of transparency can be one of the major problems, one is not shown the entire picture which can gnaw on you over time, at least for me. Compared to that, I think a model of radical transparency is very appealing."*

And mirrored by a worker on BrainBase:

> (LVI) *"Those brokerage firms known for often being unclear in what they actually take in provision: they often quote one price to the customer and then another to [the consultant], and you don't know which price is quoted to the customer and things like that. BrainBase, however, are very clear on what cut they take and what the price is. So I feel that BrainBase is more on my team, in a way."*

This is something the platforms are aware of and which is important for them as well, as stated by an executive on Folq:

> (LVII) *"You can say that the principles we use in Folq as a brand is really to be transparent, direct and honest, so we really try to use that in all our communication, both to customers and consultants, but also between them, that we try to be as open as possible and share all available information."*

There are many ways that platforms are transparent in how they perform governance and include workers in strategic decisions. This section shows how the platforms create this transparency and more reasons for why workers find it crucial.

5.4.1 Openness in Negotiations

As already mentioned, the platforms are very transparent in how the negotiations are done on the platform by for instance granting consultants access to contracts between the customer and

the platform. For contracts that are decided by a bidding competition, the platforms need to include workers who are interested in the contract so that the platform can create a bid for it, the feedback is often shared, as stated by a Folq executive:

> (LVIII) *"If there is a public bidding competition then [the workers] always get feedback on whether they have been selected to be part of the bid we send (...) and then they also get feedback on, if their bid is sent in, whether they got a positive or negative response. We usually also include the evaluation that the specific public sector customer has made, we often attach a document where [the customer] reason and score all the bids, so we are usually transparent in that regard, so the consultant gets insight into how high they scored, if they didn't get the assignment."*

5.4.2 Insight and Ownership

Many workers are interested in how the platforms run and what the future of the platform will bring, and several are interested in investing in the platforms and want them to grow and succeed. BrainBase, for instance, is very open about how they run their platform and provides insight on the platform to interested workers. As stated by the BrainBase co-founder:

> (LIX) *"Since, as I mentioned, all of [the platform owners] work as independent consultants, and I for instance have an 80% role as a consultant, and it is limited how much I can get done and how much other people can get done, so we are very open as to what thoughts we have on developing the platform further, and we are happy to share with others in the network. If someone want to contribute to developing the platform further they are very welcome do so. We have the code base open for anyone in the network who wants access. We have transparency otherwise too, if people want insight into various things we give it to them. And we have, [we] also pay consultants from time to time to do work on the platform. We prefer to use available capacity for this, i.e. consultants who are already in the network."*

BrainBase even have a public Trello board (Figure 5.7) that shows what features they want to implement in future versions of the platform.

Folq does not offer this same level of openness directly, or employ workers from the network, due to having sufficient full-time employees working on the platform. This tech orientation in the organisation is also how they can perform the screening of new members. However, Folq

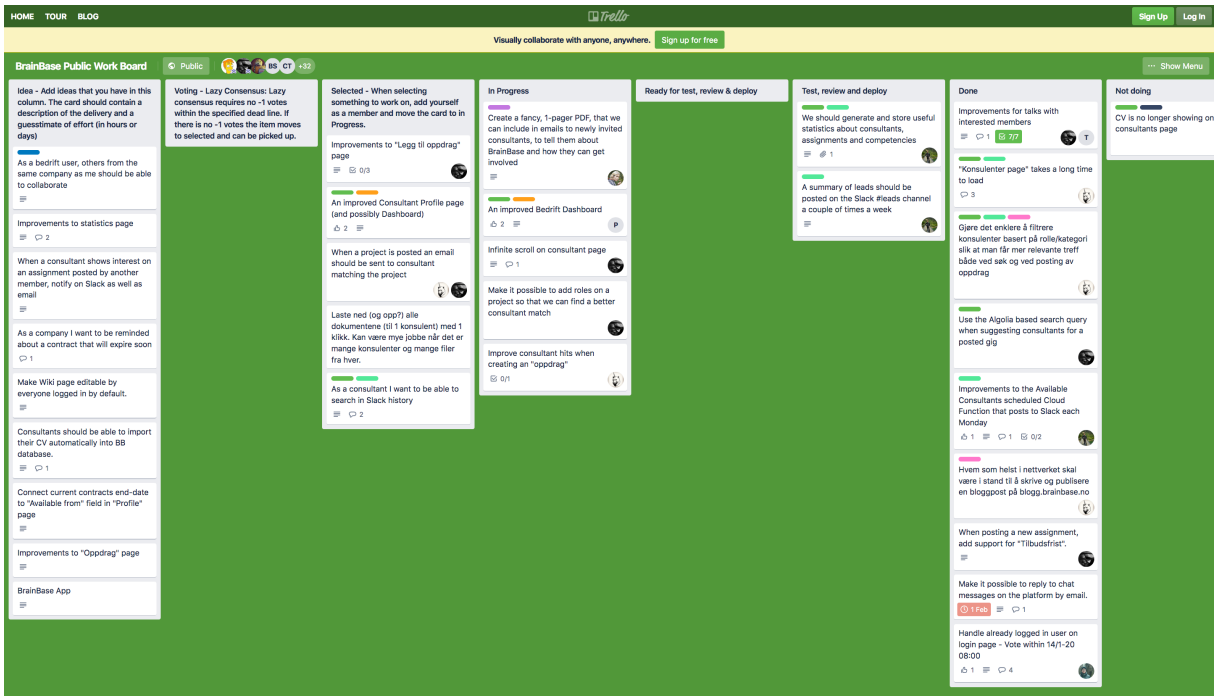

Figure 5.7: Screenshot of BrainBase's public Trello board

does use consultants on the platform through design testing, through user-driven testing and surveys. On both platforms, the platform owners are also active on the platform's communication applications and monitor discussions regarding the functionality of the platform there as well.

Another way workers get involved with the governing on the platform is through buying a stake in the company. Both platforms regularly offer stock emissions that allow workers on the platform to become owners. As stated by an executive on Folq:

> (LX) *"(...) in those emissions we have opened for employees and consultants on the platform, and many consultants have invested in Folq, and I think that is a solid signal that we are doing something right, and that the consultants have faith in us."*

We find that some of the workers interviewed have indeed invested in the platforms:

> (LXI) *"So I invested a little bit of money in them because one can do that as a consultant on the platform, Folq that is, and they have thought carefully through and have a good grasp on the market and such."*

> (LXII) *"Maybe it would have been better in that aspect if BrainBase was not a corporation, but instead was organised in another way, like a union or a cooperative. (...) But I still choose BrainBase, because there is an option of having a stake in the company and there are other consultants in the same situation as me who are owners."*

5.5 Perceived Risks

Several of the workers interviewed did not perceive many risks when starting on the platform or interacting with it. The risks were instead connected to being an independent consultant than directly associated with working on the platform. As several answered when asked about risks they encountered on the platform, they did not perceive or encounter many new risks when starting to work on a platform. Instead, the risks that were present while being an independent consultant and even some risks of working in a traditional consultancy firm persevered on labour platforms. Due to this perseverance of risks, we will present the risks identified to understand why trust is formed the way it is on the platforms.

5.5.1 Limited Interaction

Firstly, as the interaction with platforms are mainly done when a worker is acquiring and ending a mission, this generally limits the number of business sensitives or critical interactions. These limits are due to the length of the tasks. As one worker on BrainBase described it:

> (LXIII) *"Because we, in the IT-business assignments are usually several months long, or even years, and (...) the interaction with BrainBase would have been much more important if there were new jobs every week, for instance, but that is not the case."*

Furthermore, at least from the perception of the workers, there is little involvement between the platform and worker during an ongoing assignment. As stated by a worker responding to what he perceived as the platforms did during the work:

> (LXIV) *"[Facilitation] is almost non-existent, but there is not much need for it either, it is not that complicated. You work a few hours and then you bill those hours, it is not rocket science. It might be that they follow up the customer, as stated, I don't know, I do not think they do, but it might be that they do. But other than that ther is very little. If I have any questions, then they answer those and that is nice."*

And the response from a worker at Folq when asked how the platform facilitated their work:

> (LXV) *"I feel that they do not [facilitate] a lot. If I understand the question. I feel that they are a kind of lead generator, but I do not feel that they have facilitated me at all in the assignment itself. So far I have sort of felt like I was on my own as soon as I started working for the customer. Except that I got a question whether it went*

well, or if I had any problems, so I guess the answer would be no, then. That they do not facilitate."

As we have seen earlier, there is more communication between platform owners and workers in these initial and final steps. The method of these interactions is often casual and done through, for instance, Slack. The only problems that were common across all interviews were challenges regarding the platforms handled billing. However, these problems were generally sorted out after the first couple of billings and not experienced as risky by the workers. The availability of human support on the platform further supported reducing these sorts of risks. In general, due to the relatively few interactions, there are few risks and points of friction involved.

Not Finding Work

In general, one of the underlying risks of being an independent worker is not being able to find work. Even if the worker is on the platform, these risks are still present as the platforms do not guarantee that workers find work. Being on a platform is however, a risk-reducing measure taken by the workers as these platforms, and other types of online brokers function as additional avenues for finding work. Despite this, several of the workers have still expressed the need for more mechanisms of guaranteeing work. As expressed by one worker who highlighted the need for a minimum amount of hours to work on a contract:

(LXVI) *"If it is a short assignment and you have a maximum budget from a customer, it would have been advantageous to possibly have a minimum as well, but I do not know if that is common."*

However, as already stated, many already have work either from elsewhere and other have funds saved up. As one worker on Folq explained when talking about risk related to going without work:

(LXVII) *"When it comes to the risk of money, it is a bit, like, compared to the salaries I have had when I was not independent, (...) I think I can go a year without work for each year I work. So the the real risk is extremely low."*

Also, several of the workers interviewed either still had their old job while searching for a suitable task through the platform, or had other tasks already in progress from their network or other platforms. Several of the workers also spent several months on the platforms before finding a task that they wanted. Thus, several of the interviewed consultants' financial security were already more or less secured by other means than the labour platform itself.

Moreover, as already presented, the platforms do not enforce any platform exclusivity upon the workers but do try by other means to have the workers use their platform. The platforms further support the perception of low commitment this by, for instance, not charging the consultants, or requiring much of the consultants that have joined the network. As stated by the co-founder of BrainBase:

> (LXVIII) *"[It is] completely voluntary and does not cost anything to be part of the network."*

Stagnation in Learning

Workers need to stay on top of new technologies, methods and tools in the rapidly evolving world of information technology. Falling behind is a risk that is present regardless of what organisation a worker is a part of, as exemplified by workers that did not feel that they learned much in their previous, more traditional working arrangements. Other expressed they never the time to learn new skills. As stated by a worker, when explaining the choice of not working for a traditional consultancy firm:

> (LXIX) *"I felt I was in many ways the driving force for the learning and those sorts of things, and I held several courses internally but I actually learned very little from the others I worked with. I could of course also gone to another consultancy firm, and maybe learned more there. But I see that by and large it is my drive to learn that is left, not something I get from others, and that learning mostly happens at work, and by that I mean the work for the customer. So I saw that such a large part of the learning happens at the customer, or on my own in the evening, that the bit about learning and things like that was not an argument [against going independent]."*

However, one worker felt that this is a larger risk as a consultants for not learning as much:

> (LXX) *"Now nobody sees the code I write, which makes it so I can work pretty fast, but the quality is not as high as in the case where you have code review and such. (...) So I would say that in a way I learn more because I can pick what technology I want to use and experiment more, but in another way I learn less because I get less feedback from other peers.*
>
> *"Some assignments are of a sort where you enter an already established team of people with the same competences and such, and that will be different, but in assignments where you are a bit of a one man show I can easily imagine that a bit of stagnation can happen, because one learns a lot by receiving feedback on the*

work one does. You can always attend courses and such, but that is not the same as receiving feedback on the work that you do."

And in a similar fashion, how one does not get the same perks as an independent consultant that a regular employee of a company would:

(LXXI) *"(...) and [the customer] does not have any particular incentive to invest in you (...), when they pay as much as they do for your services, they expect you to just produce, produce, produce."*

As with many other perceived risks, stagnation in learning is also one that is perceived differently by different workers, and the workers often come to different conclusions about how they learn best. We also see the platforms try to create offers to mitigate these risks.

5.5.2 Information Asymmetry

Information asymmetry is one of the more significant sources of perceived risk on commercial platforms, as discussed in section 2.2. In the interviews, we found conflicting sentiments on whether or not the workers encountered this or not. We have seen, for instance, that information on the platform was not as relevant to some workers, especially regarding information about potential tasks. When asked about the access to information, for the most part, everyone was satisfied with the amount of information they got. However, when asked how the platform facilitated their workday or how they experienced the distribution of responsibilities between themselves and the platform, they were unsure about what the platform did. As exemplified by this response from a worker on Folq:

(LXXII) *"I have never really understood that 100%, or, I do not have any clarity in that, it was just very practical that they handled the contract negotiation."*

When asked about what the platforms did poorly, one worker speculated about how many assignments that were on the platform. The worker compared it to how many it could be:

(LXXIII) *"When it comes to what they do poorly, that is a bit hard, because I do not for instance know how many tasks could have been on the platform, and I think that the biggest risk on the platform is to not have enough assignments available or that one is not exposed to enough assignments. But whether or not they do this badly or not is hard to know."*

Scalability of Platform

Several of the workers had an interest in how the platform run. One particular concern stated in one interview, and that can be inferred from others, is the issue of how the platforms handle a scaled environment of workers. The challenge of scale is something that may have several ramifications on the platform and will be further addressed in chapter 6.

