

Finnish Institute of
Occupational Health

Co-Creation in Macrotask Knowledge Work on Labor Platforms

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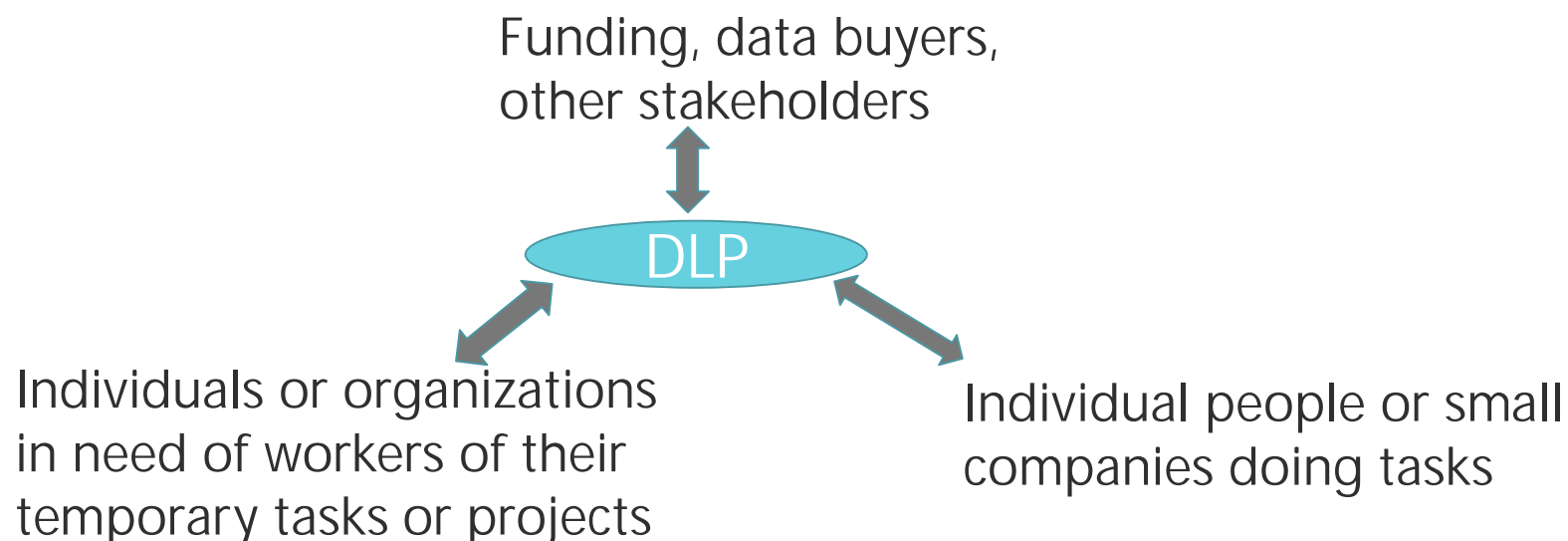


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What is a digital labour platform (DLP)?

- a virtual "turbocharged" marketplace



Tasks on online web-based platforms

- Crowdwork, or "microtasks":
 - E.g. data entry, lead generation, and basic website curation
- Freelancing work, or "macrotasks"
 - E.g. translation, engineering, marketing, web and desktop development, industrial design, data analytics

Rationale for co-creation

- Online labour platforms and/or clients split or fragment jobs to tasks or projects to source through platforms
- On average, platform workers' skills levels exceed skills required in tasks
- Actual and future digitalized work will increasingly require creative and social intelligence
- Co-creation assumedly increases workers' creative capabilities and social skills
- Co-creation may contribute to general social capital and trust, making economic transaction easier and more reliable (Miettinen 2013, p. 10).

