

Freelance Workers—Experiencing a Career Outside an Organization

Piotr Miller 

Stefan Batory State University, Poland

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.16.4.06>

Keywords:

Freelance; Career Outside an Organization; Boundaryless Career; Professional Work Experience; Grounded Theory

Abstract: This article focuses on the issues of everyday work as a self-employed, professional freelancer in Poland. The appearance of this specific category of workers on the labor market is connected with certain major changes on the economic, technological, and socio-cultural levels. The career of a freelancer is sometimes considered to be an antithesis of a corporate career. The key points are: working on one's own, functioning outside the traditional organizational structures, HR management and supervision, promotion procedures, corporate career paths, et cetera. For a freelancer, the organization is not "an employer," but rather "a client" or "a business partner." The manager of the organization is not "his boss" and the employees are not his "colleagues." As we can observe, most of the typical boundaries of a career are blurred here and that is one of the reasons why it arouses curiosity as an unusual phenomenon. The article aims to present a sociological perspective regarding the career of a freelancer in Poland. A framework of symbolic interactionism and grounded theory were applied to the author's research (conducted in 2009-14) on which the article is based. Its first part focuses on the theoretical background and the methods that were used to collect and analyze data. The second part includes some of the author's findings and conclusions on a freelance career from the interactionist perspective, as well as a discussion about the possible agreement and discrepancies between the author's understanding of freelance against the widely discussed concept of precarity.

Piotr Miller is a PhD in social science in the discipline of sociology. He specializes in the sociology of organization and management and sociology of work and employment. Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Social Sciences, Stefan Batory State University (classes in the fields of HRM, career counseling, and professional development). Lecturer at post-graduate studies in vocational guidance and career coaching at SWPS University. Qualified

career counselor and consultant, coordinator of several, long-term training and development projects. The author of a book about freelance careers and several papers on: qualitative sociology, professional identity, skills development, and HRM techniques, published in trade and scientific journals.

email address: pmiller@pusb.pl

Do we need an organizational framework to analyze a professional career? Traditional sociology conventionally used to look at work—and career-related—issues in a vertical way (see: Becker 1952:470), that is, from the perspective of a specific profession, embedded in a specific bureaucratic structure, in the search of some “objective indicators” of social and professional advancement such as: occupational status, salary, or the position in the organization, connected with a certain scope of power (see also: Konecki 1988:226). But, as interactionists, we are entitled to observe it in a slightly wider context, knowing that, in fact, “every biography is a case-study of a career,” as Hughes observed (1997:390). Nowadays, we have many opportunities to observe the emergence of new models of careers due to: (1) the market tendency to reduce labor costs and to externalize some organizational functions (Konecki 1998); (2) the rapid development of the Internet, which has simplified the opportunities of using various flexible forms of employment; and (3) the socio-cultural characteristics of the Western, postmodern society connected with the promotion of individualism and people’s right to shape their life course (and their careers) in their way. A freelancer’s perspective of a career and their idea of individual success significantly differ from the typical vision of climbing up the organizational structure while strictly subordinated to the rules enforced in bureaucratic organizations. It has greater similarity or closeness to the long-standing concept of a career model of “professional private practice for a fee” (see: Becker 1970:101-102). But, is not “freelance” just a new name for an old phenomenon? Barley and Kunda (2006:50-54) claim that “independent contracting” should be considered as a fourth, historical form of a professional practice, which appeared after the phases of: (1) free profes-

sionals, (2) professional firms, and (3) corporate professionals. The major difference between a “traditional free professional” (e.g., a lawyer, an architect, or a doctor) and a “today’s freelancer” seems to lie in the far-reaching “democratization” of the access to independent work: there is no need to graduate from a specific school or to get a license (from a bureaucratic, professional organization) that would give one the “right to practice” as a freelancer. There are no legal regulations or standards for freelance work. The author’s study showed that freelancers consider themselves as a rather egalitarian social category (unlike “traditional free professionals”), in which the form of work (i.e., working independently) seems to be often more important than the job content. During his study, the author observed some kind of a professional, group identity and solidarity among freelancers that is connected with the form of their work, not only with the profession. Unlike traditional “free professionals,” in some cases, the profession of a freelancer could be blurred—we can recognize a set of their professional skills, but it is difficult to name their occupation. Moreover, some of the freelancers prefer to construct their self-definitions and self-presentations on their career model, not only based on the specified occupation they are involved in (“I work as a freelancer” or: “I am a freelance journalist”).

