

Exploring HR Strategies for Effectively Engaging Gig Workers in the Indian Workforce

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Abstract

The paper investigates the relationship between Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation and Organizational Engagement and Inclusion among gig workers in India, based on the Social Exchange Theory. It examines the question of whether adaptive HR practices, such as clear onboarding, effective communication, and timely feedback, as well as supportive interactions, strengthen the feeling of belongingness among gig workers. A cross-sectional survey among 55 gig workers in manufacturing, IT, and creative services using quantitative methods was conducted. The findings indicate a moderate positive relationship between HR flexibility and engagement/inclusion ($r = 0.485$, $p < .001$). According to the regression analysis, the HR flexibility predicts 23.6 percent of the engagement ($R^2 = 0.236$), and the ANOVA shows that the model is significant ($F = 16.327$, $p < .001$). In independent samples t-tests, there are no differences based on demographics or sector, which indicates that the benefits in the field of HR flexibility are similar among the gig workers. In general, the collected findings indicate that adaptive and inclusive HR systems contribute to motivation, support, and organizational connection among gig workers. The paper also contributes to the small body of Indian literature and highlights why organizations need to redesign the old HR models to accommodate new non-standard work forms.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Flexible HR Strategy, Organizational Engagement, Workplace Inclusion, Contract Workforce, Gig Worker Experience

1. Introduction

Digital platforms, project-based work, and the need for organizations to flex have increased the gig economy in India rapidly. This change has been exhibited in changes in the labor composition in the IT, manufacturing, creative services, and logistics whereby gig workers are becoming highly employed in terms of specialized skills. Nevertheless, a significant number of them do not run within the main HRs, as they undergo ineffective onboarding, a lack of communication, feedback inconsistency, and little engagement in them for specialized skills. Nonetheless, most of them do not work within core HR systems, have poor onboarding, insufficient feedback, and limited participation in decision-making, all of which lower a sense of belongingness and engagement. The requirements of more spontaneous and adaptable HR practices to enable clear communication, equitable assessment, and helpful integration are apparent when compared to traditional HR models shaped to meet full-time employment needs. The research based on the Social Exchange Theory states that engagement and alignment could be enhanced among gig workers through fairness and support. As India moves toward the blended workforce, it is imperative to learn how HR flexibility is relevant to developing engagement and inclusion.

1.2 Background

Even though gig work has blossomed very fast, the majority of organisations continue to operate within full-time HR systems, which introduces uncertainty and a lack of support to gig workers. This incompatibility reduces the level of psychological attachment and performance. It has been a question of poor HR systems and not of gig work itself. Though the world has started to study the HR practices of contingent workers, there is little empirical evidence on the Indian situation. Minor details exist with regards to whether HR flexibility enhances engagement and inclusion among various demographics or industries. This paper bridges that gap by providing context-specific information on how adaptive HR systems can be more helpful in serving the growing gig workforce in India

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation in Gig Work

The literature is consistent in its findings on the matter that flexible HR practices enhance the experience of gig workers. Jeske and Shultz (2019) discovered that role ambiguity is minimized by tech-based onboarding and responsive communication. De Stefano et al. (2021) emphasized that digital HR tools enhance workflow integration. Gupta and Pathak

(2020) demonstrated that disengagement is minimized by personalized support: flexible schedules and effective communication. In general, there is evidence of the necessity of adaptive HR systems.

2.2 Organizational Engagement and Inclusion in Gig Workers

Workers feel involved, and they work harder. Wood et al. (2019) observed an increased interaction with timely communication and recognition. Ashford et al. (2018) have discovered that belongingness is enhanced by acknowledgment and inclusive communication. Kuriakose and Joseph (2022) demonstrated that when individuals are engaged in team routines, they become more engaged. Inclusion is one of the major drivers of gig worker connection

2.3 HR Challenges and Support Needs of Gig Workers

Workers in the gig economy often have a lack of strong support. Isolation because of resource scarcity was indicated by People Matters (2021). Bajwa et al. (2018) also attributed the lack of confidence to ambiguous expectations. According to Mitra and Sundararajan (2022), structured check-ins and online help decrease challenges. It is essential to strengthen HR support.

