Your best workers may not be your employees

A global study of independent workers

By Dr. Rena Rasch, IBM Software Group
Your best workers may not be your employees

The workforce is changing. Cradle-to-grave employment is a relic. Technological advances have allowed workers to be more mobile and global. The financial crisis of 2008 has had a lasting impact on employment around the world and across industries. Since then, multiple studies have documented the rise of independent workers, also known as contractors, freelancers, or consultants.

In this research report, we compared independent workers to regular employees in a sample of over 33,000 workers across 26 countries, and discussed the implications of our research findings for the Human Resource (HR) function. This report contains significant and perhaps surprising insights about independent workers.

1. Independent workers are more engaged than most employees - and have greater pride and satisfaction than high potential employees.
   Overall, independents are more engaged workers than regular employees. This is a significant finding given the importance of employee engagement to job performance and business results. Furthermore, looking at just high-potential employees, independents are as engaged as an organization’s most promising members. Moreover, when overall engagement is broken down into its four constituent parts (satisfaction, pride, advocacy, and commitment), independent workers score higher than high-potential employees on the pride and satisfaction aspects of engagement.

2. Independent workers value their autonomy.
   Autonomy—control over when, where, and how you work—is a fundamental differentiator between independent workers and regular employees, and is also a necessary condition of an intrinsically motivated workforce. The desire for autonomy is what attracts people to independent work, and what independent workers enjoy most about their arrangement.

3. Independent workers are highly innovative.
   Organizations that have adopted an alternative talent strategy may benefit from workers who are natural innovators. In fact, independent workers are more innovative than most employees—only high-potential employees are more innovative.

4. Independent workers are as collaborative as most employees.
   Independent workers demonstrate collaborative skills that are comparable to most employees. However, compared to high-potential employees, independent workers are substantially less collaborative.

In some ways, an organization’s best workers may not be employees—they may be independents. This insight could have significant implications for HR departments that are considering varied work arrangements, and for managers who are striving for engaged, innovative, and collaborative teams.
Imagine a project has come up, and you have been tasked with building a team. As an HR practitioner or manager, your challenge is to construct a group with the aggregate characteristics and skills needed to complete the project successfully and on-time. The project is urgent, but only short-term. It will require a technical and specialized skillset, not to mention creative problem-solving. Like any good team, the members will need to work closely together to deliver the desired outcome. You are juggling multiple projects at once, so the team needs to operate relatively autonomously and its members need to possess an internal momentum to self-motivate.

Given the challenge in front of you, who would you put on your team?

While this scenario is imaginary, it is likely a familiar one to many HR practitioners and managers. You and your organization’s leaders must decide on the optimal staffing strategy that suits the needs of each project and that fits within your organization’s culture. But consider this: more and more organizations are turning to alternative workers, including independent workers, to meet their talent needs on projects just like the one in our fictional example. A recent study reported the percent of firms planning to hire temporary or contract workers in the next 6 to 12 months has increased 10 percentage points to 31 percent (CareerBuilder, 2013).

While definitions of independent workers vary (Adams, 2014), we defined independent workers generally as people who do paid work outside of a regular employment contract (see Appendix). The percent of independent workers in the U.S. workforce has doubled over the past 9 years. In 2005, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005) estimated about 10 million workers were independent contractors (about 7% of the workforce). In 2014, a study conducted by Edelman Berland and commissioned by Freelancers Union and Elance-oDesk (2014) estimated about 21 million workers in the U.S. were independent contractors (about 14% of the workforce). Similar movements towards alternative work arrangements appear to be gaining momentum in European countries as well (Horowitz, 2013 & Rascouet, 2014).

The Rise of Independent Workers

About This Study

In this study, we sought to provide an empirically-derived, comprehensive look at the workforce as a whole, to provide HR practitioners and managers with sound guidance they can use when deciding upon their talent strategy and making staffing decisions. We also aimed to understand the value independent workers can add to the workforce beyond cost savings and flexibility. And, to provide a balanced perspective, we wanted to identify potential challenges faced by HR practitioners and managers who contract with independent workers. Also, beyond simply understanding independent workers, we endeavored to provide HR practitioners and managers with insights about their independent workforce that they can apply to their regular employees.