Every research project should be embedded in a specific paradigmatic tradition, related to the theoretical and methodological orientation used by the researcher. It constitutes the basic “landmarks” for a researcher, which were described as the “basic ideas” or: the “root images” by Blumer (1969:6). All of the observations mentioned in the article are based on the results of a 2009-14 study, conducted based on symbolic interactionism as a theoretical background and grounded theory as a research and

analytical strategy. From the author's point of view, these two frameworks were the most suitable for conducting research whose goal was to reconstruct the ways that individuals perceive, interpret, and experience their everyday working life. To achieve this, there was a strong need to use an approach that allowed the author to "look in the right direction," but not necessarily "say what one should see" (Woroniecka 2007:25), and that was consistent with his ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions.

The article aims to present some of the main conclusions of the study, regarding several aspects of having a professional career outside a formal organization from the perspective of an actor involved in running this kind of "smallest of small businesses" as Clinton, Totterdell, and Wood (2006) called freelance.

Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations

The author maintains Blumer's (1969:6-7, 70) dynamic vision of perceiving human society, which means that society will be understood here as "people [actors] involved in various forms of [joint] action" and social reality is perceived as an emergent and processual phenomenon (Hałas 2006:59). Secondly, I pay great attention to the central role of interaction in constructing society. Various forms of social organization are possible only by virtue of people acting and engaging in social interactions. Human life is perceived as "intersubjective in its essence" (Prus 1996:10-11) and the acting people are constantly involved in the processes of negotiating the meanings, the sense of all the norms and rules, as well as each other's identities (Piotrowski 1998:15-24). Therefore, empirically-oriented social science should be main-

ly focused on studying the wealth and the variety of human activities, interactions, while reconstructing the meanings that are assigned by them to the events from everyday life. This also applies to professional work as a social phenomenon. The definition used by the author is close to what Furmanek (2006) described as a "humanist" (or a "personalist") approach to the issue of work.

Work is one of the most important areas of our everyday activities (Hughes 1958:63). Over the centuries, the ways we work, as well as its contents and forms have undergone tremendous changes. It was understood differently in the pre-industrial era and we can find other, specific meanings of work in the industrial society, whereas, presently, we distinctly look at work. Some of the major changes were connected with the nature and the character of the dependence between the employer and the employee. Nowadays, we can observe that, in many cases, "being involved in professional work" or "having a career" does not necessarily mean "being employed." Of course, this could be perceived as both an advantage and a drawback of the contemporary labor market, as was observed by Standing (2011) in his considerations about "the precariat." It is worth mentioning that a few years ago it was one of the possible scenarios for the future of work, outlined by Beck (2000:36), who called it "the freedom of insecurity of a self-employed professional." One of the consequences of the split between "a career" and "an occupation" is the increasing importance of a so-called "boundaryless career" model (Defillippi and Arthur 1994; Mirvis and Hall 1994). A freelance career could be considered as an empirical sample of that model. The main differences between a traditional career and a boundaryless career are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. The comparison of a traditional career and a boundaryless career model.

Feature	Traditional career model	Boundaryless career model
Employer-employee relation:	job security for loyalty	employability for professional skills, performance, and flexibility
Boundaries:	one or two organizations	multiple organizations
Employee skills:	connected with the specifics of the organization	transferable
Success measures:	salary, promotion, and status	a “psychologically meaningful” job
Responsibility for career management:	organization	individual
Professional training:	formal education	based on professional experience
Career milestones:	age-related	learning- (experience-) related

Source: based on Sullivan 1999:458.

The boundaryless career model not only suits the needs of many organizations that now want to out-source or subcontract some of their operations but also responds to the needs of a growing number of participants on the labor market, who prefer to have what could be called: “a psychologically meaningful career” instead of having a so-called “regular job” with a fixed payment and a strictly defined workplace. What is also interesting about the currently observed split or separation between “employment” and “career” is that many labor market participants may even have some trouble with self-defining in the traditional terms of occupation (as mentioned above), because a definition of their work could be in some cases blurred or inadequate to the specifics of many new professions or quasi-professions. It is easy to define oneself as a bus driver or a lawyer. But, could, for example, a professional video blogger

(or a YouTube content creator), who thinks of oneself as a “coolhunter,” or an “influencer” in the healthy lifestyle, diet-coaching, and well-being industry call the work s/he does an “occupation”?