Another interesting point brought up by some worker in this regard is how the divide in power on the platform may be affected by the growth of the platform. As stated by a worker:

> (LXXIV) *"What happens when turnover in the corporation increases by several millions? And what do you then do with the distribution of that money on the platform? If it becomes to much of a business where the owners cash out their share or increase their power, that will be, there can also become an imbalance of power between the larger shareholders and the smaller shareholders. I see this a potential problem in the future. And if you then do not find a good solution for it, the correct form of organisation, then someone will break out and start new groups that offer the same outside of BrainBase."*

As we have seen, there are not many perceived risks carried by a labour platform. While the platforms try to address some of the risks and challenges, we see that the response from the workers are mixed. We try to argue for this mixed response in the subsequent chapter.

5.6 Other Methodological Results

In the interest of being rigorous in our research, we have performed several meta-analytical steps in the document analysis. Not all of these turned out to be directly relevant to the results of the thematic analysis in a way that warranted their explicit mentioning above. However, they are nevertheless relevant in their own right. For this reason, the results of those steps are detailed below in this section.

The relevant findings of the document analysis' inductive analysis steps are detailed above, in the result listings of the thematic analysis of which they were apart. This part of the results details the findings of evaluations and categorisations, and how they evolved over the performed iterations.

5.6.1 Types of Documents and Categorisations - Before First Iteration

The documents which we have gathered are easily grouped by classification of document and availability. This gave us three types of documents: contracts, public web pages and restricted web pages. In Table 5.2 we made a first attempt at inferring which categories, as described by Bowen (2009) and listed in section 4.3.3, applied to each of these types of document.

As we can see, the distinction is quite uninteresting at this point. Before going into details

Type of Document	Categorisation
Public Web Pages	(i) May provide data on context (ii) May suggest questions to ask (iii) May provide supplementary data (v) May verify, corroborate or help triangulate evidence or findings
Restricted Web Pages	(i) May provide data on context (ii) May suggest questions to ask (iii) May provide supplementary data (v) May verify, corroborate or help triangulate evidence or findings
Contracts	(i) May provide data on context (ii) May suggest questions to ask (iii) May provide supplementary data (v) May verify, corroborate or help triangulate evidence or findings

Table 5.2: Initial categorisation of documents in corpus

and exploring the documents, we kept open the possibility that all three types of documents may serve some purpose relating to most of the categories proposed by Bowen (2009). The only category we can be reasonably sure we will not find is category (iv), since the documents are all of a contemporary nature and will not contain much history that can be used to look for changes over time. We expect the documents to be more tightly categorised after a few iterations of analysis.

5.6.2 Pre-Analysis Evaluation

Grouping the documents by availability, as we have done above, also allows us to more easily discern who might be the source of the document, and to whom it is intended. We will also try to gleam what purpose the documents were made with. The first pass of such an evaluation is found in Table 5.3. At this early stage in the process, we presume that this will be more or less the same for all platforms in the study, but this may very well prove not to be the case as we perform the analysis.

Type of Document	Creator	Intended recipient	Reason
Public Web Pages	Platform	Non-registered workers and companies	Recruitment of new customers and workers
Restricted Web Pages	Platform	Registered workers	Enabling self-promotion and finding work for registered workers
Contracts	Platform	Registered workers and companies	Streamlining and standardising work relationships and payment between all projects, ensuring rights for all three parties.

Table 5.3: Initial evaluation of source, recipient and reason for creation of documents in corpus

5.6.3 Post-Analysis Evaluation and Categories

After two rounds of document analysis, we merged the resulting themes into the primary thematic analysis. At this point, we had the data to assess the completeness of the documents, and we could assess whether the documents were social actors. Additionally, we could revisit the typology, categorisations and evaluations from before the first iteration, as described in Table 5.2 and Table 5.3, and make changes to them.

After having read through the documents, we found that the initial typology was too broad, as each type of document could contain documents with several different creators and recipients, and categorisation became too broad. Hence, we split the types by who had access to the - consultants, customers, both, or the public. A new typology then became the following: web pages available to customers, web pages available to consultants, web pages available to both, customer-platform contracts, consultant-platform contracts, consultant-customer contracts. Through the analysis we had at this point found that the web pages available to customers only had little bearing on the relationships of the workers. So we ended with a typology of five kinds of documents.

With the more specific typology and the knowledge imparted from knowing the contents of the documents, we were able to revisit the categories of knowledge contained within each type, as well as the creators/senders, recipients and reason for the creation of the documents. The new categorisation is contained within Table 5.4, and the new evaluation is contained in Table 5.5.

As we can see in Table 5.4 all three kinds of contract provided context and supplementary data. The supplementary data consisted mainly of data about management and sharing of risk. The web pages available to both customers and consultants provided context and also verified

Type of Document	Categorisation
Shared Web Pages	(i) Provided data on context (v) Verified, corroborated and helped triangulate findings
Consultant Web Pages	(i) Provided data on context (iii) Provided supplementary data (v) Verified, corroborated and helped triangulate findings
Contracts (Consultant-platform, Customer-platform, Consultant-customer)	(i) Provided data on context (iii) Provided supplementary data

Table 5.4: Final categorisation of documents in corpus

evidence from interviews, as described earlier in this chapter. Web pages available only to consultants additionally provided some supplementary data in the form of specific trust building mechanisms used in building a profile and finding a project on the platform.

Table 5.5 shows the final evaluation of the context of document usage. Public web pages, aimed at new customers and consultants, attempt to make them register on the platform. Shared web pages also aim at both customers and consultants, but are mainly informational or service-oriented, helping both parties in performing their tasks on the platform. Web pages only available to registered consultants enable self-promotion and finding fitting projects. The customer-platform contracts were mainly based on the nationally standardised "SSA-B Enkel" contract, on both platforms. The contracts are made by the Norwegian government and used by the government when hiring consultants, and publicly available for use. Their usage by the platforms allows the standardisation of work relationships and payment between all projects, significantly easing administration. It is also familiar to many companies. Consultant-platform contracts regulate the relationship between the platform and the consultant when the platform is a mediator of a project. This mainly binds the consultant to the "SSA-B Enkel" contract between the platform and customer as a subcontractor and governs how payment is performed. Contracts directly between consultants and customers only exist on BrainBase. These are not standardised and may be made by the consultant, the customer, or be based on a government contract. Either way, its main function is to govern the project execution and managing risk.

Knowing the contents of the documents, we were also able to assess the completeness of each document. Considering our typology, documents of the same type necessarily describe different parts of the same system. It therefore makes sense to assess completeness by type instead of for each document individually. This assessment is presented in Table 5.6.

Type of Document	Creator	Intended recipient	Reason
Public Web Pages	Platform	Non-registered workers and companies	Recruitment of new customers and workers
Shared Web Pages	Platform	Registered workers and companies	Information to customers and workers, helping communication
Consultant Web Pages	Platform	Registered workers	Enabling self-promotion and finding work for registered workers
Customer-platform Contracts	The government	Registered companies	Streamlining and standardising work relationships and payment between all projects, ensuring rights for all three parties, reducing risk.
Consultant-platform Contracts	Platform	Registered workers	Streamlining and standardising work relationships and payment between all projects, establishing conduct and handling of project between platform and consultants, reducing risk.
Consultant-customer Contracts	Government or consultant or company	Registered workers and companies	Establishing rules for project execution and work relationship, sharing and minimising risk.

Table 5.5: Final evaluation of source, recipient and reason for creation of documents in corpus

Finally, we were able to assess the documents as social actors, as described in section 4.3.3. We found that no parts of the platform website act significantly as a social actor, since they are generally low-profile and goal-oriented in design and function. The standardised "SSA-B Enkel" contract, in use by both platforms, may signal professionalism to both customers and consultants, and in such a way shape how they act concerning projects using the platform.

Type of Document	Assessment of Completeness
Public Web Pages	These web pages show the public-facing part of the platform. However, from the interviews we know that a significant portion of platform recruitment is done through word of mouth and newspaper articles. This aspect is not captured by these documents, and they are thus somewhat selective. However, they are quite balanced in that they describe the important parts for both customers and consultants.
Shared and Consultant Web Pages	These show a significant part of the work area for a consultant while starting a project and writing hours. However, consultants also spend time on the internal communications system, which is off-platform. Also, much communication in relation to projects is performed off-platform in the form of calls, e-mails or meetings. Hence this type of document is quite selective. This also makes them somewhat uneven, as there is little information on-platform about what happens in these off-platform communications.
Customer-platform Contracts	These fully govern the judicial parts of the provider-customer relationship between the platform and customers. In this respect, they are comprehensive. However, they do not always describe the project or tasks in great detail, and may therefore be selective in that respect. This focus on the judicial parts also makes this type of document somewhat uneven.
Consultant-platform Contracts	These fully govern the judicial parts of the worker-provider relationship between the consultants and platform. In this respect, they are comprehensive. They are mostly project agnostic by design, relegating the project details to the customer-platform contracts. They are self contained in governing the relation between consultant and platform, and are as such also balanced.
Consultant-customer Contracts	These fully govern the judicial parts of the provider-customer relationship in a case where the consultants and customer contract directly. Not being governed by the platforms, these are the most diverse kind of contract. We do not have examples of every kind of contract. There is also a wildly varying level of detail in these contracts, from mostly implicit to the more explicit "SSA-B Enkel" style contracts. This makes these contracts both uneven and selective in our corpus.

Table 5.6: Assessment of completeness for documents in corpus, by type

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

In this chapter, we will discuss the results presented in chapter 5. Where the result chapter mostly relayed the experiences of the workers interacting and working on labour platforms, this chapter will discuss how these experiences and interactions relate to trust and trust building. For this, we will use the conceptual frameworks presented in Background and Related Work. We also relate the findings to earlier literature per the research questions. The structure of this chapter is similar to chapter 5, using the global themes as the overarching structure. We discuss the themes from the thematic network, and how they relate to trust using the interviews, literature and previous findings from Friestad and Opheim (2019a).

6.1 Principal Findings

This paper presents a multiple case study of IT consultancy platforms active in Norway. The generated data for the case study came from interviews with platform owners and freelance workers active on the platforms, and a document analysis of the platform websites and contracts that govern the details of the relationship between workers, platform and customers during an assignment. The global themes represent the principal findings of this study, which are illustrated in Figure 6.1. We discuss these findings in detail in the following sections.

For the most part, the trust building identified through the interviews focused on the interactions the workers had with platform owners rather than specific TBMs that were present in the interface. When looking at RQ1: *What mechanisms on or related to digital labour platforms generate trust*, and RQ1.1: *How do these mechanisms relate to TBMs in earlier research*, we find many more examples of mechanisms and factors. This is discussed in section 2.1. We

will also argue for how the trust building done on the platforms nonetheless resembles earlier research, using the database created in Friestad and Opheim (2019b) by referencing several papers found within. However, as this database consists mostly of trust building mechanisms that affect consumers' trust in the platform rather than workers' trust, the connections may not be as direct as they seem. Importantly, we would also argue that several essential trust builders come into play due to the people behind the interfaces, rather than the interfaces themselves. This is described in detail below.

With regards to RQ2: *Which trust factors do these mechanisms relate to*, we will in this discussion argue that the trust factors defined by Mayer et al. (1995) (ability, benevolence, integrity) hold up firmly in communicating trust on the platforms in this case study as well. We argue for how the different TBMs relate to the trust factors using a combination of the data collected and earlier research. The fact that the trust building resembles trust building in organisations further strengthens the relation between Mayer et al. (1995) and this study, due to that study being grounded in organisational and managerial research. Finally, with RQ3: *How do service providers on a platform respond to the different TBMs*, we find varying results for how workers respond to different TBMs. Some TBMs, such as availability of platform owners, are a very stable source of trust building, while other aspects like social constructs have mixed results.

Generally, workers view the platforms as easy to get started on due to the low commitment sign-up process. Signing up on a labour platform does not force the worker to use the platform for finding a task, nor does it cost the worker money through fees. Additionally, there is generally an alignment of expectations between workers and platform owners.

The platform owners themselves are also a source of trust on the platforms. Here we found the availability of the platform owners for answering questions to be a vital aspect of the interactions the workers had with the platform. The fact that the platform owners had similar background and experience to that of the workers, rather than being viewed as traditional brokers, further helped in building trust from the workers. Most functions of the platform were seen as quite transparent to the workers, which they expressed positively. Some viewed the platforms as a security mechanism in contract negotiations. The platforms were in general viewed as flexible organisations that could accommodate different needs, while still being able to automate other tasks and drive costs down. Finally, the workers viewed the use of technology on the platform positively.

The networks that are associated with each of the platforms in this study were also a source

of potential trust building and risk mitigation related to loneliness, social isolation and stagnation in learning. The network supported the workers with succeeding as independent consultants and offered assistance with the risks mentioned above. Through meetups with workers and the platform, these social bonds were further affirmed and they also functioned as a source of learning. The platform owners are also part of the network in both cases, which further supports their availability and the perception of platform owners as peers.

Transparency was vital during the contract negotiations, but in general, the platforms are transparent in several processes of their process, which gives workers insight into the functioning of the platform. The platforms provide further insight through user-driven testing, worker-aided development, insight into plans and also the possibility for workers to share in the ownership of the platform through stock emissions.