The present study explored these topics with data from the WorkTrends™ survey, which is a diverse cross-section of 33,000 full-time workers from different organizations across 26 countries, including over 4,800 independent workers. We were able to compare independent workers to regular employees on several essential workplace factors, including engagement, job satisfaction, innovation, and collaboration. To measure how independent workers stacked up against an organization’s best and brightest employees, we further parsed out regular employees who had been formally identified by their organization as high-potential.
Independent workers are highly engaged and satisfied workers

Employee engagement is a common goal of HR practitioners, managers and business leaders across organizations, because engaged and satisfied workers perform better, which is good for business results. Evidence confirms workers’ attitudes influence their future job performance, rather than the other way around (Riketta, 2008). Business units with higher aggregate engagement levels also tend to perform better (Harter, et al., 2002). Therefore, employee engagement is an important metric on which to compare independent workers and regular employees.

First, to ensure a more accurate comparison between these two qualitatively different types of workers, we selected a sub-sample of independent workers who have a single, long-term client. Remarkably, we found independent workers are more engaged with their clients than employees are with their organizations (Figure 1). This finding is particularly intriguing when you consider independent workers are generally excluded from organizational interventions designed to improve engagement.

Figure 1: Independent workers are engaged, yet on the lookout for the next client

Source: WorkTrends™ 2013/2014; Notes: All differences are statistically significant (p < .05).; Satisfaction: “Overall, I am extremely satisfied with [my organization as a place to work/working for my client],” Pride: “I am proud to tell people I work for [my organization/with my client],” Advocacy: “I would gladly refer a good friend or family member to [my organization for employment/client for employment or contract work],” Commitment: “I rarely think about looking for [a new job with another organization/work with another client],”
In examining each engagement item individually, more detailed findings were revealed. We found there was one exception to the trend of independent workers scoring higher than regular employees: independent workers score lower on commitment; they are more likely to think about finding another client, even when the arrangement with their current primary client is expected to be long-term.

Depending on your perspective, this insight could be expected or surprising. Some might expect independent workers’ commitment to be lower, as they must depend on themselves to build and maintain their own client base. Others may be surprised this number is not even lower, given the time and energy independent workers must spend to ensure they have enough work. Either way, this insight may shed light on how the concept of engagement is evolving. Perhaps concepts like organizational commitment and loyalty, which have long been a fundamental part of engagement, are simply less salient to independent workers. Further, in the context of economic volatility, mass lay-offs, mergers, and acquisitions, perhaps this aspect of engagement will become less relevant to regular employees as well.

Finally, we separated employees into those who are enrolled in their organization’s high-potential employee program and those who have not been formally identified in this way. We then compared independent workers to high-potential employees (Figure 2). This comparison is more robust, particularly since high-potential employees are expected to be more engaged and higher performers.

Figure 2: Independent workers score higher than high-potential employees on satisfaction and pride

Source: WorkTrends 2013/2014; Notes: Almost all differences are significantly different (p < .05). The one exception is the difference between independent workers and high-potential employees on the advocacy item.
Remarkably, we found independent workers are quite similar to high-potential employees, more so than to other employees. Compared to other employees, both independent workers and high-potential employees report greater satisfaction, pride, and willingness to refer friends and family to their organization/client. Most importantly, on two elements of engagement—satisfaction and pride— independent workers score even higher than high-potential employees. These results suggest independent workers may be on par with an organization’s best workers.

Job satisfaction, a concept closely related to employee engagement, revealed a similar pattern (Figure 3). While engagement includes a host of attitudes about the organization or client, job satisfaction refers to attitudes about the work itself. Similar to engagement, independent workers are just as satisfied with their jobs as high-potential employees, and substantially more satisfied than other employees. This trend is observed even after statistically controlling for occupation.

These findings are even more noteworthy when you consider that engaged and satisfied workers perform better. Given their level of engagement and satisfaction, we might expect independent workers to be quite high performers, perhaps as high as high-potential employees. These results certainly support the discussion of independent workers as a highly skilled and valuable part of the workforce that could represent a strategic staffing advantage.
Your best workers may not be your employees

But, why are independent workers so engaged and satisfied? What makes them different from regular employees? We think it has to do primarily with their high level of job autonomy—or the degree of influence over when, where, and how work is done—which is a fundamental construct in workforce sciences.