The author’s study could be embedded in a wider context of interests, connected with the issue of having a career outside the organization. There are at least several theoretical concepts (other than the boundaryless career model) that are related to these issues which seem to look at the problem similarly. These were widely listed by Clinton and colleagues (2006:180-182) in their article about the so-called “portfolio working” in the grounded theory perspective. For example, Hall (1976) used the term “protean career,” Handy (1991) preferred to call it “portfolio career,” Herriot and Pemberton (1996) wrote about a “contracting career,” whereas Peiperl and Baruch

(1997) used the name “post corporate career,” and we can also find the name “entreplooyee,” used by Pongratz and Voß (2001). In recent years, thanks to Standing (2011), this topic has also become one of the areas of discussion about “precarity.” All of the concepts could be considered as theoretical attempts to capture and define the increase in the importance of various, self-driven career models and the so-called “flexible forms of employment.” The author treats all of them as concepts at a higher level of generality which may be useful to understand the changing nature of modern careers and professional life. Nevertheless, if we want to find and explore empirical examples of having a career outside the organization, we need to “get our hands dirty in field research,” as Park suggested (see: Burgess 1982:10; Prus 1996:119), and try to get insight into some everyday practices of freelance.

Data and Methods

The article is based on empirical research conducted by the author with the use of the grounded theory (GT) strategy (Glaser and Strauss 1967) for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Despite a major difference of opinions about the origins and the contemporary varieties of GT (see: Glaser 2002; Glaser and Holton 2004), the author believes that it is strongly rooted in symbolic interactionism and the Chicago tradition of conducting fieldwork. The main goal of using GT was to conduct a study that would allow the author to be close to the analyzed phenomenon, which is consistent with the main assumptions of the qualitative paradigm and a vision of doing research in the direction indicated by symbolic interactionism. The second goal of using the GT approach was to conduct the study in a way that would allow the author to keep the balance between systematically leading the research project (with

the implementation of some specific data collecting techniques and coding procedures that followed the direction of the study) and maximizing the possibility of capturing the dynamics of the analyzed phenomena. The third goal was to rather generate a “fresh concept” of experiencing a career outside the organization than to verify any existing theories or models describing modern careers. The data used in the project were collected with the use of several techniques, which were highly useful in the application of the triangulation procedures (Denzin 1978:291, 302) and enabled one to look at the phenomenon from different perspectives.

The research project lasted for almost 5 years (2009-2014) and included 3 years of observations, using the “participant-experiencer” approach (based on some guidelines described by Wyka 1993); 46 in-depth, unstructured interviews with freelance workers from Lodz and Warsaw (two of the biggest cities in central Poland), representing various professions and specializations (the author interviewed, among others: IT professionals, journalists, HR professionals and headhunters, business coaches and consultants, professional language translators, photographers, operators, editors, etc.); followed by Internet data analyses (including Internet forums and groups for freelancers and business-oriented social networks such as LinkedIn, GoldenLine, etc.). The starting point of the study was the author’s personal involvement in “full-time” (2008-2011) and then (from 2011) “part-time” freelance work in the training and consulting industry. However, his intention was not to write an autoethnography or to reconstruct his own life and career story, but rather to use some of the reflections he has as findings for a specific form of participant observation (the “participant-experiencer” approach mentioned above). As a freelancer, the author was able to experience certain situations

and collect data that would be unobtainable in any other way. Secondly, it was a great opportunity to compare it with the data obtained due to the interview technique. For instance, in the initial phase of the project (which was also the initial phase of his work as a freelancer), one of the author's dilemmas was how to secure new contracts effectively. The first months of his freelance work were similar to a regular job search—based mainly on responding to ads, sending applications, et cetera. However, as a result of conducting interviews with other freelancers at the same time, the author realized that it is: (1) a common experience of many aspiring freelancers (“newbies”), (2) a strategy that is considered wrong, or at least: ineffective by more experienced freelancers. One of the solutions these experienced freelancers recommended was to search for new contracts within personal contact networks, which turned out to be far more efficient.