Finally, there are generally few perceived risks with getting started on the platform that are not also present in regular freelance work. The lack of risk is mostly due to there percentage-wise being very few critical interactions with the platform due to the duration of the assignments, combined with other trust building factors such as transparency and availability of platform owners. We will argue that the potential risks related to information asymmetry are present on the platform, and can become more severe as the platforms scale.

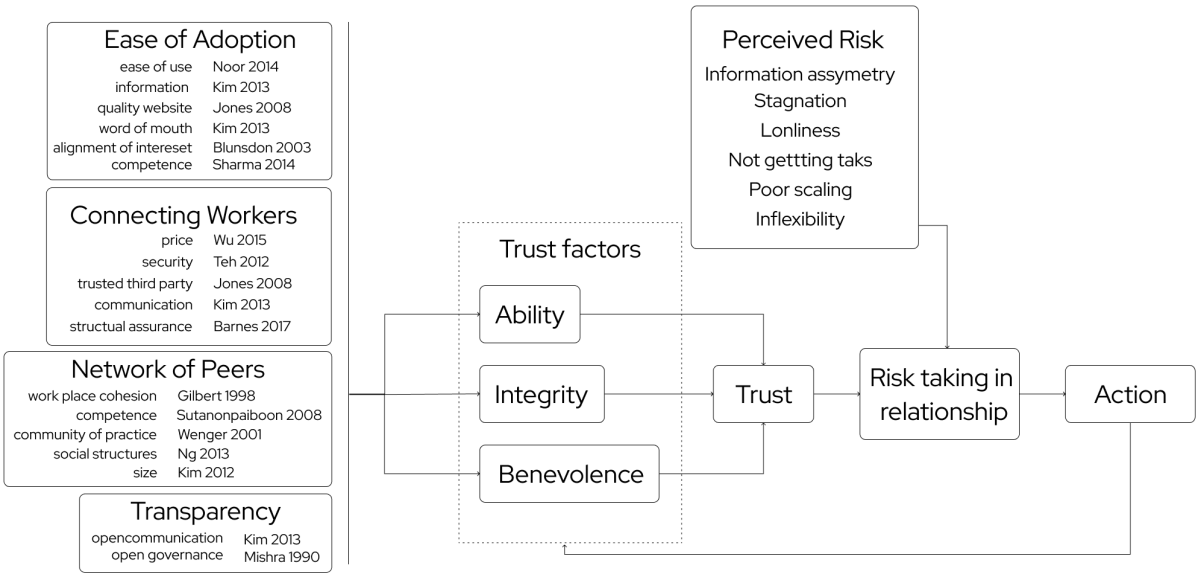

Figure 6.1: Illustration of principal findings. The articles mentioned are, in alphabetical order: Barnes and Mattsson (2017); Blunsdon and Reed (2003); Gilbert and Tang (1998); Jones and Leonard (2008); Kim and Noh (2012); Kim and Park (2013); Mishra and Morrissey (1990); Ng (2013); Noor et al. (2014); Sharma and Crossler (2014); Sutanonpaiboon and Abuhamdieh (2008); Teh and Ahmed (2012); Wenger (2001); Wu et al. (2015)

6.2 Trust Behaves Like in Organisations

One rather important aspect synthesised from the global themes (see Table 5.1), and from the discussion above, is that trust on these platforms seems to behave more like organisational trust than e-commerce platform trust. This is quite the opposite of the results of previous research on other platforms, which we discussed in depth in Friestad and Opheim (2019a). We propose this to be due to several aspects of these platforms which differ from previous research:

- The main work performed by the workers is performed off-platform without platform supervision, with the platforms mainly facilitating finding and starting tasks
- The platform owners are much more available to both workers and customers
- The platforms actively support and cultivate a social aspect of being a member, whether the worker is on assignment, looking for work, or simply waiting for an opportunity to pop up
- The workers primarily use these platforms to enhance their existing jobs as independent consultants, as opposed to using them as a secondary job

Trust on these platforms behaves like an organisation because to the workers, it feels like an organisation. At the same time, the workers are still independent, and their autonomy is not restricted by being a part of the platform. Since they do not directly support matching of workers and tasks, neither availability of platform owners nor actively supporting a social aspect are necessary parts of the functionality of the platform. Including them regardless, as these platforms have done, can build perceived benevolence of the platform.

It is also worth noting that the industries these platforms operate in are high-skill areas, requiring significant experience and often higher education for work to be performed adequately. The workers in these areas have many choices of working arrangements, and the platforms, therefore, have to reach a higher level of quality to attract workers than is required of platforms that do not require specific skills of their workers, such as Amazon Mechanical Turk.

On the other hand, the interviews still show that trust in the website is still vital for those parts of the work process that are performed on the platform, like on e-commerce platforms. This type of trust may indicate that organisation-like trust and website-like trust are not two binary choices, but instead two points on a continuous scale. By *organisation-like* we mean trust that

behaves like in a working organisation. By *application-like* we mean trust that behaves like it does on platforms where interaction with a website or app is the main driver of trust, such as in e-commerce. More research is required to determine whether this is the case, and what factors determine the placement on such a scale if so. It is also possible that the perception of placement on this scale is not the same for customers and workers, due to different usage patterns. The factors identified here may be a pointer for where to start.

6.3 Initial And Continuous Evaluation And Feedback

Both platforms implement quality assurance of the workers they allow on the platform. QA and other structural assurances are known to be essential trust builders for customers (Barnes and Mattsson, 2017). These processes vary in scope on the platforms in this study. Both platforms incorporate it in their value proposition to both customers and workers. In this study, we find that some of the workers welcomed more quality assurance in the form of feedback from customers. Such an evaluation has met with mixed results in other studies (e.g. Bain and Taylor, 2000; Hannák et al., 2017). However, the evaluation here presented a way to get feedback from the customer and also evaluate the customers. The workers wanted this as a way to learn from their experiences and become better at their jobs. How such a feature relates to trust between worker and platform, or even worker and customer, is an open question on these platforms. However, using human capital theory, we can argue that workers want to invest in themselves. If the platform facilitates this, it may be a source of trust towards the platform.

Nevertheless, studies show that reputation and feedback mechanisms are an essential tool for trust building for customers (e.g. Kim and Park, 2013). Several workers expressed a wish for increased feedback from customers on their performance, as well as being able to give feedback on the customer after a project has ended, and having the option to show good feedback on their profiles. Such feedback is normal in a conventional work relationship, and the organisation-like trust relationships on these platforms may explain why this is desired despite the mixed results of such systems on other platforms. The fact that a project is usually performed in close cooperation with the customer and over a longer period of time may also increase the probability of helpful feedback in both directions.

When looking at how evaluation and quality assurances relate to trust building as done on the platforms in this case study, we find support for it among the workers. Firstly, several of the interviewees welcomed the initial QA process that was required to join the platform. The process helps to build a more premium platform that restricts who can create a profile which is

exposed to customers. The platforms also perform this QA themselves rather than outsourcing the evaluation to another company. This evaluation shows that the platforms can evaluate what constitutes a competent worker. In turn, this supports the workers' perception of ability in the platform, in that the platform knows which market it operates in and knows what to look for when adding new workers to the platform. By restricting who they let in on the platform, the platform further shows integrity in that they value quality over quantity, even though the size of the platform is an integral part of the platform's value. This compromise may hint to the workers that the company values their specific knowledge more than simply being a contribution to the size of the network, which can help build trust.

6.3.1 Word of Mouth Effects And Platform Adoption

Word of mouth effects serve to encourage newcomers to adopt a product or service by having it recommended by a trusted peer. Such a peer is someone that the individual already trusts, such as a friend, family member or an acquaintance of various kinds. Several interviewed workers joined through a recommendation by someone already working for or on the platforms. Earlier research shows that such word of mouth effects support overcoming perceived risks and support initial trust building on commercial platforms (Kim and Park, 2013; Hajli et al., 2014). Here we see an example of trust transfer from one peer who is already a part of the platform or very knowledgeable about it to another. The peer outside of the platform relies on the integrity of the statements of the other and trust of the platform is transferred to the peer through this recommendation. This way of getting new workers on the platform is what the platforms currently rely on in order to expand its workforce. In the case of Folq, this is a major part of their strategy, while they have recently been experimenting with other types of marketing. For BrainBase, it is purposefully more or less the only way they market.

This sort of effect can be hard for platforms to explicitly encourage because there needs to exist trust from the consultant to the platform in order for the consultants to recommend it to their peers. However, as seen in subsection 5.3.1, both platforms are aware of this. The growth of both platforms using mainly word of mouth shows that the platforms enjoy such trust from their workers, and they also encourage sharing this trust with peers through financial incentives. The addition of a financial motive, both directly through a reward for recruitment and indirectly through the possibility of increased dividends by platform growth, may also be helpful in this regard. However, more research is needed on this topic, as we found little data pointing either way on whether explicit payment facilitates trust transfer through our interviews.

6.3.2 Autonomy

Self-employed consultants enjoy a high amount of autonomy, and the platforms try not to limit this autonomy, so as not to infringe on the workers. The platforms play their part as brokers between consultants and customers but are not particularly involved in the relationship between the customer and worker after the initial contract negotiations. The platforms also leave large agency in negations to the customers and workers. From earlier research, we find that granting the workers autonomy in task solving can help build trust in the company, and we would argue that this study supports these findings. Granting the workers power to negotiate and suggest terms in their contract is another important trust builder as identified by Mishra and Morrissey (1990). Through the interviews, we find examples of this autonomy. Mainly, that workers choose which customers to work with, instead of being assigned work. We also see it in the freedom the workers have in contract negotiations.

We see that the platforms purposefully avoid interfering with the daily work of the labourers. Instead, the platforms offer supplemental coursing, tools and resources to support them. The platforms do this in several ways. Firstly, they allow the worker to maintain and administrate their work and company by using their chosen methods and tools. The only requirement from the platforms is that the workers report the work done in a particular month. We see this attitude reflected further in other interactions between the platform and the workers. Outside the initial steps of getting started on the platforms and negotiating contracts, the workers are left to themselves. The workers can apply for assignments on the platform or wait to be contacted. The platforms each have a preferred way that most activities and interactions are done, but do not impose this behaviour. Instead, the platforms encourage workers through other mechanisms such as trying to find relevant assignments for the workers. This flexibility gives support to Spreitzer et al. (2017), which argued that flexibility and agency should be given to the workers rather than the platforms.

Furthermore, the platforms are flexible in their dealings with both the workers and the labours. We see the platforms' willingness to try new arrangements, instead of turning down a contract or a worker that might not fit in with their most standardised method. This willingness may be an effect of the platforms being relatively young. As stated in interviews, in the beginning the platforms are concerned with setting up a viable platform, to grow and attract new customers and workers, rather than jumping straight into the most efficient and automatic handling of processes. The flexibility and service-oriented mindset, as some of the workers on the platform put it, is appreciated and shows benevolence and ability to handle different working arrangements on behalf of the workers. We again see that rather than denying various requirements and re-

quests from the workers, the platforms embrace them and try to accommodate the requirements. This showcases the benevolence of the platform in that it allows and can handle the necessities for its workers.

On the other hand, we see that some points of friction arise where the platforms are less flexible. The only real complaint brought up in several interviews was the point of billing. On both platforms, there was some friction between how the platforms handled billing and how the workers wanted or expected it to work. Given that this is one of a few specific, automated and crucial interactions between the platform and worker on the platform, it is worth pausing on. That the workers struggle with billing could point to information asymmetry present in this interaction, due to which the workers may have an expectation of flexibility that the platforms do not meet. Billing is one of the automated tasks on the platforms, and in general, the workers responded very well to such automated tasks.

6.4 Connecting Workers with Customers

Matching customers and workers for assignments on the platform is the primary concern for both the platforms and the workers in this case study. When discussing the ability of the platform, this mostly translates to acquiring and offering assignments to their member workers, and attracting workers to perform those tasks. If the platforms can adequately communicate this, it accounts for much of the necessary trust. Another essential aspect of offering tasks is not only being able to acquire them but to do so in a cost-efficient manner compared to traditional actors in the market. A fair price by itself is considered a TBM (Wu et al., 2015). By acquiring tasks and assignments while taking a lower cut of the wages of the workers, the platforms show that they perform at least as well as the competition at a lower cost. Hence, the platform invests much its resources into acquiring tasks, and it is an integral part of the trust building on the platform. Other investments in the platform serve more as auxiliary services and offerings.

Directly tied to the process of getting tasks are contract negotiations. As already discussed, there is room for direct contract negotiations between worker and customer. However, in almost all cases, the platform is nevertheless involved as an intermediary between the two parts. Using the platform as an intermediary can have several advantages. The workers found protection and structural assurances in letting the platform handle certain aspects of the negotiations, as well as billing and transferring money from customer to worker. The platforms added an extra layer of security should something happen to the payment or project execution. This security can be seen similarly to escrow services on commercial platforms (Teh and Ahmed, 2012; Li

and Liu, 2007) and other mechanisms related to trusted third parties (Jones and Leonard, 2008). In these cases, the platforms act as a third party member that negotiates on fair terms for both parties.