Previous research has identified degree of control or autonomy as a useful criterion for consistently differentiating among types of work arrangements (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). Therefore, it came as no surprise that, when asked to rate the importance of 16 factors in their decision to become an independent worker, aspects of autonomy came out on top. Of greatest importance to independent workers was the desire to be their own boss and have greater control over how they do their work. Equally important was the desire for more flexible working conditions, such as working from home and setting their own hours (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Autonomy most important to decision to go independent

Source: WorkTrends 2013/2014; Notes: Error bars represent a 95% confidence interval. Non-overlapping error bars represent statistically significant differences (p<.05).
In addition to asking independent workers to rate the importance of various factors, we also asked them a simple open-ended question: What is the best thing about being an independent worker? Confirming our expectations and previous findings, the most commonly mentioned themes were associated with autonomy (Figure 5). Especially applauded was simply having control over your own schedule.

In addition to valuing autonomy, independent workers report having higher levels of control over their work lives (Figure 6). Given the role played by autonomy in numerous theories (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Demerouti, et al., 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1985) it is no wonder that independent workers with their greater autonomy are highly engaged and satisfied workers.

That job autonomy is important to job satisfaction has been long and well established (Fried & Ferris, 1987). The more autonomy a worker has, the more satisfied (s)he is with the job. This is true for independent workers, high-potential employees, and other employees. However, the degree of importance differs depending on worker type. Job autonomy is just as important to independent workers and high-potential employees. On the other hand, autonomy is less important to other employees.

Interestingly, the control that independent workers have over their work is similar to that of high-potential employees. This is yet another point of similarity observed in this study between independent workers and high-potential employees. Independent workers have likely come by their autonomy by side-stepping the organizational hierarchy, whereas high-potential employees have likely been given leeway by their managers who trust in their capabilities.

"In addition to valuing autonomy, independent workers report having higher levels of control over their work lives."
Independent workers are more innovative, but less collaborative

The most admired organizations are also among the most innovative. Four of the top five most admired companies in 2013 (Fortune, 2014) also ranked somewhere in the top 100 on innovation (Forbes, 2014): Amazon.com (7th), Starbucks (19th), Google (47th), and Apple (79th). Innovation, it seems, is a nearly universal necessity for top performing organizations. Independent workers represent a highly skilled segment of the workforce—talent necessary for innovation. In addition to their skills, independent workers also seem to bring an innovative nature to their work.

We found independent workers substantially more innovative than other employees, and almost as innovative as high-potential employees (Figure 7). Innovation was measured with behaviors like risk-taking and challenging the status quo. Nearly one quarter of independent workers cited freedom as one of the best parts of their arrangement, and this includes the freedom to pursue creative ideas (Figure 6). The very features that drew independent workers to their alternative work arrangement may be the characteristics that make them more innovative. Organizations that choose to enlist the help of independent workers might find them to be natural innovators.

“[We found independent workers substantially more innovative than other employees, and almost as innovative as high-potential employees.]”

Note: Innovation was measured with four Likert scale items: “I take calculated risks in my work,” “I feel free to challenge the status quo,” “I can try new things in my work, even though my efforts may not succeed,” and “Promising new ideas are developed and supported financially.”

Figure 7: Independent workers more innovative than most employees
Now, more than ever, collaboration is a strategic imperative, whether it is across businesses, within teams, or between individual workers. While independent workers are intrinsically motivated and naturally innovative, they do lag behind high-potential employees in their collaboration (although they report similar levels of collaboration to other employees; see Figure 8). Collaborative behaviors are necessary for transferring knowledge and cultivating stakeholder buy-in, two goals necessary for innovative initiatives to reach fruition.

To be fair, less collaboration may not necessarily be a problem. Some projects can be broken into isolated tasks that can be completed on their own simultaneously without needing input from others working on the same project. However, should a project require greater cooperation, a focused effort may be needed to ensure independent workers operate like team players.

The lag in collaboration for independent workers could be due to a number of reasons. Again, by their nature, independent workers could simply be less inclined to compromise. Fifteen percent of independent workers reported having sole decision-making control as the best part of their work arrangement (Figure 6). A desire for totalitarian authority is not exactly conducive to a collaborative working relationship.

In fact, when asked to name the worst aspect of their arrangement, only four percent of independent workers cited working alone. Further, the primary problems cited were related to not having anyone to help them when the work piles up and losing out on the social aspect of work. However, some independent workers admitted to missing the opportunity to talk about their ideas with coworkers. For example, one independent worker said the worst part is “not having colleagues to discuss problems and to brainstorm with.”