If we try to give a (*post hoc*) structure to the in-depth interviews conducted by the author during the study, we would be able to find some common elements concerning the way of choosing and selecting the responders (interlocutors). All of them were professionals who: (1) worked for themselves in the services sector, (2) performed intellectual (“white collar”) rather than physical work, (3) treated their freelance work as a vital source of income, (4) worked without having any specified “physical” workplace (an office), (5) performed project-based work for several different paymasters. However, during the project, the selection was primarily based on the rules of theoretical sampling and the constant comparative method (Glaser 1978:36-54; Strauss and Corbin 1990:176-193). For instance, at the beginning of the project, the author conducted interviews with some business coaches and consultants whose everyday work consisted of face-to-face, close

contact with their clients. To achieve some comparisons, the second category he has chosen were software developers—professionals with significantly different specifics of their daily tasks. Their ways of experiencing freelance contrasted greatly with what the author learned from the consultants (for example, some of them complained about a lack of everyday social contacts or even experienced a kind of “loneliness” while working). The main aim of using the interviews during the project was to understand the phenomena rather than to gain some “certain knowledge” (Fontana and Frey 2009:97). The assumption of the project was to conduct interviews that would have been close to the original meaning of an interview, which is “a meeting of two people,” not “a survey” (see: Konecki 2000:177-178). As mentioned above, all the data collected due to the interviews were treated as a significant source of comparative material that allowed the author to compare his insights with the experiences of his interlocutors.

The third source of data was the Internet, which can be considered as one of the “natural spaces” of freelancers' everyday activities. One of the author's interlocutors said: “Basically, my workplace could be anywhere. I just need to have access to the Internet.” For freelancers, it is a good “place” to acquire new customers, to maintain relationships, to self-present, and to build a strong reputation. What was relevant from the perspective of the study is also a place to post information about their everyday work, with all its advantages and disadvantages. The Internet (especially the freelancers' forums and groups on LinkedIn and GoldenLine) was used as a supplemental, but, at the same time, very convenient, economic, and confident (El Kamel and Rigaux-Bricmont 2009) source to analyze existing data. The author did not participate in the observed

discussions, nor generate any new content, playing instead the role of an uninvolved observer. Obviously, there were several limitations to the technique used. These were connected with treating the Internet-based data like a “photograph” that was taken at a certain moment in time, which limits the possibilities of the technique (but, on the other hand, doing a virtual ethnography was never a goal of the author), and, secondly, there were ethical doubts concerning the acquisition of the Internet data (Jones 1994) in such a way. Although there are preexisting, widely-recognized guidelines when conducting Internet research, for example, the recommendations of The Association of Internet Researchers (Markham and Buchanan 2012), it is still quite difficult to resolve certain doubts regarding: the confidentiality of the data collected in places that could be considered by the users as both “public” or “private,” a discrepancy between the research goals and the “netiquette,” or even the act of uninvolved observing that could be interpreted as inappropriate “lurking” by some users.

All the data collected during the study (i.e., from the observations, interviews, and the Internet) were coded with the use of GT procedures that were close (but not identical) to the version of coding procedure presented by Strauss and Corbin (1990, see also: Strauss 1987). In the author’s opinion, it was best suited to answer the aim of his study. The main difference between the approach by Strauss and Corbin and the approach used by the author was the decision to not use the “coding paradigm” as a tool that could have unnecessarily structured the data with the use of some external, theoretical assumptions. The first part of the coding process was supported by OpenCode 4.01, the second part was carried out without any CAQDA software. The purpose of this article is not to discuss the study in de-

tail, but to reflect on some of the overall findings. A thorough description of the analytical process, as well as the quotes from the interviews, have been widely presented in: Miller (2016).

Findings

The core category generated during the analysis of the empirical material was “experiencing a career outside an organization.” It turned out that despite the many differences among the participants of the study (e.g., their various professions and industries, different socio-demographic characteristics, different stages of life, different biographies and life stories, etc.), some directions of their lived experience, as well as the ways of perceiving and interpreting their professional life were surprisingly convergent on many levels (see also: Strauss 1995:4-12; Domecka 2005:237). Reconstructing the participants’ reflection on their lived experience enabled the author to observe repetitive patterns of experiencing specific professional situations with several observable similarities in the ways these are perceived and evaluated. In this section of the article, the author’s intentions are: (1) to reconstruct a definition of “being a freelancer” (based on the ways of self-defining and building the identity of a freelancer), (2) to share information about the types (or: categories) of freelancers that were observed during the study and to show how “the freelance career path” could be followed by (3) highlighting some of the main, everyday dilemmas and challenges that freelancers have to face due to the nature of their work, with an assessment of the role “freelance ideology” plays in facing them.