2.4 Flexible HR Systems and Worker Outcomes

Flexible HR is one that has a direct influence on worker results. According to Kalokhe and Sharma (2021), adaptive evaluation enhances productivity. Jeske and Shultz (2020) demonstrated better perceptions of fairness when supported by autonomy systems. According to Qureshi and Syed (2022), greater commitment was indicated with digital feedback tools. Flexibility is closely related to performance and retention.

2.5 Inclusion Practices and Gig Worker Outcomes

Inclusive approaches enhance the experience of gig workers. According to Connelly and Gallagher (2004), there was increased inclusion when information was available to the temporary workers. Ashford et al. (2018) demonstrated that equal access leads to a decrease in outsider feelings. Mehta and Singh (2021) discovered that micro-inclusion practices are a very effective way of increasing engagement. Inclusion is one of the key HR levers.

2.6 Communication, Feedback, and Gig Worker Experience

Constant communication will inspire satisfaction. The researchers discovered that clarity leads to less ambiguity (Coveri et al., 2021). Roy and Sharma (2022) demonstrated that structured feedback increases performance and confidence. Narayan and Thomas (2020) attributed frustration and attraction to poor communication. Gig roles require communication systems to be modified.

3. Research Objectives

3.1 Objective

- 1.To assess gig workers' perceptions of Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation in their organizations.
- 2.To evaluate the levels of Organizational Engagement and Inclusion experienced by gig workers.
- 3.To examine whether there is a significant relationship between flexible HR Strategy Adaptation and Organizational Engagement and Inclusion among gig workers.
- 4.To examine whether Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation predicts Organizational Engagement and Inclusion among gig workers.

3.2 Hypothesis

According to the research objectives, the hypotheses of the study are the following:

H₁: Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation is positively associated with Organizational Engagement and Inclusion among gig workers.

H₂: Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation significantly predicts Organizational Engagement and Inclusion among gig workers.

H₃: Organizational Engagement and Inclusion differ significantly across demographic groups of gig workers.

H4: Organizational Engagement and Inclusion differ significantly across industry sectors of gig workers.

3.3 Significance of the Study

This research contributes positively to the few empirical sources on non-traditional work by revealing the impact of Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation on the engagement and inclusion of gig employees. It supports Social Exchange Theory, which demonstrates that impartiality, interaction, and supportive engagements make a significant portion of the involvement. The conclusion that HR flexibility produces similar effects regardless of demographic and sectoral backgrounds broadens the knowledge on the experience of gig workers. In practice, the findings can assist organizations in creating inclusive, scalable, and adaptive HR to enhance satisfaction, integration, and long-term engagement with the gig worker workforce.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The relationship between Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation and engagement/inclusion among Indian gig workers was studied in the form of a non-experimental, cross-sectional study. Descriptive-correlational method was selected to quantify the current perception without controlling for variables. Predictive relationships were tested using correlation and regression, and t-tests were used to evaluate demographic and sectoral differences in a natural work environment.

4.2 Sampling Strategy

The researchers were conducting the study on gig workers who had been engaged in work based on projects, contracted, or platform-mediated in India. The convenience sampling was applied, and only those professionals of active gig who completed a full questionnaire and were over 18 years old were included. There were no full-time or part-time workers, interns, or non-gig workers. The last sample was made up of 55 respondents: manufacturing (20), IT (9), creative services (17), education (3), and corporate services (6).

4.3 Tools for Data Collection

Google Forms were used to collect the data. The questionnaire was divided into three parts as Demographics (age, gender, sector, tenure), Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation (seven questions on onboarding clarity, communication access, feedback, managerial responsiveness, compensation clarity, training, and integration support), and Organizational Engagement and Inclusion (seven items on belongingness, feeling valued, communication access, participation, motivation, alignment, and continued association). The two scales were both in the format of a five-point Likert scale, and their reliability was determined by internal consistency. Demographic data provided support in the analysis of group disparities among gig workers

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The section gives the demographic profile of the surveyed 55 gig workers. As a continuation of the previous studies (Ashford et al., 2018; Jeske and Shultz, 2019), age, gender, sector, and tenure were looked into since they tend to affect work experiences. Knowing these features gives a perspective that can explain engagement and inclusion trends among the gig workers.