Perhaps independent workers do not feel they belong to a group, they feel like an outsider. They may be excluded, inadvertently or intentionally, by fellow regular employees working on the same project. Also, independent workers may be protective over their work; their ideas are their capital, especially in the arts and sciences where we see more of them. Perhaps by working remotely or not having access to all of their client’s systems, independent workers have fewer channels through which to share and connect with others.

Whatever the explanation, our research findings suggest managers with independent workers on their teams may need to take proactive steps to foster collaboration and ensure effective teamwork.

---

"...managers with independent workers on their teams may need to take proactive steps to foster collaboration and ensure effective teamwork."

---

**Figure 8: Independent workers less collaborative than high-potential employees, but just as collaborative as other employees**

Source: WorkTrends 2013/2014; Notes: High-potential employees score statistically significantly (p < .05) higher than both independent workers and high-potential employees on collaboration. Independent workers and other employees are not statistically significantly different from each other on collaboration.

Note: Collaboration was measured with four Likert scale items: “I work very closely with others to achieve my work goals,” “Information and ideas are shared freely between coworkers,” “Decisions in my work group are made by consensus,” and “Conflicts between coworkers are resolved quickly and effectively.”
Your best workers may not be your employees

You and your organizational leaders must decide on your optimal staffing strategy. Nevertheless, if your strategy includes independent workers, our research findings suggest three implications worth considering.

1. Broaden your conversation about independent workers beyond cost factors.
Often, discussions about independent workers are had mainly in the context of talent sourcing and procurement. Our research results suggest these conversations could be broadened to include the unique characteristics that make independent workers valuable assets. In short, independent workers may not only be a flexible and cost-effective resource, they may also be inherently engaged, satisfied, and innovative workers.

2. Foster collaboration between independent workers and regular employees.
Enlisting independent workers can also have its challenges; besides the risk of misclassification, for which organizations can be fined (IRS, 2014), independent workers are less committed, even when they have a primary long-term client. They are also less likely than high-potential employees to work with others towards common goals, share information freely, reach decisions by consensus, and resolve conflict. There may not be much that can be done about divided loyalty; having multiple clients simultaneously goes with the independent territory. However, organizations can take steps to foster collaboration among independent workers. Organizations can give their independent workers full access to information related to their projects (e.g., shared files, wikis) and invite them to project team meetings. The challenge will be to strike a balance between helpful and over-involved. Independent workers like being their own boss, so would probably bristle under a heavy management hand.

3. Cultivate autonomy among your regular employees.
Autonomy is a well-established means of promoting well-being and productivity at work. Not only is autonomy of the utmost importance and value to independent workers, they also report having greater control over their work. Autonomy is arguably the most important differentiating factor between independent workers and regular employees, and many of the benefits demonstrated by independent workers may be attributed to increased autonomy. Given autonomy is a necessary condition of an intrinsically motivated workforce, organizations may seek to encourage their employees to be more autonomous. To achieve this, organizations could emulate online marketplaces, such as Elance and Mturk, using internal work exchanges. Job design initiatives have long aimed to increase workers’ motivation by promoting autonomy through job enrichment interventions, such as job rotations. In some ways, an internal work marketplace would be but an extension of this idea. Internal work marketplaces could offer employees a degree of choice and variety of work that rivals that of independent workers.

What these research findings mean for your organization

“Autonomy is arguably the most important differentiating factor between independent workers and regular employees.”
Independent workers can bring an innate enthusiasm and innovative ethos to their work, but may require a little encouragement to collaborate as much as your best employees.”

One such work marketplace implemented by IBM Research was designed to match organization change management experts with projects requiring change management skills, allowing newly trained practitioners to use their skills and meet real-time needs. Another similar program at IBM is Liquid, which is a platform that brings together problem solvers using an open-system approach—when work needs to get done, Liquid simply asks a network of problem solvers, and the best outcome is recognized. Both of these examples illustrate how an independent worker model could be implemented internally among employees.

Conclusion

Until now, comprehensive and rigorous research on independent workers as part of a varied and flexible workforce has been lacking. Our research goes beyond simply examining market-level trends in the rise of independent workers, taking the workers’ perspective to explore their similarities to and differences from regular employees. This report contains significant and perhaps surprising insights into the rise of independent workers. Independent workers can bring an innate enthusiasm and innovative ethos to their work, but may require a little encouragement to collaborate as much as your best employees.