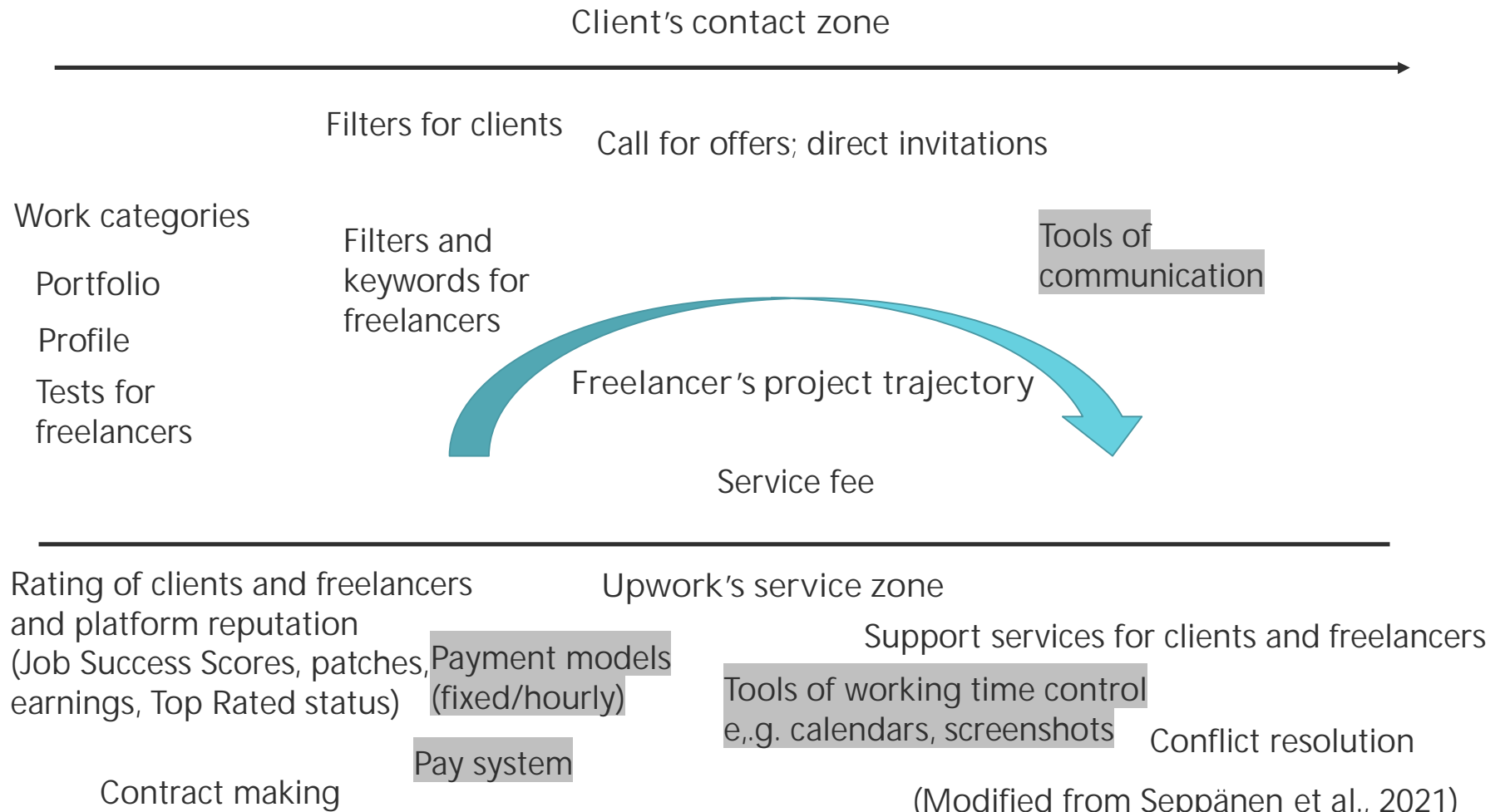
Co-creation

- Complex, relatively open-ended objectives of work tasks/projects
- Collaborative interaction between at least client and freelancer
- Contribution and engagement of freelancers
- Use value for both freelancers and clients

Research questions

- 1 How do platform knowledge workers co-create appropriate solutions with others as they complete macrotasks?
- 2 How do the platform's features aid or hinder this co-creation?

Upwork features



Data

- Qualitative analysis of 15 freelancers' interviews (2018-2019) residing in Finland and working through Upwork.com

Number	Occupational category	Work status
2	Analysts	Self-employed, student
4	Translators	Self-employed, student, employed
2	Consultants	Self-employed
3	Graphic designers	Self-employed, unemployed, employed
1	Engineering consultant	Employed
1	Coder	Self-employed
1	Writer and editor	Self-employed
1	Scientist	Employed

Methods: Focus on projects

- 1 Project type by open-endedness/complexity
- 2 Quality of collaboration and
- 3 Digital tools used (inside and outside
Upwork platform)

Out of approximately 60 projects in the data, seven co-creative projects were found

- Co-creation in certain fields or startup-clients' projects

Project and complexity	Length	Collaboration – client was involved!
1 Tutoring in programming	6 months	Joint problem solving
2 Product development; open-ended	More than 6 months	Open-ended; Partnership
3 Graphic design; creative	2 weeks	Dialogue
4 Inventing words; creative	Short (few hours)	Client and many freelancers
5 Software development; Open-ended	4 months, maintenance 2 yrs	Flexible team working
6 Robot development; Open-ended	11 months	Flexible team working
7 Marketing research; open-ended	13 months	Within and between flexible teams

How do Upwork's features aid or hinder co-creation?

Direct feature in the co-creative projects	Use in co-creative projects
Upwork's pay system	In use but <u>domesticated</u> (Faraj et al., 2016), routine
Payment model (fixed / hourly)	Mostly hourly (5/7), fixed (2/7) in the shortest projects
Working time controls (calendars, screenshots etc)	In use but not relevant for the freelancers. Rather, <u>clients' involvement in co-creation was building trust as control</u>
Tools of communication	Almost totally outside Upwork

How do Upwork's features aid or hinder co-creation? Cont.

- Co-creative projects seem to use their own tools that are outside Upwork
- Multi-actor co-creative projects also create their own structures and instrumentalities outside the platform
- -> Besides pay system, co-creative projects function relatively independently of the platform

Discussion: Why would a labour platform promote co-creation?

- Findings suggest that it is possible for clients not to split or fragment the tasks in platform work.
- Platforms' focus on speed and monetary transactions does not explicitly enhance co-creation
- Platforms must be appealing to users - Co-creation can be of economic interest for the platform company if it attracts new users or maintains old ones
- While platform users (both workers and clients) are increasingly heterogeneous (Vallas & Schor, 2020) is likely that the operating models of DLPs will also become more diverse, potentially including co-creation.

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