However, for a third party to be an effective negotiator, they need to be trusted. We argue that the main way platforms build trust as negotiators and mediators is through transparency (see section 6.6) and being a peer of the workers. Being a peer seemingly makes it easier for workers to accept that the platform owners have the competence needed to find and offer high quality assignments on the platform. Competence has some support in earlier trust research in e-commerce (e.g. Sutanonpaiboon and Abuhamdieh, 2008; Sharma and Crossler, 2014). Although the sale of tasks is not necessarily a skill that many workers learn as part of their education, it can be considered more of a general skill that some workers pick up as either independent consultants or as part of a consultancy firm. Perhaps the most important competence that the workers appreciated is to find interesting assignments, where indeed a background in the IT sector would be useful.

Additionally, some workers found that they did not need the assurance of having the platform as an intermediary in the contract negotiations. We saw this mainly in interviews with workers on BrainBase, whose primary model involves minimal interaction from the platform itself. In these cases, the consultants were happy with being able to find an assignment through the platform and handle the details themselves. Thus, it may be useful for the platform to be flexible in their approach - offering to help with the contracts, but also allowing consultants to handle it on their own if they prefer that.

Regarding the interface of the platform, having a method of contacting a potential customer both perceived as easily accessible and with a low barrier of entry further increases trust in the platforms. As already discussed, perceived website quality (PWSQ) is an important source of trust, and because getting tasks is the most important task on the platform, it should also be the most prominent feature. Having easy access to direct communication through the platform is an important trust builder in e-commerce (e.g. Kim and Park, 2013; Ou et al., 2008). Communication can help to reduce the information asymmetry between customers and suppliers by providing a channel where specific details may be clarified, without going through a process of setting up a meeting or some other way of contacting the other party with a higher barrier of entry. The same can be said on labour platforms where there may be insufficient information available in the posting, or if the worker has other concerns. Thus having a way to contact the other party directly from the posting, which both studied platforms do, is a way of increasing

trust. The trust built through communication will, for the most part, be built towards the customer, not necessarily the platform. However, the environment created by the platforms that encourage such communication can serve as a source of trust building towards the platform. Earlier research on both e-commerce platforms (Chen and Shen, 2015) and social commerce platforms (Bruhn et al., 2014) show that trust transference occurs from the relation with the customer to the relation with the platform, such that good interactions with customers also increase trust in the platform. Similar trust transfer likely also takes place on labour platforms.

6.5 Network of Peers

Earlier research, especially on social commerce, shows that forums and other social constructs serve as a source trust building. Through trust transfer, trust can also be built to the platform that facilitates and host the network as well. We see the communities formed around the platform take these constructs a step further and creates something more resembling a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 2001). The platforms do not pay the workers directly to contribute to this part of the platform. An example of this is the BrainBase-wiki. The wiki covers several aspects of being an independent worker and running ones own company, is created and curated by the community and hosted by BrainBase.

Another example is the social gatherings that the platforms host. While participation is encouraged by the platforms, it is not mandatory and not paid. From social commerce research, we can argue that social interactions related to the platform and a global social presence created by the network, is a source of trust (e.g. Ng, 2013; Hajli et al., 2014; Lu et al., 2016). Moreover, from organisational research, we also find that communication is an integral part of trust building by creating workplace cohesion (Gilbert and Tang, 1998).

6.5.1 Facilitate Learning and Social Bonds

Learning through meetups is a popular way of sharing knowledge within a company. Using human capital theory, we can argue that this is a potential boon to the self-employed worker. The platform supports the workers investing in their specific human capital through learning. In turn, this may increase the workers' perception of benevolence in the labour platforms, thus building trust. Both platforms try to be a resource for how to run an independent business. They do this by and creating resources and events tailored towards this. Here we see an example of the platforms not only supporting the development of specific human capital through hosting and facilitating knowledge sharing. The platforms invest in general human capital as they help

the workers learn how to succeed as independent workers.

Similarly, the chat applications that the platforms use is the main driver for the community. These apps can lower the bar for asking questions and start discussions that are relevant to the community on the platform. They also allow for more open communication, which welcomes participation. As described, the BrainBase platform has a wiki on the website that is in some cases a log of long discussions that were deemed relevant to curate and be available for future reference for all members. This availability and ease of access to peers and information create an environment of risk reduction for the people involved in the network. As almost all of the workers on the platform find themselves in a similar situation of self-employment, having someone to discuss the situation with, and share experiences, helps lower the risks of the work and increase trust in the network. Through trust transfer, this trust can be associated with the platform that hosts and facilitates said network.

6.5.2 Passive and Active Network Participators

We also see that these constructs and social gatherings do not matter for all workers. One way to describe this is to differentiate between active and passive members. Several interviewees described themselves as passive members of the network. They would look at activity on Slack and maybe participate in some of the social gatherings, but they either thought it was ineffective, did not have the time or did not particularly care for it. There can be several reasons for this, firstly the fact that many workers are already a part of the social network of the customer, or their own small business is associated with the platforms. Having a network elsewhere may provide sufficient social constructs for the worker. Secondly, as workers often are active on several platforms that offer similar services, committing to a single platform is an investment that many do not find necessary. Workers may not even look to the platform for such interactions, treating it more as a service than a place of work. We see a difference between active and passive workers within the network. The most active workers seem to be those that have a stake in the company, either through holding shares in the company or for other reasons.

6.5.3 Availability of Platform Owners

The fact that platform owners were readily available on the same communication channels as the workers were expressed by the workers to be a boon. This availability of platform owners served in many ways as a further risk reduction mechanism for the workers. From earlier, we know that communication is also a source of trust building between worker and customer. Having the same be valid for the platform suggests that such a mechanism exists here as well.

In cases from our interviews, if the workers had any questions or grievances with regards to the platform, they did not hesitate to make contact with the platform owners. This safe and reliable fallback helped mitigate several of the perceived risks involved with other processes. It may have made the automation and efficiency measures on the platform more tolerable for the workers as well. If they had any issues with processes or needed assistance, it was easy for them to make contact with someone who could aid them. Had this availability of the platform owners not been so widespread, there may have been a lot more perceived risks with the platforms. This availability also mitigates risks regarding information asymmetry and uncertainty, as the platform workers can ask about anything they find unclear, and expect to receive an answer.

6.6 Transparency

Several of the workers noted the presence of openness and transparency regarding information sharing on the platforms. Information can be found in several places on the platform, including in the public areas of the platform, so anyone can see what the platforms offer. The platforms provide further insight or include the workers through testing and participation when testing new aspects of the platform. Some of the workers directly noted the benevolence from the platform through their transparency. Being open about information is in general an important trust builder mirrored in both organisational (Mishra and Morrissey, 1990) and e-commerce literature (e.g. Kim and Park, 2013). Workers are more trusting towards organisations that share critical information openly with them, and which reduce the information asymmetry that is often a part of e-commerce transactions.

We find several reasons for why this transparency is particularly important to the consultants of the platform. The platforms have several different relationships with the workers. They act both as the labourers' employer and a marketing agent which advertises the worker to potential customers. As the workers are charged for this service by the platforms through salary deductions, the workers need insurance that the platforms can deliver the service. The worker here takes the role of a customer, and we see how TBMs become essential to build trust in order to drive platform adoption. The platforms can use mechanisms such as PWSQ and high quality information on the site to achieve this, and they do so to a certain extent. However, allowing the workers insight into how the platform runs also shows the ability of the platform to perform its primary function, which allows them to make educated decisions. Several consultants also noted that this was not normal for a consultancy firm, and as such, it can also foster trust through showing benevolence.

Availability of the platform owners also supports this transparency. From the interviews, we see that different workers want insight into different processes and parts of the platform. Transparency can be difficult to automate without just giving blanket access to everyone, which might introduce several security risks from both a business and IT standpoint (Anderson, 2008). By using a human in the organisation as an intermediary, this problem can be avoided. As the platforms grow, however, having humans available to handle the increase in questions may not be feasible. A solution the platforms can use is to leverage their networks as workers can often answer the questions that other workers may have, especially those of newly registered members. A consequence of platform transparency may, therefore, be increased trust in the network of peers. Thus, in a future where there are more workers on the platform, the platforms can still maintain their transparency by offloading some of the questions to experienced members.

6.7 Automation and Efficiency

A goal for both platforms is to keep administrative and managerial costs low. Automation is one of the ways to do this, and interestingly a positive aspect for the workers. From previous research, we know that, people generally react poorly to algorithmic management (Dietvorst et al., 2015). The platforms in this study evade this problem by minimising any management of workers. Instead, both companies try to invest in improving their "self-serve" matchmaking of customers and workers, as well as other clerical processes. The automation allows the platforms to focus on the task of getting more customers on the platforms to a greater extent. As already discussed, the ability to focus on the main activity of the platform, while automating away the paper mill, is a potential trust builder.

As this case study concerns platforms operating in the IT sector, however, one might argue that there is a lower threshold for accepting automation and algorithms as part of the management since the workers are more familiar with the underlying technology that allows for this automation.

The more automated tasks, such as invoicing, have also been met with some frustration from interviewed workers. This frustration may be due to inflexibility or lack of information. We argue that one of the reasons the automated tasks nevertheless generally get a positive response from the workers is due to the availability of humans on the platform to contact, should something arise with the process. As argued, this availability is a vital trust builder for the workers.

As the platforms scale to accommodate more workers, this availability may disappear if the

platform does not simultaneously scale up its core staff. There are several strategies the platform might take to meet this challenge. They could rely on better access to information. Another option is also to leverage the network of the platform and to a greater extent. However, while this can be significantly cheaper, it can also be significantly harder to achieve as the challenges are not only technical. As the platforms grow, we predict the increasingly scarce availability from the leadership to be a challenge with regards to trust on the platform. Since keeping costs low is a significant concern for both workers and platform owners, it will be interesting to see what solutions emerge to balance these risks, and which work the best.

6.8 Risks

There are few perceived risks both when starting and staying on the labour platform. In turn, this means that there is a reduced need for trust between the labourers and the platforms (McKnight and Chervany, 1996). As we have seen, however, there are some real risks involved with the work on platforms and being an independent consultant in general. In this section, we summarise some of the risks that were not mentioned elsewhere in the discussion and what, if any, trust building mechanisms directly mitigate these risks.

6.8.1 Less Interaction with the Platform

The specific structures of a platform seem to be more critical if the worker is more reliant on the platform to do the work. In the case of the platforms in this case study, the main job of the platforms is to connect customers and workers while other tasks are minimised, offloaded or automated. This decrease in interactions seemingly reduces the amount of friction and hence also perceived risks and frustrations when engaging with the platform. It also increases the platforms' ability to perform this primary task. Had the workers relied on the functionality of the platforms to a greater extent than they do today, we would perhaps see a more substantial need for specific trust building mechanisms on the platform. As it stands, most of the workers had no problem getting work through other channels and already had sound finances, but found the platforms to be an excellent supplementary source of work nevertheless.

6.8.2 Not Getting Tasks

While not getting paid and not finding tasks on the platform or through other means is viewed as a risk, it is not as crucial or detrimental of risk on these platforms as we see on other platforms in earlier research (Monteith and Giesbert, 2017). The workers in the interviews did not spend much time entertaining this as a significant risk. This is due to several factors, firstly that the

market they operate in is both highly paid and highly sought after by customers. The tasks pay well when acquired, and some of the workers claimed they could go for a long time between tasks without much financial hardship. The diversification of sources of work also lowers this risk. Additionally, as the workers we interviewed had all found assignments through the platform in a relatively short time, the platforms may already be doing a sufficient job of mitigating this risk.

6.8.3 Autonomy of Workers

All the independent consultants interviewed have different systems of maintaining their networks, relations, administration of themselves or their small company, as well as how they handle invoicing. This autonomy makes the notion of being exclusive to platforms quite unattractive to workers, as it limits the workers' exposure to tasks and hence heighten that risk. This lack of exclusivity may also be a reason why many members are more passive in the platforms' networks, as being socially active on several platforms could become a demanding task. Should the platforms become more exclusive in the future, we may see this collide with the autonomy that the workers enjoy and be a source of distrust and even a perceived risk of getting started on a new labour platform. However, with exclusivity, the workers may also invest more time in the community of the platform. In turn, they may find that the platforms provide many of the features that are lost when going independent. All of the workers in this study enjoyed their current situation and did not express a wish to be platform exclusive. Many workers find work through private networks of colleagues and friends, and trying to prevent this or extract a cut from work found outside of the platform might become a significant source of conflict between workers and the platform.

6.9 Framework

The frameworks discussed in this study and Friestad and Opheim (2019a), as described in subsection 2.5.1 and illustrated in Figure 2.8 and Figure 2.9, shed light on trust relationship formation and how the different parts affect each other. In this study, we see a clear distinction between platform as facilitator and mediator, and customer as a provider of work. The consensus of the workers is that a labour platform offers a service to the workers rather than employment. We see this by the fact that many workers are either active on several labour platforms or have acquired other tasks through their networks. The way the platforms are trying to make customers contact workers directly, and vice versa, further drives in this point of the platform being mainly a facilitator. All the actors in the framework shown in Figure 2.9 are

linked. A platform cannot succeed without customers and workers, and a lousy job performed by a worker is a risk for both the platform and the worker in question. The same risks are also real for customers and the platform concerning the workers. If a platform allows a harmful or malicious customer on to the platform, it will hurt the trusting relationship to both the platform and the customer in the eyes of the workers. We therefore argue that on labour platforms, like on e-commerce platforms and social commerce platforms, there exists an interconnected, triadic trust relationship.

