

# eLancing the Future Work Model: Opportunities and Challenges

8

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## INTRODUCTION

Technology has penetrated our lives, this permits it to be a key changer and shaper of our daily activities. Evidence of the growing influence that technology has in our lives can be seen by the number of internet users worldwide estimated to be 4 billion users (Internet World Stats, 2017). In general, digital platforms can be an information analysis platform (i.e., online reviews), capital platform (i.e., facilitate the sale or rent of assets) and labor platform (i.e., links client-online freelancers). Firms are now repositioning their production strategies towards a distributive system, this explains why some high-tech firms remotely outsource talent from global labor markets (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008). Work is not just central to how we contribute to and participate in the society, but also a powerful mechanism for economic inclusion and social identification. Advances and progress made in technological gave rise to a new labor market mechanism known as electronic lancing (eLancing) as noted by Abubakar and Shneikat (2017). In eLancing is a type of work arrangement that takes place in the cyber platform in which individuals and/or client organizations hire other individuals (i.e., freelancers/sellers/workers) for lucrative assignments and/or work (Abubakar & Shneikat, 2017).

The eLancing platform resembles the eCommerce platform, the demarcating line between the two is that eLancing is a computer-mediated platform (market place) to advertise vacancy/demand, recruit, select, hire and compensate/pay virtual workers as oppose to the buying and selling of goods and services. eLancing platform is an online platform where online freelancers are connected through the internet to provide various services (Shneikat, 2016). Virtual workers are the eLancers, (i) who work without meeting or knowing the employer, (ii) work on microtasks lasting for specific hours and paid on hourly basis or fixed amount within a given period, (iii) do not have the traditional work schedule 9 to 5, and (iv) do not report to anyone (i.e., unit chief or supervisor). Example of such platform includes: upwork.com, guru.com, fiverr.com, freelancers.com and many more. The world largest eLancing platforms are upwork.com and freelancer.com. Upwork has 12 million registered eLancers with 3 billion jobs posted annually and more than US\$1 billion worth of work done annually (Upwork, 2017). The Freelancer has 27 million registered eLancers with 13 million jobs posted and more than US\$588 million worth of work done annually (Freelancers, 2017).

Technology and talent management are the main forces pushing for change in the human resource management in the 21st century. Modern scholars (Abubakar & Shneikat, 2017; Cascio & Aguinis 2008) claimed that present staffing and work models does not match with the present fast-paced work systems and organizations. The traditional way in which labor and capital are organized for production and service delivery in one physical location seems to be losing appeal. Artificial intelligence, robotics, augmented and virtual reality, and the internet of things have been linked to digitalization and the 4th

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3473-1.ch090

industrial revolution. However, it is about us “humans” - the way we live, learn, earn and play. Thus, the future of work is all about pliability and the ability to reinvent oneself. The orthodox archetype of having a stable life time job is eroding and is being replaced by more flexible short-term precarious work arrangement, the eLancing.

Technically, eLancing represents the resurrection of dead capital, the comatose human capital in the context of the World Wide Web’s genealogy. Our values, norms, cultural institutions, and educational systems were designed to create traditional workers. eLancing work model has the propensity to alter the traditional work perceptions, norms, institutions and regulations. This new baby of digitalization and the 4th industrial revolution, eLancing, calls for further examinations, new policies, work practices and theory development and revalidation of existing theories. Thus, this chapter’s aim is to provide a comprehensive overview of existing work models and potential future work model. Subsequently, in this chapter analogy of various work arrangements ranging from independent professionals, contracted professionals, outsourcing and offshoring, teleworking, crowdsourcing and eLancing was conducted. This chapter also classifies eLancers based on several socio-demographic factors, describes the challenges, opportunities and implications of eLancing.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Hybrid Work Models**

Hybrid and flexible work models are designed to allow individuals work from home, work outside regular office hours, to reduce or extend contract hours (Groen et al., 2018). These practices make employees to perform all work-related duties at a remote location and any time of day. The common theme linking independent professionals, contracted professionals, outsourcing and offshoring, teleworking, crowdsourcing and eLancing is work (Aguinis & Lawal, 2012; Shneikat, 2016). Prior researchers often interchangeably use these terminologies; however, they have several distinguishing features. This section will provide a more nuance understanding of each work arrangement:

### **Independent Professionals**

An independent professional or contractor are self-employed persons who do not have any employees but can provide goods and services to other entities under terms specified in a contract or within a verbal agreement (Sayah, 2013). Conventional workers or temporary workers are under the directives and control of the hiring firm. However, independent professionals are not controlled by the client, because client’s control is limited to accepting or rejecting the outcome (Connelly & Gallagher, 2006; Fragoso & Kleiner, 2005). Independent contracting shares several similarities with eLancing. *One*, working alone on a project-related basis for various clients, either in parallel or in succession, project pay, and other details is governed and regulated by a contract. *Two*, as with eLancing, the client does not supervise the professionals directly the professionals have leeway in terms of hours of work and location. The demarcating line with eLancing includes; one, independent professionals face constraints based on clients’ needs e.g., new workplaces, conditions and locations (Sayah, 2013; Süß & Kleiner, 2010). However, eLancers can have specific working conditions e.g., hourly rate, fixed amount, milestone, and do not face new conditions or location since they work online. A freelancer (e.g., plumber, carpenter, auditor, former employee) can be an independent contractor, but an independent contractor is not an eLancer

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