5.1 Age of the Respondents

Table 1

Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
18–25 Years	16	29.1%	29.1%
26–35 Years	24	43.6%	72.7%
36–45 Years	13	23.6%	96.4%
46 Years and Above	2	3.6%	100.0%

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Total	55	100%	100%

Most respondents were between 26–35 years (43.6%), followed by 18–25 years (29.1%), confirming that gig work is dominated by young adults, while only 3.6% were above 45, reflecting lower digital adoption among older workers.

5.2 Gender of the Respondents

Table 2

Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Prefer not to say	3	5.5%	5.5%
Male	27	49.1%	54.5%
Female	25	45.5%	100%
Total	55	100%	100%

The sample had 49.1% males and 45.5% females, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution that contrasts with the typically male-dominated gig-economy, while still reflecting broader Indian trends where men are more present in manufacturing and IT gigs and women in creative, communication, and service-oriented roles.

5.3 Sector of Work

Table 3.

Sector Distribution

Sector	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Corporate & Professional Services	6	10.9%	10.9%
Creative & Communication Sector	17	30.9%	41.8%
Education & Training	3	5.5%	47.3%
Information Technology (IT)	9	16.4%	63.6%
Manufacturing	20	36.4%	100%
Total	55	100%	100%

Most respondents worked in Manufacturing (36.4%) and Creative/Communication roles (30.9%), with smaller representation from IT (16.4%) and Corporate Services (10.9%), reflecting broader Indian gig-economy trends and strengthening the study's generalizability.

5.4 Duration of Engagement with the Organization

Table 4

Tenure Distribution

Duration of Engagement	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 6 months	10	18.2%	18.2%
6–12 months	20	36.4%	54.5%
1–2 years	12	21.8%	76.4%
More than 2 years	13	23.6%	100%

Duration of Engagement	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Total	55	100%	100%

A majority of respondents (54.6%) had less than one year of engagement, reflecting the short-term nature of gig work, while the remaining 46.4% had 1–2 years or more, indicating a rising trend of longer-term and recurring gig roles seen in structured gig work in sectors like manufacturing and IT.

5.5 Correlation Analysis

Table 5

Correlation between Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation among gig workers and Organizational Engagement/Inclusion

	Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation of Gig Workers	Org. Engagement/Inclusion of Gig Workers
Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation of Gig Workers	Pearson Correlation 1	.485**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	55
Org. Engagement/Inclusion of Gig Workers	Pearson Correlation .485**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	55

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient ($r = .485$, $p < .001$) shows a moderately strong, significant positive relationship between Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation and Organizational Engagement/Inclusion, supporting H_1 and aligning with studies such as Jeske & Shultz (2019) and Ashford et al. (2018), which found that flexible and inclusive HR practices enhance commitment and belongingness among non-traditional workers.

5.6 Model Summary

Table 6

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.485 ^a	0.236	0.221	2.921

a. Predictors: (Constant), Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation of Gig Worker

b. Dependent Variable: Org. Engagement/Inclusion of Gig Workers

5.7 ANOVA

The R value of 0.485 shows a moderate positive relationship, with HR flexibility explaining 23.6% of the variance in engagement ($R^2 = 0.236$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.221$), a stable and meaningful effect consistent with Chambel and Sobral (2019), who found similar variance levels for flexible HR policies among temporary workers.

Table 7

ANOVA- Organizational Engagement and Inclusion and flexible HR Strategy

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	139.355	1	139.355	16.327	.000 ^b