Who could be defined as a “true” freelancer from the perspective of the participants of the author’s study? The first common, essential feature that

appeared from the study is the requirement to work for oneself and at one's own risk. This can be understood in several ways. For those who treat freelancing as a long-term career option, "working for myself" usually means: "running a one-person company." For those who see freelancing only as a temporary solution or a substitute, an alternate form of employment, it often means "work that is based on civil law contracts." For others, freelancing could also be a way to gain greater professional experience or to earn additional income from additional work. Nevertheless, especially for those who treat freelancing as a vital source of income, the belief that "working for myself" and "not having a boss" seems to be a particularly important piece of their professional identity and their definition of a freelancer. "Working under one's own name" could be considered as another significant dimension of "working for oneself." The freelancer's name is often treated as a "personal brand"—part of one's reputation that is linked to the specific category of services provided and the quality guaranteed. Although in some cases, a failure in a project could be perceived by the customers as a blemish on the freelancer's image, it seems that, beyond financial aspects, a strong reputation is one of the important measures of a freelancer's professional success. Simplifying this, we can say that it is a situation in which finding potential customers is no longer necessary because "the strength of the reputation" allows the selection of partners on the freelancer's terms.

The second common essential feature of being a freelancer concerns the character of professions that can be performed. As mentioned above, from their point of view, freelancers consider themselves as an egalitarian and inclusive social category that would happily accept someone calling themselves

a freelancer, even if it seems difficult at first glance to imagine a combination of a particular occupation or profession and being a freelancer. Although freelancers are most often stereotypically considered people who are engaged in some intellectual, creative, "white-collar" work, when, in 2012, a first "coworking office" for freelance hairdressers was opened in Poland, virtually none of the author's interlocutors had anything against it. Some even stressed that nowadays the boundaries between "physical" and "intellectual" work are blurred, so it is pointless to say that a hairdresser who works for themselves, without opening a salon could not be called "a freelancer." Moreover, in most cases, freelancers emphasize that formal qualifications are less important than being equipped with some "transferable skills" that could be valuable and sought after by different clients.

The third common feature of being a "true freelancer" is connected with project-based work. The cooperation between the freelancer and one's client could be short- or long-term, one-off or repeated—it all depends on the specifics of a project. In many cases, being a freelancer means being involved in several different projects at the same time. Although most freelancers present their work as an antithesis of a safe, corporate-like, 9-to-5 job, at the same time, they attempt to find long-term clients who offer participation in future projects. A second important measure of individual career success is having a "rich portfolio" of loyal and valuable clients. It is a kind of a paradox—or at least an interesting contrast of professional values—that, on the one hand, freelancers are happy to emphasize their strong need for autonomy and professional freedom, while, on the other hand, they also want to achieve a certain degree of stability (from their perspective, it is "stability on their own terms").

The fourth definitional feature is the high variability and irregularity of working time and space. To work as a freelancer is to accept the flexible character of that kind of work with all the pros and cons. There is no such thing as predefined work hours, regular paydays, or any guaranteed annual vacation leave. A workspace could be just as well the client's office, a coworking space, a café with Internet access, or the freelancer's home. A commonly used concept of "being at work" (or: "being in the office") is also a bit problematic here. Of course, it will vary, depending on the freelancer's profession or specialization, the stage of one's career, et cetera, but what is important is one's responsibility for defining what is "working time" and "workspace," and organizing them.

The fifth, and final, essential feature of "being a freelancer" discovered by the author during the study consists of certain individual attributes that may be useful in the career of a freelancer. It may be considered more difficult to grasp its "soft" dimension, but it is definitely no less important. The data analyzed during the project pointed to some characteristics without which it is difficult to function in the "freelance business" for long. Sometimes, they are considered even more important than the conditions mentioned above. Most freelancers would agree that one's "character," "personality" (in the common, not psychological, sense), and other individual traits could be the foundation of a long-term freelance career. One can say that "becoming a true freelancer starts in the head" with such features as: being inner-driven, proactive, enterprising, and most of all: autonomy-oriented and self-determined (which means a readiness to decide independently about the shape of our working life). "Autonomy" or "freedom" (often used interchangeably) are keywords to understanding freelancers' self-perspec-

tive. If we ask a person who considers themselves to be a "true freelancer" about their main motivations, we often hear about the strong desire for professional autonomy. If we ask what the main advantage of being a freelancer is, we often hear "being my own boss."

