Chapter 4
"Generous" and "Stingy" Advice Sharing Among Peer Freelancers in Professional and Creative Project Work Considering Competitive Advantage

ABSTRACT

To make ends meet as a freelancer, people have to build a serious and credible skillset (through formal education, credentialing, deep practice) and offer sufficient public information to draw the attention of potential clients. Depending on their particular expertise, they have to have social contacts in the field, and they have to be active on various platforms to bid for work. Freelancers have a variety of social media platforms that they may socialize on for mutual support and advice sharing. Sometimes, to build their credibility, freelancers will create and share peer-to-peer teaching and learning resources. These individuals and teams have to share relevant information without giving away any competitive advantage, given the sparsity of paid jobs and projects. To consider generosity and stinginess of social advice sharing, this work explores some peer-shared teaching and learning resources on the Social Web surrounding freelance work, including a set of 126 slideshows on a popular social slide-sharing site and 16 video transcripts from a popular video-sharing site.

INTRODUCTION

A "freelancer" is a self-employed person who bids for particular jobs and is paid when that job is satisfactorily completed. Depending on the freelancer, sometimes, the person doing the work is an amateur and other times a professional (such as a practicing professional who wants additional income or experience, such as a retiree who is working part-time). In one study, the respective freelancer classifications were the following: Independent Contractors, Moonlighters, Diversified Workers, Freelance Business Owners,

and Temporary Workers ("September 2020 Freelance Forward 2020," Sept. 2020). A freelancer may be freelancing part-time or full-time (if there is available work). "Diversified Workers" have full-time jobs but add on freelancing to that workload. The survey found that some freelanced daily (37%), weekly (32%), bi-weekly (11%), monthly (10%), and less than monthly (10%) ("September 2020 Freelance Forward 2020," Sept. 2020). Annual earnings from freelancing accounted for $1.2 trillion in 2020, with a median hourly rate of $20. A "peer freelancer," fitting with the framework of this book, refers to either a person who freelances and has experiences in freelancing (in any number of fields), and refers to a general peer as in a commonfolk (without direct experiences in freelancing in some cases). Both types of freelancers were observed in this research work.

Some summary findings of an online survey study of freelance workers in the U.S. found that 59 million or 36% of the U.S. workforce freelanced in 2020, and there was $1.2 trillion in annual earnings from this work ("September 2020 Freelance Forward 2020," Sept. 2020). A tenth of the U.S. workforce "has paused freelancing" due to COVID-19; "51% of paused freelancers still have other sources of work, while 28% are on leave / furloughed or unemployed and 17% are students, homeworkers, or retirees" ("September 2020 Freelance Forward 2020," Sept. 2020). Simultaneously, others who had not freelanced prior started to do so…based on the financial instability during the COVID-based recession. Insightfully, the researchers found that "constant skills education and training is a must—and a standard—for freelancers" ("September 2020 Freelance Forward 2020," Sept. 2020).

For economies undergoing change, the flexibility of a labor force that can take on various tasks and fulfill various needs on-the-fly may be advantageous. Theoretically, these can be interchangeable workers who can engage in matrix supervision and so work across a range of entities and organizations. Those who are read into this process may engage such work with less friction. Corporations can achieve particular outcomes without full commitment to a new hire. For the free agents, they can take on various work, acquire new skills, and work remotely; they do not have to make a longer-term commitment to an employer. Certainly, the life of a freelancer is not the easiest. A freelancer has to provide for his or her own office space, equipment, software, healthcare insurance, taxes (for sole proprietorships), and other needs. They have to market themselves, bid for work, negotiate with clients, and ensure payment (Figure 1), whether in very low micropayments or bartered goods or actual moneys. Freelancers take on all legal liabilities and indemnify the various corporations for which they work.

Taking work to the broad masses, to harness collective intelligence, is theorized as a way to solve complex problems. For work, larger tasks are often broken down into micro-tasks, which are then doled out to willing workers. Crowdsourcing based on information technologies (IT) involves "technology-enabled outsourcing of tasks through an open call to the masses via the Internet" (Modaresnezhad, Iyer, Palvia, & Taras, 2020, p. 1). This approach is thought to benefit by having access to a wide audience of potential employees who can help with the complexity of particular work challenges, like coding (Lin, 2018). The wide availability of potential labor means heightened competition for available work. The global workforce means a lowering of wages given the lack of any unionized or other structured protections. The advent of crowd-sourced work (content mills, work bidding sites, and others) has meant, for many workers, a race to the bottom with pennies for labor. The present culture of open-shared creative work results in harsh economics for the creatives (Hai-Jew, 2019).

A *cui bono* analysis of "who benefits" might find mixed results. The target work may be achieved at varying levels of quality and compensated for with diminishing funds. Then, too, different countries (and states) have different laws affecting the experiences of freelance workers and whether they should

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