Residual	452.354	53	8.535
Total	591.709	54	

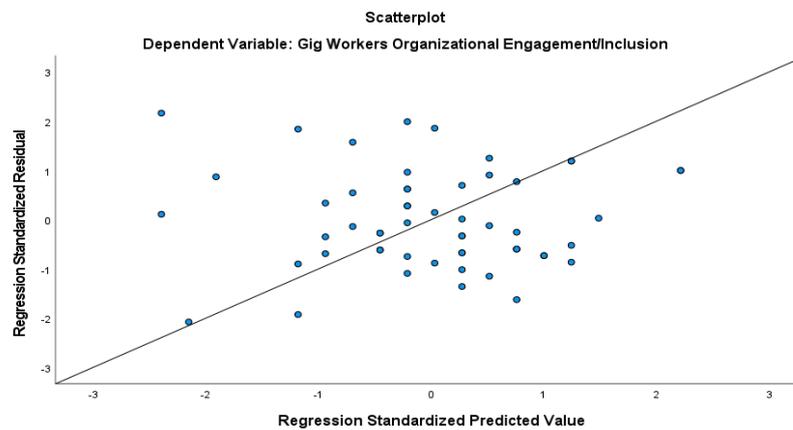
a. Dependent Variable: Org. Engagement/Inclusion of Gig Workers

b. Predictors: (Constant), Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation of Gig Worker

The regression model is significant ($F(1,53) = 16.327, p = 0.001$), showing that Flexible HR Strategy Adaptation meaningfully predicts Organizational Engagement and Inclusion and supporting H_3 , aligning with Cappelli and Keller (2013), who also found adaptive HR practices to be strong predictors of engagement among non-standard workers.

Figure 1

Scatter plot - Regression



The scatterplot shows randomly dispersed residuals around zero with no patterns or major outliers, confirming linearity, homoscedasticity, and overall stability of the regression model predicting engagement/inclusion from flexible HR strategies.

5.8 Independent Samples Test

Table 8

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Gig Workers Organizational Engagement/Inclusion	Equal variances assumed	0.111	.740	0.851	50	.399	0.806	0.947	-1.097	2.709
	Equal variances not assumed			0.854	49.989	.397	0.806	0.944	-1.090	2.702

s not
assumed

Levene's Test ($p = .740$) confirmed equal variances, and the t-test result ($t = .851, p = .399$) showed no significant group differences, leading to the rejection of H_4 and indicating uniform engagement and inclusion across gig-worker categories, consistent with Wood et al. (2019). **6. Findings and Discussion**

Adaptation of the HR Strategy has a definite positive effect on inclusion and engagement of gig workers. Adaptive HR practices, including clear communication, effective onboarding, and timely feedback ($r = 0.485$), exhibit a moderate level of correlation, which positively influences belongingness. Results of the regression prove that the HR flexibility accounts for 23.6% of the engagement variance, meaning that even minor gains can reinforce the attachment of workers towards the organization. Gig workers appreciate transparency, fairness, and prompt response as their full-time counterparts do. Engagement is enhanced in project-based and dynamic environments, where managers are consistently in contact with clients, undergo proper onboarding, and act swiftly on issues. This confirms why we should have inclusive HR systems that incorporate permanent and contingent staff in organizational culture.

7. Conclusion

The paper reveals that Adaptation to Flexible HR Strategy is an important determinant of engagement and inclusion among Indian gig workers. Good communication, equality, and quick service can be used to establish psychological bonding even with non-permanent employees. Since HR flexibility has been responsible for almost a quarter of the engagement results, it is important to redesign the conventional HR systems to accommodate temporary and project-based jobs. Lack of demographic or sectoral variations confirmed that clarity, equity, and responsiveness are helpful to gig workers in each category. With India shifting to a blended workforce, the organizations that have lenient and inclusive HR systems will be in a better position to attract and retain the skilled contingent talent.

7.1 Limitations

The sample size (55) of the study does not promote generalization, and purposive sampling does not accommodate representativeness. It is cross-sectional and does not have long-term causality, and is dependent on self-reported data, which can be biased. The representation of sectors was skewed in that the manufacturing industry and creative industries dominated. Engagement and inclusion factors that are not directly related to remuneration (satisfaction with compensation, psychological safety, and platform governance) were not studied

7.2 Future Directions

Longitudinal designs for future research include evaluating the lasting impacts of HR flexibility and investigating mediators such as perceived organizational support, trust, and the fulfillment of psychological contracts. Bigger and broader samples, i.e., between regions or countries, would enhance generalizability. Qualitative methods may be used to gain deeper insight into the lived experiences of gig workers. Further research could also explore the influence of AI-driven tools on the onboarding, feedback, and engagement in gig work as HR becomes more technology-oriented in the future.

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