The extension of the framework by Mayer et al. (1995) which we proposed in Friestad and Opheim (2019a) holds up as well, as several of the identified trust factors can be related to one or more of the trust factors: ability, integrity and benevolence. These factors were mentioned directly several times during interviews with both workers and platform owners. Looking at similar frameworks to explain trust formation, the most popular alternative to that of Mayer et al. (1995) is perhaps the framework created by McKnight and Chervany (1996), further refined for e-commerce in McKnight and Chervany (2001), which also takes several other types of trusting factors like the individuals' disposition to trust and the institutional trust into account. For this study, however, it can be argued that these two additional points become negligible due to the perceived low risk of getting signed on to a labour platform, thereby not needing a very high disposition in order to trust the platform. Trust in the labour platforms as institutions, we would argue, is simply the belief that the platforms complete the services they offer. This again comes to ability, integrity and benevolence. It is worth mentioning that this study only interviewed workers already on the platforms, who would necessarily already have the dispositional and institutional trust to sign up. This is a potential weakness in the study that we will discuss later. Nevertheless, we see that the three trust factors give a succinct way to describe the trust formation between the workers and the platform.

Interestingly, the previously discussed CoP aspect of the platforms adds an extra dimension to the triadic trust framework. These communities are associated with the platform, but are not quite part of them as they are adjacent to the platform itself, but facilitated and to a degree moderated by the platform owners. The success of these communities depends on the voluntary participation of the workers. The platform can not add extra resources into it in order to create the community. Such a community complicates the framework, as trust can be built and transferred to, for instance, the platform through a relationship with peers on the platform. The prevalence of word of mouth to drive platform adoption shows this as well, where an individual worker can help build trust in the platform while not directly employed by it. Word of mouth effects opens for trust frameworks on labour platforms to be even more complicated than just

the three main actors of customer, provider and mediator, by bringing in more actors as either fully-fledged actors themselves or as supporting parts in the network.

Another way of observing this added complexity is through a model containing many adjacent and partially connected triadic trust relationships, extending out into a more extensive network of relationships encompassing all workers and customers on the platform, as well as the platform itself. In this model, we see each triadic relationship as a sort of "atomic model" of relationships on a platform, with TBMs, actors and dyadic relationships being the "subatomic particles" of which it is constituted. To continue the metaphor, the entire model would be a more extensive, multi-atom particle, around the nexus that is the platform itself. One could do this, for instance, to study trust transfer. It would then make sense to forego TBMs from explicit mention and instead add relationships representing the network of peers. An example of this might look like Figure 6.2.

Finally, another example could be to model the effects of a community of practice (CoP) on a single triadic trust relationship. This could be done by simply adding a representation of the CoP to the existing model. This might look like Figure 6.3. These are only two examples of extensions to the model, but they begin to show the versatility of the triadic trust model. We hope that this succinct model can be used in future research with great effect to model trust on all kinds of labour platforms, in combination with frameworks modelling its constituent dyadic relations, such as the one proposed by us in Friestad and Opheim (2019a) alongside the triadic model. This warrants future research, perhaps quantitative, to attempt to use the model in more contexts.

6.10 Limitations And Weaknesses of Study

As of this writing, the IT sector is thriving in Norway, meaning that there is plenty of choice and little difficulty in finding work, despite the effects of the Covid-19 (WHO, 2020) shutdown on large parts of the Norwegian economy. No one in the interviews felt "stuck" on the platform, as is the case in other similar studies. This availability of work and demand for labour reduces risk significantly, which in turn reduces the need for trust. This reduced risk may make it difficult for workers to reflect on what builds trust between themselves and the platform, as it is less necessary for them to do so.

We conducted relatively few interviews, with eight interviews in total. As discussed in section 4.4, we saw diminishing returns after the last couple of interviews. Despite this, we could

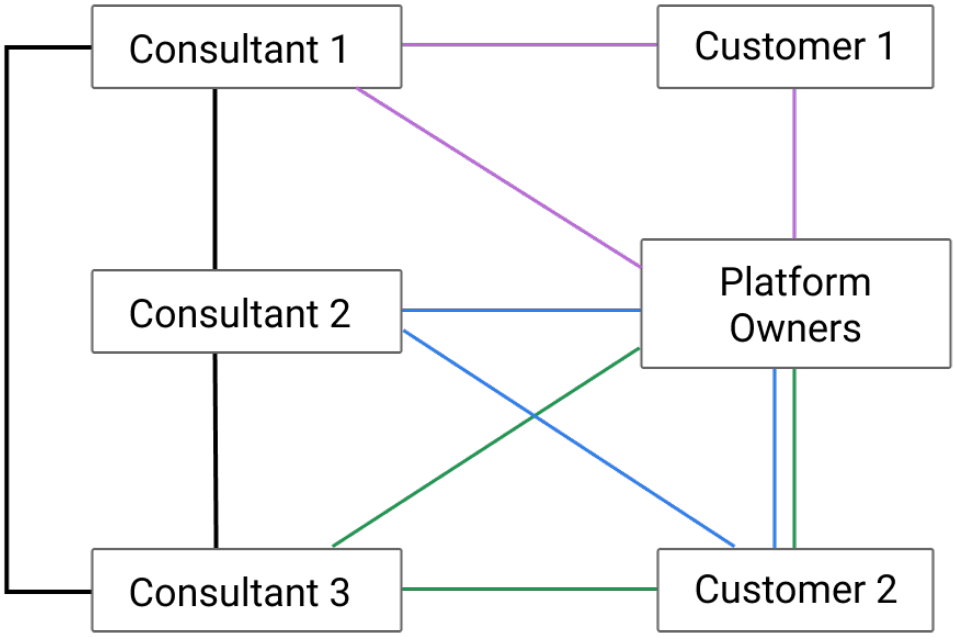

Figure 6.2: Example modelling of an extensive network of trust relationships and possible trust transfer in a platform. Here the purple lines encompass one triadic relationship; the blue another; the green a third. The black lines show the network of peers.

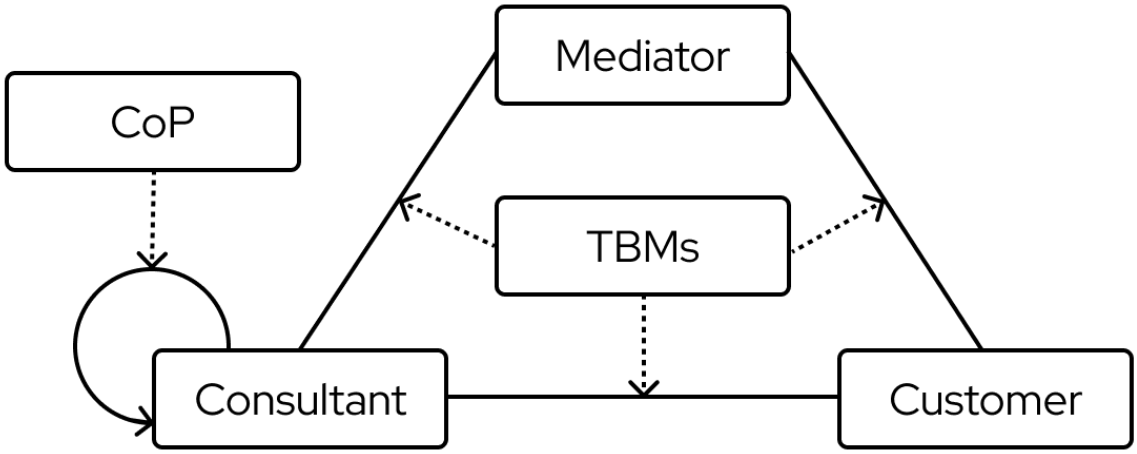

Figure 6.3: Example modelling of a triadic trust relationship acknowledging the presence of and incorporating a community of practice. The CoP could be easily modelled as a relation between consultants, external to the core triadic relationship.

still have conducted more interviews, especially with consultants within other sectors of work within which the platforms offer service. Folq, for instance, offers several other types of consultants: management, strategy and design in addition to software developers and tester. Of the people interviewed, two of the five workers were management consultants, two were software developers, and one was a test leader. Thus, we did not get to interview all the types of workers that the platforms offer. As there was no special treatment of workers in practice on the plat-

form, outside of different QA processes during the platform registrations, we did not prioritise this.

The people interviewed were also all registered and active members on the platforms. We did not interview workers who applied and got rejected or workers who chose not to get started on labour platforms at all. We did conduct one interview with a worker who signed up on the platform as an independent worker then joined a small company working through the platform instead of continuing work as an independent. We did get some perspectives on what the platforms did worse than traditional firms, but all from the perspective of platform workers. Interviewing non-platform workers could present more severe risks, or perhaps lack of TBMs that discouraged workers from starting on the platforms. Such a perspective could provide a fascinating insight into where the platforms fail to build trust with potential workers.

As already discussed, there was, in general, minimal interaction between workers and platforms when the workers had an active assignment that filled their schedule. This drastically limits the number of interactions made with the platform. Thus, also the number of recent experiences for the workers interviewed. The lack of recent experiences could reduce the quality of the data gathered. It also reduces the number of interactions that could either produce risk or generate trust.

Both of the platforms analysed were founded in 2017, according to Brønnøysundregistrene, the register for all companies run in Norway. This grounds the study in relatively young platforms, at least compared to more longstanding actors in the same market. eWork, for instance, is a broker for matching workers and customers in several sectors that has been active since at least 2006. Studying recently founded platforms gives some interesting perspectives in the study as these platforms can see what earlier platforms have done wrong with regards to trust building. However, it also makes it more challenging to contrast and compare these platforms with older platforms in the market.

As we can see in Table 5.6, many of the document types in the document analysis are uneven and selective to some degree. This means that great care must be taken in concluding from these alone. However, we used the documents as context and for triangulation of findings from interviews. This lowers the effect of lack of comprehensiveness. The interviews provided details about the missing parts from the corpus of documents and vice versa. However, we may still be missing context only attainable from other kinds of documents, for instance, e-mails or phone communication in the negotiation of a project.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions and Future Research

In this section, we summarise the paper, its findings and how the findings reflect on earlier research. This section also introduces the practical and theoretical implications of the study. Finally, we discuss angles for future research that were uncovered throughout the study.

7.1 Contribution

In this paper, we conducted an exploratory multiple case study of two digital labour platforms active in Norway. The goal of the study was to understand better how trust is created and communicated between labourers and the platforms through different trust building mechanisms. The study consisted of eight interviews with both workers and platform owners on the two platforms. The study also included document analysis of the platforms' websites and contracts that govern work and payment for projects through the platforms.

This study contributes to bringing trust research on e-commerce platforms further into the emerging area of digital labour platforms that do not necessarily have the same characteristics as more traditional commercial platforms. It shows that trust in the studied labour platforms functions similarly to organisational trust. However, earlier trust research on commercial platforms is still applicable, while also highlighting new ways trust can be transferred between worker and platform. This study also brings trust research in organisational and management research further together with human-computer interaction, information systems and CSCW research by highlighting how to communicate trust through digital interfaces and computer-supported cooperation.

7.2 Practical Implications

This study shows how platforms make use of trust building mechanisms found on traditional trust building mechanisms from e-commerce platforms, while also using efficiency and transparency in their platform to build and communicate trust to the workers. The concrete TBMs are essential for the parts of projects that are performed on the platform, but since the parts are comparatively much smaller than those performed off-platform, non-website trust building is also vital.

We have also seen that these findings are quite different from those found on other types of labour platforms, with the main distinguishing factors being (1) required skill level of workers; (2) few touch points with the platform during a project; (3) availability of platform owners; (4) an encouraging social aspect of being a worker; and (5) a willingness to be flexible in work arrangements to fit workers and customers. These all have the potential to considerably affect trust, although their relative importance is not yet known.

Additionally, we found that the most significant irritant among workers was the lack of flexibility in the billing process because they might have to perform billing on other days and with other methods than they otherwise would, and it took longer to get the money. This was less of a problem for the consultants on BrainBase using the direct billing method, as they had a more lenient reporting mechanism which did not affect their billing method or period.

The workers enjoy little risk, as most friction, confusions and concerns are solvable by merely contacting a platform owner as a safe and reliable fallback. As both of the platforms have a goal of becoming increasingly self-serving, which would remove the human element from the various processes, the platforms must take great care in preserving this support for the workers, or risks may significantly increase.

Platforms finding themselves in similar situations described in this case study should thus take care to be flexible, transparent and available to their workers. They must also take care that their platform interfaces and automated processes are flexible, efficient, and of high quality, to minimise friction in the interactions there. They should also have humans readily available to answer questions, as this increases the workers' perception of ability in the platform. Perception of integrity can be increased through transparency and acting in the interests of the workers. This is done by having people with experience from the sector in leadership roles. The platforms can also allow the workers to affect and give feedback on the development of the platform. The

platform can also increase perceived benevolence by acting benevolently, for instance, by offering perks and involving workers. Allowing the workers to take part in ownership and dividends on the platform, or by encouraging a social aspect through providing a community where members and owners can communicate freely with each other can further enhance benevolence. We illustrate trust literature concepts that should be of interest to the platform owners in a design process in the left part of Figure 6.1.

Whether these findings are transferable to larger organisations or other types of labour platforms remains unknown, as there is an unanswered question with regards to scaling of the platforms and typology. It remains to be determined if and how the platforms can be scaled up and further automated while still maintaining the high level of trust that the workers put in the platform at this current stage, but these results should serve as a good starting point for future research into this topic.