Why did we pay so much attention to reconstructing the main aspects of the common definition of a freelancer? It is because, as interactionists, we want to be as close as possible to the meanings given to the phenomena by the people who are personally involved. That kind of definition is far more useful for a researcher to understand "what freelancing is about." Most freelancers would probably agree that we can empirically observe both a "core" and other "marginal forms" of "being a freelancer." It means that a person who meets five of the essential features mentioned above would probably be identified as a "freelancer in the full sense of the word" by other freelancers.

The second area we will focus on in this section of the article is a comprehensive typology of freelancers, which is grounded in the data collected and analyzed during the study. Studying Polish freelancers, we would probably meet: 1) "born freelancers"—who could not imagine any other model of employment that fits better to their "character" and their professional expectations; 2) "escaping freelancers" who quit their previous regular, stable, organizational job (which is often connected with a need for a greater autonomy or unsatisfactory working conditions) and, thanks to the acknowledged qualifications, professional experience, and social network that they have built over the years, are able to succeed; 3) "non-ideological freelancers" who are driven by pragmatic reasons rather than their own features, values, and predis-

positions—they choose freelance as it is somehow profitable for them (mostly in financial terms) or due to the fact that it is one of the typical forms of work in their profession; and 4) “forced freelancers,” who become self-employed due to economic reasons or an unfavorable labor market situation (they either lost a “regular job” or could not find an appropriate one), they often consider freelancing only as a temporary and transitory way to survive before finding a full-time job. As we may notice, for the representatives of the third and fourth types of freelance, the need for the professional autonomy mentioned above is usually not perceived as the main advantage of that career model.

How can a freelance career path look like? Obviously, it will vary, depending on the situation of a person, their motivation for becoming a freelancer, and their chances of success. We may consider a freelancer’s career path in terms of “status passages” (Glaser and Strauss 1971). For the purposes of the article, we will focus on the most “optimistic” career path option which, according to the author’s study, consists of four stages. The first (initiatory) phase is the stage of the “growing freelancer.” Under the influence of various external (e.g., labor market situations, some unacceptable aspects of the previous career model, some disruptive changes within the organization, etc.) and/or internal factors (e.g., a sense of vocation, a need for self-realization, a lack of autonomy in the previous working life, etc.), a person begins to consider different career possibilities and decides that freelance could be a good solution. Of course, the time frame of the decision-making process may vary and it is strongly individualized, but eventually, it leads to thinking of oneself as a “full-time” or “part-time” freelance professional. The second is the “newcomer” stage, which is often the phase when various ways of organizing one’s everyday

working life are tested, as well as experiencing (for the first time) the advantages and disadvantages of being a freelancer takes place. Although not every “newcomer” feels out of their depth here. Becoming a freelancer could be connected with several “first attempts” in freelance-based work or combining it with their “regular” professional activity. That stage seems to be crucial for the further career of a freelancer. Usually, it abounds in some crisis situations. One of the most difficult are those referred to as “undersupply” or “oversupply crises” by one of the author’s interlocutors (*in vivo* codes). These are usually highly stressful situations, connected with a deficiency or excess of orders (projects) that may strongly affect the motivation for further development as a freelancer (see also: “bulimic career patterns” in: Fersch 2009:9, 115-116). The stage usually finishes when “the newcomer’s” market position is strengthened enough and they have developed effective strategies to deal with the undersupplies (lack of work and money) and oversupplies (lack of time) in the future. It may also be associated with the significant role of a portfolio for freelance work (each project builds up the freelancer’s portfolio and makes it easier to find new contracts). A portfolio is one of the main elements of the freelancer’s career capital, understood as an individual set of resources that increase the employability and gives the freelancer a sense of continuity in their working life. The third stage is the phase of a “freelancer with an established position” (or “a regular subcontractor” phase). Usually, it occurs more rapidly when the career capital resources are greater (valuable specialist skills, extensive professional experience, a rich portfolio, a wide network of contacts, etc.). At this stage, the opportunities to become involved in further projects increase, as well as the possibilities to “cherry-pick” offers. Rejection of a specific project no longer means an “undersupply crisis.”

