

Cos should leverage 'gig' eco to drive innovation, change

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By Vikram Bector

The gig economy — comprising consultants, freelancers and free agents — is a workforce trend that is increasingly becoming popular. According to Intuit, up to 40% of the workforce in the US will be part of the gig economy, by 2020. In India, contract work is already a familiar concept for non-managerial positions across sectors and close to 15-20% of the workforce is estimated to become part of it. Considering its growing importance, it's crucial for prospective employers, as well as free agents, to keep pace with the concept, and what it entails.

The draw for prospective free agents: Working on an assignment-basis can be a source of primary or supplementary income. A key pull-factor is the autonomy and flexibility. Freelancers can choose assignments based on the nature, scope and specificity of work, the remuneration, timelines, and also how desirable the client is. Those on an assignment would work closely with one (a designated project manager) or a few key stakeholders. Preferring to focus solely on their work, many millennials would like to deal with fewer complexities of workplace dynamics as compared to an employee — and therefore, shun a structured permanent work environment.

From a profile-building perspective, assignments spanning diverse sectors lend more credibility, as they help one develop a holistic perspective.

What's in it for the organisation: Subject-matter expertise as well as a holistic view, previously mentioned are available on tap. Free agents can provide much-needed, neutral and fresh perspectives and can accelerate change and innovation.

Free agents can help tide over peak-period demands for additional manpower, without adding to long-term headcount costs and associated challenges. Over time, an organisation can create a global pool of ambassadors who are mobile and can be

deployed at short notice.

Enabling a 'gig-friendly' environment: Organisations should be mindful that such assignments clearly spell out responsibilities and deliverables. As with employees, free agents will be motivated and engaged if an organisation values and appreciates their expertise.

Additionally, organisations should try to offer similar infrastructural conveniences to employees and free agents.

A detailed cultural immersion and induction, working with assigned project managers (or guides), will help accelerate output, especially since free agents work independently as compared to employees. An appreciation of the context is extremely important before one can demonstrate the impact of one's work. It's important for relevant internal stakeholders to be formally introduced to these free agents. This makes it easy to resolve project-related queries and clarifications and help with access to the right information.

Senior leaders and all other internal stakeholders also need to be sensitised on the working style of a free agent. This will help them fine-tune their expectations and enable free agents to focus on their core deliverables and add value.

Tips for aspiring free agents: Free agents must spend time to research about the company, its business model and strategy. They should set up a meeting with all stakeholders as soon as possible and take the help of a project guide to help them navigate through the organisation. A diligent start will make for smooth sailing later.

Commercials — such as benefits and leave entitlements, travel allowance, overtime, payment for scope enhancement, etc — should be clarified in advance to avoid any unpleasant surprises. Deadlines should be treated as sacrosanct since this will help build credibility.

Forward-looking organisations should always be prepared to engage with global talent in newer ways. Innovative ideas could originate from multiple sources, only an open mind will be able to leverage the power of new ideas even if they come from a free agent.

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