7.3 Theoretical Findings

This paper draws on trust research from the world of digital e-commerce and platforms as presented in Friestad and Opheim (2019a) as well as trust research in organisations and working environments. We identify six themes which seem to govern trust on the two studied platforms, which encompass 47 underlying themes that relate to trust factors as described by Mayer et al. (1995), affecting the perception of ability, benevolence and integrity. These can be used to inform and direct future research.

Perhaps our most prominent finding is that trust on these platforms, as opposed to those examined in previous platforms, behaved more organisation-like than application-like. This result is interesting and warrants further exploration, as it is to our knowledge the first of its kind. On the other hand, we still found that those parts of the platform work that involved direct interaction with the platform website still included application-like trust. This is another step towards unifying organisational trust and platform trust, and hints towards a scale of application-like and organisation-like trust. How workers perceive trust on the platform may be affected by how much the workers use the platform in day-to-day life and how many organisation-like structures exist around it, even if the workers are all independent contractors and not employees of the platform. It is also possible that how trust is perceived on a platform is not the same for workers and customers on the platform, due to different usage patterns.

We also found that workers generally do not observe any increased risks from being part of

either of the platforms and that they could lower some existing risks of being an independent contractor, especially with regards to payment and finding work. It seems that workers in this area use these platforms as a way to cast a broader net, so to speak, in their primary job, in order to increase their chances of finding work. This way of work is a difference from results in other research, where most workers perform gig work as a secondary source of income, besides their primary job.

7.4 Future Research

Currently, several consultants are registered on more than one platform at the same time. In theory, this would grant an advantage to the platforms which take the lowest share of the income, assuming the same kinds of tasks are available on all platforms. Platforms use mechanisms to build exclusivity through offering exclusive projects and customers to their members and attempt to add a social aspect of membership through communities of practice. These mechanisms, as we have seen, are closely linked to trust. One could imagine that if one platform were to gain exclusivity with the most attractive customers, it would start a positive feedback loop of customers attracting workers and vice versa. On the other hand, if all platforms were to have an equal amount of exclusivity with attractive customers, the workers might be forced to register on all platforms to stay competitive, essentially nullifying any advantage the exclusivity may bring. Exploring these possibilities is a topic for future research, which could be important for informing the lawmakers responsible for regulating the market of the future.

How the platforms perform in a scaled-up environment would be very interesting with regards to trust research. The workers are positive to available humans while also appreciating that the platforms automate and streamline the processes in the company. As it is a goal of both the platforms to make the platforms even more self-serving then they are today, it would be interesting to follow this development and see how trusting relationships respond to increased automation and less human interaction. How the platforms scale is also relevant, as they currently rely more or less on word of mouth effects. Should platform growth be driven by more conventional marketing, the initial trust brought on by word of mouth will probably not be present.

Several of the TBMs encountered in the interviews appeared off-platform, in third party communication applications, and over the phone, email and face to face during meetups. We see to a larger extent that trust building resembles organisational trust building, rather than the trust built on platforms. However, this trust building is still communicated primarily with digital tools. Researching how organisations communicate trust in the modern labour platform could

provide insight into how labour platforms can be a more realistic alternative to brick and mortar organisations for a more substantial part of the population.

One of the mechanisms we encountered that we did not find an effect for through our interviews is that of monetary rewards for recruiting new members to the platform. Studying monetary incentives could be an objective for future research.

More research should be done into the relationship between organisation-like and website-like trust building on labour platforms. We saw in this study that trust behaves quite differently from how it does on previously studied platforms like Amazon Mechanical Turk and Uber. Since this was a small scale case study, future research should perform a broader search into more platforms. Future research could quantify their relevant similarities and differences to attempt to examine whether organisation-like and application-like trust are indeed points on a scale, and how that scale behaves. The characteristics we identified in section 6.2 may be helpful in this endeavour.

Communities forming around the platforms seem to be an essential factor for the labour platforms in this study. Communities have been studied extensively on the topic of social commerce and in CSCW literature. There have also been a few studies regarding communities that whose primary function is to be adjacent to labour platforms, such as Turkopticon (Irani and Silberman, 2013). There has been little research where the platforms are as involved in the community as they are in this study. Future research could investigate how these communities form and how the different structures that surround and support these communities function. In particular, CSCW research on communities and digital cooperation can provide an interesting angle when studying these communities. Additionally, a more embedded study that monitors the cooperation and communication between peers on the platform could provide a fascinating insight into not only trust building but also how the platforms function as a community and organisation.

The models shown in Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3, and described in section 6.9, are simple extensions of the framework for triadic trust that we proposed in Friestad and Opheim (2019a). The ease with which the framework was extended to illustrate these two hypothetical research objectives - the effect of trust transfer on the platform, and the effects of a community of practice on each triadic trust relationship - is a positive sign that the framework is useful. Future research should attempt to use the framework in new contexts to attempt to validate it further usefulness.

7.5 Acknowledgements

We want to thank the managers and founders of BrainBase and Folq for giving us access to their platforms and being very helpful to our research. We would also like to personally thank all the workers who took time out of their day to be interviewed by us and sharing their experiences on the labour platforms.

We would also like to thank our supervisor, Babak A. Farschian, and our fellow master students Kristina, Andreas, Stine and Christian for frequent meetings, motivation, knowledge sharing and tips regarding research, that mainly aided us in creating the method for this study. Additionally, we would like to dearly thank our supervisor for frequent and invaluable guidance on how to conduct our research to a high standard and rigour.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide with Platform Workers

Vi forsker på tillitsbygging på digitale plattformer for arbeidere. I den anledning ønsker vi å stille deg noen spørsmål angående arbeidsdagen din og hvordan du opplever å bruke [plattformselskapet] i den sammenhengen.

Del 1: Empiriske observasjoner om plattformen og plattforminteraksjon

Spørsmål 0: Har du tidligere jobbet på en tilsvarende arbeidsplass i samme bransje før du begynte å jobbe her, for eksempel i et konsulenthus eller som in-house-utvikler?

Spørsmål 1: Med dine egne ord: kan du beskrive en vanlig arbeidsdag for deg? Hvilke oppgaver gjør du i løpet av vanlig dag og hvordan kommuniserer du dette med arbeidsgiver og plattform?

Spørsmål 1.1: Kan du beskrive hvordan kretsløpet av et oppdrag er på plattformen. Hvordan kommer du i gang, hvordan følges opp og hvordan avsluttes oppdraget?

Spørsmål 1.2: Hva slags funksjonalitet på plattformen bruker du spesifikt til dette? (Eventuelt ut over det som er nevnt på tidligere spørsmål)

Spørsmål 2: Bruker du noen digitale plattformer, apper eller andre systemer utenfor selve plattformen til prosjektadministrasjon, leads og lignende? Dette kan være elementer som e-post, støtteverktøy utviklet i miljøet, eller grupper på sosiale medier.

Spørsmål 3: Hvordan skaffer du oppdrag? Får du oppdrag tildelt av [plattformselskapet] eller velger du selv?

Spørsmål 3.1: Hvordan får du tak i informasjon om og i forbindelse med oppdrag?

Spørsmål 4: Hvordan fordeles arbeidsoppgaver mellom deg og plattformen?

Spørsmål 5: Hvilke risikoer opplever du i arbeidsdagen din?

Spørsmål 6: Hvordan får du tilbakemelding av [plattformselskapet], kolleger og kunder?

Spørsmål 6.1: Når og hvordan får du slik tilbakemelding?

Spørsmål 7: Hva gjorde at du valgte å jobbe gjennom [plattformselskapet] kontra et mer konvensjonelt konsulenthus?

Spørsmål 7.1: Hvordan kom du først i kontakt med [plattformselskapet] og hvordan fant du ut om dem?

Spørsmål 7.2: Kan du beskrive hvordan det var å komme i gang på plattformen? Var det noe onboarding eller lignende?

Del 1 er gjennomført, her kan vi ta 5-10 min pause før vi fortsetter videre med del 2 om det er ønskelig.

Del 2: Opplevelser av å jobbe med plattformen

Spørsmål 8: Hvordan har opplevelsen din med å jobbe på plattformen samsvart med forventningene du hadde før du begynte? Hva er likt, hva har overrasket positivt og negativt?

Spørsmål 8.1: Hvordan synes du plattformen fasiliterer at du skal kunne gjøre jobben din?

Spørsmål 9: Hvordan opplever du miljøet hos [plattformselskapet]?

spørsmål 9.1: Hvilke forventninger tenker du at [plattformselskapet] har til deg?

Spørsmål 10: Synes du at du har tilgang til den informasjonen du trenger? Får du informasjonen du trenger når du trenger den?

Hvis tidligere jobb i samme bransje Spørsmål 11: Hvordan opplever du forskjellene på arbeid og arbeidsdag, sammenlignet med din tidligere jobb?

Hvis tidligere jobb i samme bransje og opplevde risiko Spørsmål 12: Hvordan relaterer disse typene risiko (fra spørsmål 4) til din tidligere jobb?

Spørsmål 12.1: Hva synes du [plattformselskapet] gjør bra for å senke risiko, og hva synes du de gjør dårlig?

Spørsmål 13: Hva synes du om tilbakemelding du får fra plattformen? Hva er bra, og hva er mangelfullt? Hva ønsker du tilbakemelding på i arbeidet ditt?

Potensielt flere spørsmål vi har til verktøy og situasjoner som oppstår i arbeidsdagen din. Spørsmål 14+: Mer detaljert om opplevelse av aspekter ved miljø, arbeidsdag og verktøy.

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide with platform Owners

Intervjuet er todelt. Første del handler om hvordan plattformen og omkringliggende systemer fungerer konkret, og andre del handler om forventninger og utfordringer.

Del 1: Konkret om hvordan plattformen fungerer

Spørsmål 1: Kan du beskrive hvordan kretsløpet av et oppdrag er på plattformen fra deres standpunkt? Hvordan finner plattformen arbeidere og oppdrag, hva gjør dere i løpet av oppdraget, og hvordan avsluttes oppdraget?

Spørsmål 1.1: Hvordan følger dere opp oppdrag?

Spørsmål 1.2: Hva slags funksjonalitet på plattformen bruker du spesifikt til dette? (Eventuelt ut over det som er nevnt på tidligere spørsmål)

Spørsmål 1.3: Involverer dere arbeidere i prosessen med å videreutvikle plattformen? I så fall: hvordan?

Spørsmål 2: Brukes noen andre digitale plattformer, apper eller andre systemer utenfor selve plattformen til å utføre disse oppgavene? Dette kan være elementer som e-post, støtteverktøy utviklet i miljøet, eller grupper på sosiale medier.

Spørsmål 3: Gir dere tilbakemelding til kunder og arbeidere, og hva ser dere i så fall etter når dere lager en slik tilbakemelding?

Spørsmål 3.1: Når kommer denne tilbakemeldingen?

Spørsmål 4: Hvordan fordeles arbeidsoppgaver mellom dere, arbeider og kunde?

Spørsmål 5: Hva tilbyr dere kunder?

Spørsmål 6: Hva tilbyr dere arbeidere?

Spørsmål 7: Hvordan tilbyr dere disse tjenestene? (mtp. digitale verktøy og grensesnitt)

Spørsmål 8: Hvordan matcher dere arbeidere og jobber?

Spørsmål 9: Hvordan markedsfører dere dere ovenfor potensielle arbeidere.

Spørsmål 9.1: Er dere aktive på andre digitale plattformer, medier eller forum?

Spørsmål 10: Hvordan skaffer dere oppdrag og kunder?

Spørsmål 11: Hvordan investerer dere i plattformen? (Hva er satsningsområder / hvilke aspekter med plattformen vil dere utvide på, legge inn eller videreutvikle?)

Spørsmål 12: Hvorfor valgte dere å lage en plattform i stedet for en annen type organisasjon eller konsulentvirksomhet?

Del 2: Forventninger og utfordringer

Spørsmål 13: Hvilke forventninger har dere til arbeidere?

Spørsmål 14: Hvilke forventninger har arbeidere til dere?

Spørsmål 14.1: Har dere erfart noen brudd på slike forventninger, hvordan ble dette håndtert og hva var konsekvensene?

Spørsmål 15: Hvilke tema er det arbeidere tar opp med dere når de tar kontakt med dere? er det noen bekymringer som går igjen?

Spørsmål 16: Ser dere utfordringer med å være en plattform kontra annen type virksomhet? Spesielt med tanke på samlokalisering og embeddedness/forankring av arbeidere

Spørsmål 17+: Eventuelle oppfølgingsspørsmål fra tidligere svar

APPENDIX C

Quotes in Original Norwegian Form

This appendix contains the original Norwegian transcriptions of all quotes included in the results, by the same indices.