We can also observe the increasing importance of consolidating relationships with previous clients, which makes it a little easier for the freelancer to sign future contracts. In some cases, a freelancer may become “a regular subcontractor,” which gives them a sense of stability (“the paradox of freelancers’ professional values”). It could lead to the fourth, “well-regarded expert,” stage of a freelancer’s career. Based on well-developed career capital and having a good reputation (including a strong and recognizable personal brand), some freelancers can eschew the acquisition processes. At this stage, it is the client who becomes the more active side in the negotiations. The client may want an “expert-freelancer” to carry out his project, but it is the freelancer who decides if s/he is available or not (to a much greater extent than at earlier stages). This fourth stage is also considered as potentially the most profitable. It is perceived as the “ideal vision” of “having reached the top,” but, of course, the career of a freelancer can easily come to an abrupt end or be interrupted, at any single moment. The move to a career as an entrepreneur, an employee, or even: unemployment are all possible, which is the essence of Beck’s “freedom of insecurity” mentioned above.

What are the other significant, everyday dilemmas that freelancers have to face, and their methods of solving them? We will focus on three important, problematic aspects of experiencing a career outside an organization, which are: dealing with the time and space of work, creating rationalizations with the use of “freelance ideology,” and approaches to the issue of dealing with a permanent insecurity. As we know, every job is inextricably linked to its temporal order (see: Konecki 1998:190-193). Newman (2006) wrote that most of us think of time as uniform and unchangeable, but, in fact: time is a social construction and our conceptions of time are tied to the

occupation. Over the years, for most of us, a precisely defined working time has become an important interpretative frame and a symbolic border between “being at work” and “being at home.” Oldenburg (1989) opined that, usually, we divide our time between being in three categories of spaces: “the first place” (our home), “the second place” (our job), and “the third place” (other public spaces). But, usually, there are no such clear borders within the working time of a freelancer, as work commitments are constantly interwoven with personal time. As mentioned above, the work of a freelancer is also not attached to a specific office or any other kind of an imposed working space. It all depends on the profession and the specificity of the particular tasks that are undertaken during a particular project. Each workplace of a freelancer is usually transitional, though, of course, some are used more often than others. The “home office” is one of the most common, but, at the same time, the most troublesome solution among freelancers, especially for those who have not discovered any useful time and space management techniques that could help them avoid various distractors. So, in many cases, the freelancer’s individual line of action needs to be fit together with the actions of his colleagues, but often also with his family members, who need to be taught that “staying at home” does not necessarily mean “having personal time” (some other dilemmas of “working at home” were widely described in: Ga-decki, Jewdokimow, and Żadkowska 2017:73-105).

Analyzing the data from the interviews, or some Internet groups and forums for freelancers, we will probably quickly find some frequently repeated formulas that seem to be highly popular among their community (according to the analyzed data, they seem to be more common among the statements of “born” and “escaping” freelancers). The author uses the term “freelance ideology” (in a meaning close to

“professional ideology” in: Mills 1943:165-180) to describe a specific set of values, ideas, and concepts that can be noticed in some of the freelancers’ narrative schemas. They are used to explain, interpret, and present their work to others and to identify what can be considered as a part of “our world” (“the world of freelance”) and what may not. They also express who freelancers are and distinguish them from other types of workers in the labor market. Some elements of the ideology may also be used as parts of “self-deceiving strategies” (Scheff 1990:50) that could be useful tools to convince oneself that becoming a freelancer is a good choice. They often become “handy explanations” or rationalizations that help to cope with some crisis situations connected with the insecurity of their work. Some of the main components of the “ideology” are: professional freedom (or: autonomy) and professional self-determination as core values; the important role of self-fulfillment, emphasizing an attachment to the work-life balance concept; striving for financial independence; a job that is one’s passion and allows one to be one’s boss. The ideology’s roots seem to be grounded in common philosophies based on “the search for authenticity” (Spicer 2011). Some of the often repeated, ideological statements seem to be only declarations that are difficult (or even impossible) to implement. Let us take, for instance, the “I am my own boss” or “I do not have to work 9-to-5” formulas that are often used by freelancers to explain the character of their work. The first one suggests that there is no one who can tell a freelancer what to do—clients are more the freelancer’s business partners than one’s “superiors.” In fact, in many cases, a freelancer is often working on several projects at the same time, having several “bosses” instead of one. The second statement suggests that full-time work is perceived as just a “relic of the past” and staying in the office for 8 hours each day is a waste of time. In fact, there are many situations

in which a freelancer has to work for much longer than 8 hours—often without an evening or a weekend break. But, even with an awareness of the highly declarative character of the ideology, it is an important way for freelancers to express what a “career outside an organization” is all about and to neutralize some psychological pressure connected with the permanent insecurity of their everyday work.