Think back to the hypothetical team we asked you to build at the beginning of this report. Upon reflection, would you build it differently in light of the findings presented here?

For more information
To learn how to build a smarter workforce, visit: ibm.com/smarterworkforce
Your best workers may not be your employees

References


About the Author
Dr. Rena Rasch has been with IBM’s Smarter Workforce Institute since 2008. She has managed the Institute’s WorkTrends study, a large-scale employee opinion survey of over 33,000 workers in 26 countries around the world. Rena values empirically-based practices, and uses her skills in psychometric theory, research design and statistics to develop valid and reliable HR tools and knowledge. She has published peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, as well as white papers and reports. Rena is a member of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychologists (SIOP), and frequently presents at its annual conference. Rena received her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota’s Industrial/Organizational Psychology Program.

Contributor Acknowledgements
Dr. Sheri Feinzig
Dr. Sheri Feinzig is the Director of IBM’s Smarter Workforce Institute, and has over 20 years of experience in human resources research, organizational change management and business transformation. Sheri has applied her analytical and methodological expertise to many research-based projects on topics such as employee retention, employee engagement, job design and organizational culture. She has also led several global, multi-year sales transformation initiatives designed to optimize seller territories and quota allocation. Additional areas of expertise include social network analysis, performance feedback and knowledge management. Sheri received her Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the University at Albany, State University of New York. She has presented on numerous occasions at national conferences and has co-authored a number of manuscripts, publications and technical reports. She has served as an adjunct professor in the Psychology departments of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York and the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, Illinois, where she taught doctoral, masters and undergraduate courses on performance appraisal, test and measures.

Jonathan Ferrar
Jonathan Ferrar is Vice President, Smarter Workforce, at IBM. He is responsible for strategy and product management for IBM’s Smarter Workforce business. In this role, Jonathan leads the strategic direction, product strategy and research & development of HR solutions for clients. Jonathan has worked in IBM since 2000 and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in the UK having been in the HR profession for 20 years with three different companies. From 2010 to 2012 he held global HR responsibility for workforce analytics, HR strategy and transformation & planning in IBM. Prior to this he held senior HR roles in recruitment, outsourcing and as an HR Director leading departments across up to 20 countries in Europe, Middle East and Africa. From 2007 to 2010 he was the HR Director for UK & Ireland for IBM. He holds a degree from the University of Cambridge, UK and is based in New York, USA. You can follow him on Twitter @jaferrar and LinkedIn.
About WorkTrends

WorkTrends is a research program begun in 1984. In its current form, WorkTrends is a multi-topic survey completed online by a sample of workers diverse in terms of industry, organization, occupation, gender, age and other key organizational and demographic variables. In 2013, over 33,000 employees were surveyed across 26 countries. We sampled a mix of both regular employees and independent workers who had to be at least 18 years old and work at least 30 hours per week. The survey measured a wide range of workplace issues, including attraction, quality of hire, manager effectiveness, employee engagement, training, career advancement, compensation, recognition, collaboration, innovation, turnover intentions, and others.

IBM Smarter Workforce Institute

The IBM Smarter Workforce Institute produces rigorous, global, innovative research spanning a wide range of workforce topics. The Institute’s team of experienced researchers applies depth and breadth of content and analytical expertise to generate reports, white papers and insights that advance the collective understanding of work and organizations. This report is part of IBM’s on-going commitment to provide highly credible, leading-edge research findings that help organizations realize value through their people.

Appendix: Who Are Independent Workers?

A challenge inherent in the study of alternative work arrangements is the variety. One study might include entrepreneurs, while another might focus on seasonal workers. These are very different types of workers with different experiences and challenges. Yet, in many studies they are lumped together. Part of the problem stems from inconsistent or unclear terminology. Another part of the problem stems from the tendency for these workers to be grouped together, because they have been labeled alternative, even though they may be quite different from each other.

For these reasons, the present study explicitly defined independent workers. Our primary goal was to prevent further muddying of the waters, not to exclude other types of workers, because they are less relevant or deserving of study. We also excluded the awarding of contracts and outsourcing at the organizational or project level from this report, because we were focused on the independent worker’s perspective. Finally, to provide even greater clarity, we omitted discussion of micro-tasks or using crowds to complete a large piece of work.