(I) *"Den beste modellen, tror vi, for konsulenter i form av at vi tar minimalt cut, egentlig så lite cut som vi kan for å drifte plattformen videre."*

(II) *"Det er jo at vi sikrer god tilgang på kjøpende kunder. (...) Folq er utstillingsvindu for de, men det vinduet er ikke noe verdt om det ikke er noen kunder inne å ser på de. Så det er at vi hele tiden har fokus på rekruttere kunder og at vi har fokus på å få på plass mekanismer som gjør at kundene faktisk trigges til å bli aktive og ta kontakt og at de blir aktive i den form at de lyser ut oppdrag."*

(III) *"Så ba da om høyere lønn, og det sa min sjef at det var helt umulig, også sa jeg opp og startet for meg selv. Og nå tjener jeg mye mer penger, mer enn jeg ba om i jobben."*

(IV) *"Hvis man får oppdrag der så er jo det bedre. Og så er jo sånne... sånne megler-type folk er jo en sjanseløs gjeng, da. Det er ikke så gøy å ha så mye med dem å gjøre. Det er litt klovnetimen med folk som ikke har peiling på noen ting som driver og formidler konsulenter, det er et litt sånn nødvendig onde."*

(V) *"(...) de har lavere cut, sånn at det er greit å prøve [BrainBase] først"*

(VI) *"[Vi tilbyr] dyktige og erfarne konsulenter, gjerne folk som har jobbet en stund og har bygget opp en erfaring og ønsker å jobbe, hva skal jeg si, de er veldig engasjerte ofte fordi de jobber for seg selv og er dermed avhengig av å gjøre det beste som de kan for å ha en sjanse til å overleve."*

(VII) *"Det der er et ganske komplekst område fordi siden egentlig er en paraply over mange selvstendige konsulenter så er det egentlig konsulentene selv... altså de driver sitt eget selskap fordi de ønsker å være selvstendige, så vi blander oss ikke opp i hvordan man.. på en måte driver sin butikk, holdte jeg på å si. Men, det vi gir er egentlig opsjoner og valgmuligheter til å kunne gjøre det enda bedre, eller ha det enda bedre som selvstendig konsulenter."*

(VIII) *"Så når man føler at man ikke trenger det som er stabilt med et tradisjonelt konsulenthus mer, da kan man like gjerne starte for seg selv og samarbeide med andre i samme situasjon."*

(IX) *"De fasiliterer på en måte ingenting at jeg skal gjøre jobben min sånn sett. Fordi de fokuserer på hvordan jeg skal få jobb, eller bytte jobb, eller hele den biten der. I det daglige slik det er nå så fasiliterer de egentlig veldig lite."*

(X) *"Det er ikke sånn at Folq, tenker jeg, kan være ditt ene go to sted også blir du liksom tatt kjempegodt vare på alltid for oppdrag. Så som selvstendig konsulent må du jo følge med på alle de store fem-seks store norske plattformene sånn som jeg ser det da. Hvis du vil ha de beste oppdragene.*

"Det er ikke noe eksklusivitet. Jeg går på alle. (...) Fordi at jeg jakter jo oppdragene, ikke nødvendigvis plattformer.

"Når det begynner å nærme seg slutten av perioden så kommer jeg til å gå ganske bredt ut, altså ikke bare via Folq, men også direkte til kontakter og andre nettverk da."

(XI) *"Mange av konsulentene, de aller aller fleste, er jo registrert på andre meglere som jo er konkurrenter av oss. Hvis vi oppnår eksklusivitet hos mange kunder, så vil jo det gjøre, får det konsulentene til å tenke at 'okay, men det er her vi må være, det er Folq som har de gode avtalene'."*

(XII) *"Det er å skaffe kunder som er make eller break. Hvis de hjelper med det så er det liksom 95%."*

(XIII) *"Jeg får mine penger i tide, det er det viktige."*

(XIV) *"Jeg var egentlig veldig postiv til at jeg ble kontaktet av oppdragsgiver, for det er litt "too good to be true" ."*

(XV) *"Det er den klassiske mellomleddposisjonen [i industrien] og det er på en måte noe vi prøver å utfordre fordi administrativt tar det mye tid og kapasitet. Jeg vet ikke om dere har sett på plattformen, så har vår plattform null ansatte, vi jobber alle som selvstendige konsulenter ved siden av å drive plattformen. Det betyr at vi må bruke tiden vår på en fornuftig måte"*

(XVI) *"(...) men i stedet for at jeg måtte en avtale selv eller at kunden utarbeidet en avtale og sendte til meg så var det jo Folq som utarbeidet den, de allerede hadde en standardavtale som gikk til begge parter som vi bare signerte, så det var jo veldig praktisk for både meg og kunden, sånn at vi bare signerte begge to, etter at vi hadde blitt enige om pris og omfang."*

(XVII) *"(...) men jeg kunne fint bare gått bak ryggen på dem i det tilfellet det, men når man aktivt demonstrerer at man er ærlig da, så tror jeg det er en god måte å bygge tillit på. Det er et veldig interessant spørsmål, for det er jo kjempeviktig for Brainbase sin del. Hvis de kan stole på konsulentene så sparer jo de enormt mye tid og penger og ressurser, hvis de slipper å drive å følge med eller stå for fakturering eller sånne ting."*

(XVIII) *"Så da syntes jeg det var fint og tidsbesparende at de gjorde det, og kanskje også betryggende i den forstand at dersom kunden hadde laget en kontrakt som jeg skulle signere så måtte jeg jo tenkt veldig på at: 'oi, tenk om kunden har skrevet noe med liten skrift som gjør at jeg kommer dårligere ut da'. Mens Folq oppfattes da som et mellomledd som er på begges side så da stoler jeg på at alt er i orden, når det går via Folq. Så både trygghet og tidsbesparende da."*

(XIX) *"For oss er det jo at de opptrer profesjonelt og at de gjør en god jobb for oppdragsgiver, og at de bygger gode relasjoner med oppdragsgiver slik at de ønsker å videreføre oppdraget, dersom konsulenten også ønsker det. Det er det viktigste. Jeg tror ikke vi skal ha så veldig mange forventninger til de heller, at vi ikke skal sette så mange krav til de."*

(XX) *"De forventer jo at jeg skal forholde meg til de fristene som gjelds på fakturering og timelister, tenker jeg. Og de forventer vel også at jeg oppdaterer ledigdatoen min, og utover det har de liksom ikke noen forventninger."*

(XXI) *"Jeg føler at de er en sånn lead generator, men jeg føler ikke at de fasilitert meg noe i selve oppdraget."*

(XXII) *"Det er egentlig litt uvanlig fra Folq sin side, de gjør egentlig lenger oppdrag da, som varer ganske lenge eller ikke er tidsbestemt. Mens her var det noen som bare trengte noen i en måneds tid, litt over en måned, 5 uker. Så da er det på en måte en slags tidsbegrensning og maks antall timer så det er litt uvanlig. Men jeg tror de syntes det er spennende å eksperimentere med det også."*

(XXIII) *"Sånn som det var for meg nå så var det litt spesielt da, for at jeg var hos kunden på det tidspunktet jeg gikk over til å være selvstendig. Og kunden ytret eksplisitt om at de ønsket at jeg skulle fortsette der, så det ble på en måte en litt spesiell ordning. Så jeg har på en måte ikke helt fulgt et sånn vanlig, si, kretsløp sånn sett da, jeg har egentlig bare fortsatt å være der jeg var, men via Folq, og da var det liksom det å fikse kontrakter og sånn var veldig rett frem da."*

(XXIV) *"Kontrakten for oppdraget mot kunden og da var jo den og den var bygget opp på selskapet sin rammekontrakt, og da ba jo jeg blant annet om å få utlevert den kontrakten og da fikk jeg det med en gang. Så jeg tenker, sånn, proff i så henseende er at det var transparent da også. Det at de var så transparente i den prosessen, samtidig som at de håndterte alt det formelle veldig effektivt, og når jeg også ba om å få en indeksregulering som en del av kontrakten så ble det løst veldig smidig. Så det syntes jeg var bra da, og det er jo ikke gitt at alle sammen har den velviljen og kompetansen til å løse det så fort som det de gjorde der."*

(XXV) *"Det var egentlig veldig greit, da. Jeg fikk en følelse av at det var veldig proft, da. For jeg trodde at det var en sånn klassisk, at du bare fant plattformen på hjemmesiden deres også bare lagde du en bruker og fylte inn litt om deg selv. Men det var veldig fint at det var mer profesjonelt så du lagde ikke bruker, du måtte først søke."*

(XXVI) *"(...) at de som jobber på plattformen automatiserer veldig mye og tenker utenfor boksen. Det handler om å minimere dette som kalles overhead, altså administrativt arbeid, og mange bruker for eksempel Fiken for bokføring, jeg bruker ikke det, men om man da bruker fiken finnes det et grensesnitt eller API slik at man kan delvis automatisere bokføring for eksempel, så trenger man ikke en økonomiassistent. Så den holdningen og tilnærmingen til dette syntes jeg er veldig inspirerende."*

(XXVII) *"Man tar veldig mye for gitt. Jeg sender jo ikke faktura til BrainBase. Jeg laster opp timer og min timerapport på plattformen også lager jeg bare en faktura*

for min egen bokføring også skjer det, jeg vet ikke helt om det helt automatisert eller semi-automatisert på deres side, men en bokføringspost lagres iallefall automatisk med Fiken sitt API på deres side, også sender de det enten manuelt eller automatisk til sluttkunde. Men de fleste foretak har jo en person som tar i mot fakturaer og går igjennom den og pakker om den og det tar jo tid. Og her har man tatt vekk den tiden."

(XXVIII) *"En platform som BrainBase så kan man se det som at man outsourcer en del av sin salgsavdeling, en del av sin markeds-, PR avdeling"*

(XXIX) *"Min erfaring at man på en måte ser på den overordnede beskrivelsen også er ofte det man ender opp med å gjøre defineres på mange måter selv, men innen visse begrensninger da. Så hvis jeg ser at det er sted, ofte vet jeg litt om det stedet som har lyst ut oppdraget, og hvis jeg da ser at det er et sted som jeg tenker er gøy å jobbe hos, så skal ikke akkurat den spesifikke teksten den viktigste da."*

(XXX) *"Jeg har også vært i dialog med noen som jeg har sendt litt meldinger frem og tilbake og det har vært litt varierende hvem som har startet dialogen, men det har ikke blitt noe av fordi timingen har ikke vært god."*

(XXXI) *"(...) og da tok jeg kontakt med mennesker som jeg vet jobber der, spurte hvordan de er på det fortaket. Så oppdaterte jeg CVen min, lastet den opp på platformen og skrev et personlig brev. Da går ikke det direkte til kunde, for jeg vet ikke, det må vel godkjennes av grunnleggerne av BrainBase. Og da ble jeg innkalt til intervju, også møtte jeg kunden."*

(XXXII) *"Det finnes potensiale her. Spesielt det her med hvordan det som kalles plattformsøkonomi."*

(XXXIII) *" (...) men det er jo litt sånn klassisk plattformøkonomi med at du må ha liksom konsulenter for å få oppdrag og så må du ha oppdrag for å få konsulenter i en sånn sirkulær versjon".*

(XXXIV) *"Jeg syntes det går veldig bra. Det kommer opp flere oppdrag, flere jobber, flere muligheter på jobb enn jeg trodde først. Nettverket på BrainBase vokser kjapt. Så det finnes et potensial, et stort potensial."*

(XXXV) *"Det gjør vi egentlig ikke. Alle som kommer har gjerne hørt om oss via noen andre. Så du kan si det at vi markedsfører oss med å gjøre bra ting for konsulenter, og det vet konsulenter som er i nettverket. Vi har en høy grad av tillit, tror*

vi, blant konsulentene [i nettverket], og da snakker medlemmer i nettverket oss opp til andre mennesker som de møter som også er interessert i å bli konsulenter. Et eksempel på det, (...) en som jeg så her forleden var at han hørte om oss når han var på bar og snakket med annen konsulent, og en hadde hørt om oss via en nabo som jobbet i bransjen og så videre. Så det er masse forskjellige veier inn, og vi har følt at den markedsføringen der er egentlig den beste markedsføringen som du kan få, når du snakker om produktet ditt til andre. Så det er egentlig mye mer verdifullt enn at vi går rundt og lager store annonser, så det har vi ikke gjort, vi har ikke brukt en krone på markedsføring."