During his study, the author found out that there are at least three approaches (grounded in collected and analyzed data) to the issue of dealing with insecurity among freelancers. They seem to be connected with their objective, individual professional situation, as well as their subjective way of perceiving it. The first approach, defined by the author as “fatalistic (or: reactive) orientation” is characterized by the belief that one’s impact on today’s and future professional life is rather limited. A lack of security is considered to be the main risk factor that could adversely affect the direction of their further career development. Their attitude towards freelance treated as a long term solution may be negative. They often see it only as a transitional stage towards finding a regular (full-time) job. It tends to be more common among “forced” freelancers that were mentioned above. The second perspective (referred to by the author as a “short-term orientation”) is strongly focused on the present. This approach is particularly popular with some of the youngest freelancers claiming that long-term career planning is pointless. From their point of view, the labor market is highly unpredictable and retirement is just an unlikely, distant, future scenario. They are usually more optimistic about their current professional lives than the “fatalists,” but also: firmly embedded in a “here and now” perspective. They emphasize that they want to stay open-minded to various career opportunities. In some cases, they do not know

yet whether freelance is a permanent or just a temporal solution. The third approach is “an orientation focused on securing the future.” This is mainly the case for the freelancers with an established position and greater career capital resources whose financial situation allows them to save some money. They accept the insecurity of freelance, but, at the same time, they try to minimize the risks associated with it. They often think of themselves as a long-term, single-person business.

Discussion

As we may see, the possibilities of precisely planning the career of a freelancer are quite limited. It cannot be easily predicted in which direction it could develop or how long it could last. There are too many external factors that can transform it unpredictably. No wonder, then, that freelance is often lumped together with other forms of the so-called “precarious work” and is thought of as a form of employment that people are forced into due to their unfavorable labor market situation. Each day they have to deal with a lack of all of the most important work-related security dimensions mentioned by G. Standing (2011:10), that is, labor market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security, and representation security.

But, does freelancing always equal precarity? It cannot be denied that Standing’s concept is based on relevant observations and could be a useful tool to describe and explain the reality of the contemporary labor market. However, in the case of freelancers, their precarity is not as common as we may think and, in the author’s point of view, is definitely gradable. If we look at all sides of the freelance career continuum, we may say that the situation of

a “newcomer” has little in common with the situation of a “well-regarded expert” (or even a “regular subcontractor”). If the former may be considered as a part of the “precarious workers” category, the second one is much closer to those Standing described as “proficians.” It is the career capital that should matter during the study of the freelancers’ market situation. The second dividing line runs between “the grinners” and “the groaners” characterized by Standing (2011:59-84). Of course, we will find many individuals whose decision to become a freelancer was far from their own free choice (as I mentioned above, here freelancing is thought of as a temporary solution), but there are many people who made their own, autonomous decision about becoming freelancers. Furthermore, some of the author’s interlocutors seemed to be extremely satisfied with the working conditions that are offered by being a freelancer. One may say they were deceived by a promise or a vision of a “self-made person” or “the delusion of having a psychologically-meaningful” career and reaching self-fulfillment. Nevertheless, nowadays, could “job security” not be considered as a kind of deceptive concept? Observing the major changes on the labor market that are connected with the so-called “4th Industrial Revolution” (Schwab 2016), we may say that it is freelancers, with their transferable skills and their career capital, but not necessarily a “concrete profession,” who are best prepared for the future labor market. What is essential is that being a member of the precariat should rather be considered as a matter of a subjective, self-perception than a “structurally imposed imperative.” In many cases, classifying all the freelancers (*ad hoc*) as dissatisfied, precarious workers (or maybe: non-workers?) who are constantly exploited seems to be an inadequate simplification. As interactionists, we may offer some tools that enable us to consider all perspectives efficiently.

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Citation

Miller, Piotr. 2020. "Freelance Workers—Experiencing a Career Outside an Organization." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 16(4):90-104. Retrieved Month, Year (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.16.4.06>