We defined independent workers as those who:

- Provide a service to a company, but are not an employee or agent of that company
- Typically work for a number of different clients, sometimes concurrently, tackling particular jobs or projects that require special expertise in return for a fee
- Are also known as independent contractors, independent consultants, or freelance workers
- May be self-employed or part of a partnership with other independent workers
- Are typically not entitled to the same benefits and protections as regular employees

All workers in the WorkTrends study are full-time (at least 30 hours per week). Overall, independent workers are demographically similar to high-potential and other employees, with some notable differences. Independent workers and other employees are about the same age (M=42 years), while high-potential employees tend to be younger (M=37 years). High-potential employees have by definition yet to reach the pinnacle of their careers, which might explain why they are a bit younger.

“This report is part of IBM’s ongoing commitment to provide highly credible, leading-edge research findings that help organizations realize value through their people.”
While independent workers are not more or less likely to be women, high-potential employees are more likely to be men, even after statistically controlling for management level and occupation. Perhaps being passed over early on in their careers contributes to the dearth of women in the highest echelons of organizational ranks.

Independent workers seem to be more autonomous beyond their work lives as well—fewer are married (46%) compared to both high-potential (62%) and other (52%) employees. Yet all three groups of workers have the same number of children on average.

In the U.S., high-potential employees are more racially diverse (68% white) than independent workers (75% white) and other employees (80% white). Independent workers are slightly more diverse in terms of sexual orientation. More of them have a disability (33%) compared to both high-potential (22%) and other (21%) employees. Perhaps the flexibility inherent in independent work provides them with the accommodations they need to work effectively.

All three groups of workers are represented in all occupations and industries, but a few differences are noteworthy. Some of these differences meet expectations; others counter misconceptions about independent workers. In fact, compared to both high-potential (2%) and other (1%) employees, more independent workers (10%) hold roles in the arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media. Also, in the construction industry independent workers (14%) are more common than high-potential (8%) and other (4%) employees.

Compared to most employees (5%), more independent workers (11%) and high-potential employees (10%) work in the information sector. Counter intuitively, independent workers (8%) are not more common than most employees (9%) in computer and mathematical roles, although high-potential employees (13%) are more plentiful in these positions.

Independent workers may be differentiated from seasonal and contingent labor by the sophistication of their jobs. In fact, the percentage of independent workers (15%) in the professional, scientific, and technical services industry is higher than high-potential (9%) and other (6%) employees.

On the other hand, the percentage of most employees (14%) in office and administrative support roles is double that of high-potential employees (7%) and nearly triple that of independent workers (5%) in such roles. In the government sector, the percentage of independent workers (5%) is lower than high-potential (9%) and other (13%) employees.
Your best workers may not be your employees
Traditional measures of engagement refer to a single organization. This poses a challenge to the comparison of independent workers and regular employees, because independent workers contract with multiple organizations at the same time (M = 5.30, SD = 5.73), not to mention their arrangements are often short-term or temporary. Yet, some independent workers have a single, major client for whom they work at least 30 hours a week, and for whom they intend to continue working at least one year. To ensure an apples-to-apples comparison with regular employees, for engagement we used a sub-sample of independent workers who had a primary long-term client. We also examined how independent workers with a primary long term client differ from independent workers with multiple clients. We found some differences, but they are small. Independent workers with a single long term client are slightly older (about one year), they are slightly more likely to be men (Odds Ratio=1.12), fewer are single (23% vs. 29%), they have slightly more children on average (M = 1.3 vs. 1.2), and they work a little more (about two hours more per week). They are not substantially different in educational attainment or occupation. These similarities and marginal differences give us greater confidence in generalizing our findings to independent workers more broadly.

Due to space constraints, from this point forward graphs comparing independent workers and regular employees overall are not shown.

Degree of importance was measured by the strength of the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction. The correlations for independent workers (r=.48, p<.00, n=4,829) and high-potential employees (r=.49, p<.00, n=6,383) are statistically significantly higher than the correlation for other employees (r=.41, p<.00, n=19,076).

Notably, collaboration here refers to that between people working on the same project, and does not explicitly include collaboration between independent workers, which can be quite substantial. According to the Freelancers Union, 81% of independent workers get referrals for work from their compatriots (https://www.freelancersunion.org/blog/2014/07/02/independents-united-81-freelancers-refer-work-each-other/).