(XXXVI) *"Vi har litt utgående markedsføring, veldig lite, så all vår vekst egentlig frem til februar 2020 har primært basert seg på word of mouth og nettverkseffekter. (...) Så det som skjer er at en konsulent hører om oss, fra en venn, det er vel det som er det mest vanlige, så googler de sikkert og registrer seg på nettsiden vår. På nettsiden har vi ganske sparsommelig med informasjon, men informasjonen er designet slik at de skjønner om det er noe for de da."*

(XXXVII) *(...) og kanskje mer enn tilgang på informasjon så har man veldig lett tilgang på dem, så hvis jeg lurer på noe så svarer de raskt. De er liksom tilgjengelig enten på mail eller telefon eller Slack."*

(XXXVIII) *"(...) men i praksis har man relasjoner mellom mennesker som er ganske avgjørende, så det jeg prøver på i hvertfall er at hvis jeg er i tvil om noe, om noe er greit eller ikke, så ringer jeg og spør heller en gang for mye enn en gang for lite."*

(XXXIX) *"(...) da var vi opptatt av hvordan skaffe leads og da var det bare jeg googlet og kom på det med plattformer også googlet det litt og havnet da tilfeldigvis på Folq. Fordi jeg har jo gått på NTNU så jeg kjenner litt av de som jobbet der, så da ble jeg veldig nysjerrig på det."*

(XL) *"På den måten kom jeg da over Folq, ikke sant, når jeg lette etter ulike konsulenthus på nett selv. Også visste jeg jo på på en måte, jeg så på en måte på hvor en del av dem hadde bakgrunn fra, jeg har jo kamerater som har jobbet i Bekk selv. Så liksom via den... jeg fant det rett og slett på nettet også tittet jeg litt rundt og så jeg hvem de var også kunne jeg dobbeltsjekke med kompis på hva det her var for noe og sånne ting. Og det var sånn jeg kom i kontakt med Folq."*

(XLI) *"Det er en annen type bedrift, det er mer et nettverk enn et meglerhus, og folka som jobber der har veldig mye høyere kompetanse, eller, folka som står bak BB har veldig mye høyere kompetanse, typisk, enn de som har meglere. Jeg har inntrykk av at de som startet BB er erfarne konsulenter, og det er ikke bare sånne juniorselgere og sånn."*

(XLII) *"En ting konsulentselskapene er superflinke på er nettopp å bygge opp det faglige og sosiale felleskapet. Så det er en ting du gir avkall på i det du bestemmer deg for å gå selvstendig, så vi prøver å demme litt opp for det du mister der. Det blir selvfølgelig litt løsere med oss, men vi fasiliterer at du får møte folk og snakket litt fag og ta en pils."*

(XLIII) *"Det er mer ensomt, vil jeg si, å jobbe som selvstendig konsulent, for... nå er dette oppdraget her av en sånn art hvor det bare er jeg og han kollegaen min som gjør hver vår ting, kan du si, for vi har forskjellige fagområder. Og så er det kunden som ikke er så teknisk. Jeg har tidligere fått mye mer tilbakemelding på koden jeg skriver, for eksempel."*

(XLIV) *"Grunnen til at jeg da valgte å slutte som selvstendig konsulent nå er at fordi jeg hele tiden har hatt en plan om at jeg tror at man må være en del av noe større. Også kan man bestemme hva det større er, det kan jo være et nettverk eller det kan være et selskap. (...) Så jeg får ikke nytte av de andre konsulentene at de kan hjelpe meg å selge inn på steder, men den får du jo på en måte hvis du er ansatt i et selskap og det er mye større interesse av å hjelpe hverandre, og du trenger jo nettverket til hverandre for å få tak i oppdrag også. Også er jeg jo et sosialt dyr og sånn sett har jeg lyst å ha kollegaer som du kan ha det hyggelig med. Og da var det riktig for meg å bli ansatt et sted i steden."*

(XLV) *"Folka som er på plattformen som gir et visst sånn sosialt nettverk så man kan delta på fredagspils og sånn. Og jeg vil si det er sånn OK, men i praksis så er det ikke så bra som i teorien, fordi det man går litt glipp av som konsulent er jo dette sosiale samholdet på arbeidsplassen med å være en del av team og sånn. Det varierer jo fra kunde til kunde, men generelt så blir du ikke i like stor grad en del av teamet som fast ansatte gjør. Men så er det heller ikke sånn at et sånt konsulentnettverk kan demme helt opp for det, fordi det å møte noen folk en gang i måneden, for eksempel, til en fredagspils er jo ikke det samme som å møte noen man jobber med hver dag til en fredagspils. Så du har ikke de delte opplevelsene av arbeidet og sånn å snakke om som gjør at du har blitt kjent og sånn, så det er*

en hyggelig sosial samling, men sånn sammenlignet med å bare henge med venner eller drive med en eller annen hobby, så synes jeg ikke det har så mye for seg, egentlig."

(XLVI) *"I vår bransje er vi jo ikke med i fagforeningen, så da finnes det jo et behov for å organisere seg, og det kan jo gjøres gjennom den her typen platform med å formidle sin egen jobb."*

(XLVII) *"Jeg vet en del har diskusjoner om å kanskje kjøpe bolig og andre kanskje vil ha kontor hvor de jobber sammen, også at det blir ringvirkninger som påvirker andre områder også. Det er kult å jobbe med."*

(XLVIII) *"Det syntes jeg egentlig er supert. Jeg synes det er kult at de jobber for å være et samlingspunkt for folk. Så det syntes jeg var veldig bra, jeg har vært på en del meetups, både vært lærerikt og møtt nye folk."*

(XLIX) *"(...) for meg er jo Folq en salgskanal, pluss at de prøver å gjøre litt sosialt ut av det. Det er jo liksom en salgskanal med litt gøy da og det kan funke bra det altså"*

(L) *"(...) [E]n måte å dekomponere det litt da: Risiko for å ikke lære, og risiko for å tape penger."*

(LI) *"Det har vært lange diskusjonstråder som har blitt over hundre kommentarer og man har lagt mye tid inn om man skal kjøpe el-sykkel, moped eller bil på firmaet og hvis man skal kjøpe, skal man ha tjenestebil eller privatbil, og hvilke form skal man gjøre det på: delbetalinger eller ikke."*

(LII) *"(...) og da er det fint med en Wiki å gå til. Jeg har brukt det for eksempel når jeg skulle registrere meg for MVA, så var det en veldig bra sammenfatning der om hvordan man skulle det i konteksten av Brainbase og et norsk AS."*

(LIII) *"Snakke selskapsdrift: det er jo en ting som er veldig relevant for disse selvstendige konsulentene, de har jo eget AS nesten alle. Måten vi gjør det på er at vi har en gang i måneden, så har vi en meetup som er åpen for alle våre konsulenter, og ofte også utenfor Folq-felleskapet da."*

(LIV) *"(...) men vi har noe som vi kaller tjenester. Så der er det jo tjenester - eller rabatterte tjenester, gjerne - som man kan få, som gjerne er forhandlet frem av medlemmer i nettverket. Så da f.eks vi har en pensjonsavtale med KLP, det er en konsulent som har forhandlet frem fordi han følte at han trengte en bedre pensjonsavtale."*

(LV) *"Ofte så kan mangel på åpenhet være et av de store problemene da, man blir ikke fortalt hele bildet og det er sånn som kan gå og gnage over tid, ihvertfall for meg. Da syntes jeg det å ha en radikalt åpent modell, er veldig appellerende da."*

(LVI) *"De meglerhusene er jo kjent for at ofte er det uklart hva de egentlig tar i provisjon og sånn: de gir en pris til kunden og så gir de en pris til deg og så vet ikke du hva prisen kunden får er og sånn. Mens BB er veldig tydelige på hva de tar og hva ting koster og sånn. Så jeg føler at BB er på en måte litt mer på mitt lag."*

(LVII) *"Du kan si at de prinsippene vi benytter oss av i Folq som brand er egentlig å være transparente og direkte og ærlige, så det prøver vi egentlig å bruke i all kommunikasjonen våre både til kunde og konsulent, men også mellom dem, at vi prøver å være så åpen som mulig og dele all informasjon som er tilgjengelig."*

(LVIII) *"Hvis det er en offentlig anbudskonkurranse så, da får de alltid en tilbakemelding på om de har blitt valgt ut til å bli del av tilbudet vi sender inn - det får de tilbakemelding på - også får de tilbakemelding om, hvis de har blitt sendt inn, om det er et positivt eller negativt svar. Da pleier vi også å inkludere den vurderingen som den spesifikke offentlige kunden har gjort, vi legger ofte med et skriv hvor de begrunner og scorer alle leverandørene, så vi pleier å være tranparente på det sånn at konsulenten får innsikt i hvor høyt opp de nådde da, hvis de ikke fikk oppdraget."*

(LIX) *"Siden, som jeg nevnte, så jobber vi som selvstendige konsulenter, og jeg for eksempel har en 80% stilling som konsulent, og det er begrenset hvor mye jeg får gjort og hvor mye andre får gjort, så vi er veldig åpne på hvilke tanker vi har rundt videreutvikling, og deler gledelig med andre i nettverket. Hvis noen har lyst til å bidra med videreutvikling så er de hjertelig velkomne til å gjøre det. Vi har kodebasen åpen for alle i nettverket som vil ha tilgang, så de kan gå inn å se. Vi har ellers åpenhet, hvis folk vil ha innblikk i diverse ting så gjør vi det. Og vi har, betaler også til tider konsulenter for å gjøre arbeid på plattformen. Da foretrekker vi å bruke ledig kapasitet, altså konsulenter som er i nettverket allerede."*

(LX) *"(...) i de emisjonene så har vi åpnet for ansatte og konsulenter på plattformen, og det er mange konsulenter som har investert i Folq, og det tenker jeg er et solid signal på at vi gjør noe riktig og at konsulentene har tro på oss."*

(LXI) *"Så jeg investerte littegrann penger i dem nå fordi man kan gjøre det som konsulent på plattformen, altså i Folq, og de har tenkt ganske nøye gjennom og har ganske god oversikt over markedet og sånn"*

(LXII) *"Kanskje det hadde vært en bedre i det aspektet om BrainBase ikke var et aksjeselskap, men i stedet hadde en annen organisasjonsform, som en forening eller kooperativ.(...) Men jeg velger likevel BrainBase, for det finnes mulighet å bli deleier og det er andre konsulenter i samme situasjon som meg som er eiere."*

(LXIII) *"Fordi vi, i IT-bransjen så er jo oppdraget som oftest måneder lange, om ikke flere år, og da hadde jo interaksjonen med BrainBase vært mye viktigere dersom det var nye jobber vær uke for eksempel, men slik er det jo ikke."*

(LXIV) *"Det er jo nesten ikkeeksisterende da, men det er ikke behov for så mye heller, det er ikke så veldig komplisert. Du jobber noen timer, og så fakturerer du timene liksom, det er ikke rakettforskning. Nå kan det hende at de følger opp kunden, som sagt, det vet jeg ikke, jeg tror ikke de gjør det men det kan hende at de gjør det. Men ut over det så er det veldig lite. Hvis jeg har noen spørsmål så svarer de på det, og det er fint."*

(LXV) *"Det føler jeg at de ikke gjøre så mye. Hvis jeg forstår spørsmålet. Jeg føler at de er en sånn lead generator, men jeg føler ikke at de fasilitert meg noe i selve oppdrag. Så liksom hvertfall til nå har jeg følt at jeg liksom "on my own" så fort jeg begynte å jobbe for kunden. Bortsett fra at jeg fikk et spørsmål om det gikk bra, eller om jeg hadde noen problemer, så svaret er vel nei da. At de ikke fasiliterer."*

(LXVI) *"Hvis det er kort oppdrag og man har et maksimumsbudsjett fra en kunde, så hadde det også vært en fordel å eventuelt ha en minimum, men jeg vet ikke om det er så vanlig."*

(LXVII) *"Når det gjelder det med risiko for penger så er litt, sånn, i forhold til de lønningene jeg har hatt når jeg ikke var selvstendig, så jeg lurer på om jeg kan gå et år ledig per år jeg jobber. Sånn at den reelle risikoen er ekstremt lav da."*

(LXVIII) *"[Det er] helt frivillig og det koster ingenting å bli en del av nettverket."*

(LXIX) *"Jeg var ganske mye sånn som var drivkraften for fagutviklingen og de tingene der og holdt en del kurs internt og egentlig lærte veldig lite av de andre jeg jobbet med. Jeg kunne ha forsåvidt ha kommmet til et annet konsulenthus der jeg kanskje hadde lært mer. Men så ser jeg i det store og hele så er min drivkraft til å lære ting som står igjen, ikke noe jeg får fra andre og den læringen skjer mest på jobben, og tenker jeg jobben hos kunden. Så jeg så at en så stor læringen skjedde hos kunden, eller privat på kvelden selv, at den biten med læring og de tingene der ikke var et argument da."*

(LXX) *"Nå er det ingen som ser koden jeg skriver, noe som gjør at jeg kan jobbe temmelig fort, men kvaliteten blir ikke like høy som i tilfellet hvor man har code review og sånn, eller fagfellevurdering som man kaller det på norsk. Så jeg vil si at på en måte lærer jeg mer fordi jeg kan velge teknologi selv og eksperimentere mer, men på en annen måte så lærer jeg mindre fordi jeg får mindre tilbakemelding av andre folk i samme fagfelt.*

"Noen oppdrag er jo sånn at du kommer inn i et eksisterende team med folk med samme kompetanse og sånn, og da vil det være annerledes, men i oppdrag hvor du er litt sånn one man show så kan jeg lett se for meg at det er fort gjort å stagnere litt, fordi man lærer veldig mye av å få tilbakemelding på arbeidet man gjør. Du kan alltids ta noen kurs og sånn, men det er ikke det samme som å få tilbakemelding på arbeidet du gjør."

(LXXI) *"(...) og [kunden] har ikke noe særlig insentiv for å investere noe i deg og sånn, hvis de betaler så mye som de gjør forventer de bare at du skal produsere, produsere, produsere."*

(LXXII) *"Det har jeg egentlig sånn aldri 100% skjønt, eller, jeg har ikke noe sånn klarhet i det, det bare var jo veldig praktisk at de tok seg av selve avtaleinngåelsen."*

(LXXIII) *"Når det kommer til det dem gjør dårlig er litt vanskelig, for jeg vet jo ikke for eksempel hvor mange oppdrag det kunne ha vært på plattformen, og jeg tenker at største risikoen på plattformen er at det er for få oppdrag tilgjengelig eller at man ikke blir eksponert for nok oppdrag. Men hvorvidt dem gjør det dårlig eller ikke er vanskelig å vite da."*

(LXXIV) *"Hva skjer når omsetningen i aksjeselskapet kommer til øke med mange millioner? Og hvordan gjør man da med den fordelingen av pengene på plattformen? Hvis det blir for mye business av eierne at de tar ut pengene eller øker sin makt, det blir, maktubalanse kan det også bli mellom de som er store eiere og de som ikke er store eiere. Det ser jeg på som et potensielt problem i fremtiden. Og da hvis man ikke kommer til en bra løsning på den, den organisasjonsformen som er riktig, så kommer det da noen som starter nye grupper utenfor BrainBase som gjør samme sak."*

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Trust Building on Digital Labour Platforms: the Worker's Perspective

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