

When the gig is up: Gig workers don't always trust their boss and that might be a good thing

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As the so-called 'gig economy' continues to grow, so do questions about how this type of non-traditional work compares to full-time work

arrangements and how these new relationships differ and impact performance and commitment.

Researchers from the University of New Hampshire took a closer look at gig workers—which include freelancers, [independent contractors](#) and [temporary workers](#)—and examined relationships between workers and their managers and found that one trait, trust, could be a double-edged sword. The paper is published in the *Journal of Trust Research*.

"Millions of workers are now considered gig workers, offering them more flexibility with schedules, working remotely and short-term assignments," said Rachel Campagna, associate professor of management at UNH's Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics.

"Our research found that with this flexibility also means less traditional workplace interaction and [relationship](#) investment by employers which can lead to less trust by workers. But ironically, that's not necessarily a bad thing because in some cases if something goes wrong, gig workers don't seem to take it personally, rebounding more quickly and brushing it off."

In their study researchers outline a series of four studies that looked at a variety of self-identified gig workers. Through surveys and tasks, they asked them to imagine a specific work situation that involved a certain level of trust and asked them how they would respond.

Previous studies show that work relationships are important, and trust is a key component, but researchers found in this case when there was an issue of mistrust with a manager, the gig workers were not as emotionally invested in their relationship with their manager as traditional full-time employees, who had a tendency to take breaches of trust harder emotionally, which had subsequent impacts on their

performance and commitment to their manager.

"Gig workers are such a huge part our economy and it's not clear how well they are treated or respected," said Jennifer Griffith, associate professor of organizational behavior and management at UNH's Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics. "Even though they rebounded more quickly, trust is important in building relationships with not only a manager but also with co-workers and teams and this study shows that it is important to invest in people, no matter their work circumstances."

The paper is among the first to theorize and test that trust in managers is different for [gig workers](#) than it is for traditional workers, and that it has implications for performance differences between the [worker](#) types. The researchers suggest that more research is needed in this area as companies and employees shift their work style and create new work arrangements.

More information: Rachel Campagna et al, When the gig isn't up: The importance (and relevance) of trust on gig workers' performance and commitment, *Journal of Trust Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/21515581.2023.2215747](#)

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