Article

Resource Conversion in Gig Careers: A Systematic Review of Career Adaptability and Sustainable Career Development

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Abstract – Digital labour platforms have changed how people earn a living and build their careers, but less is known about how gig workers turn personal and social resources into lasting career benefits. This systematic literature review examines how psycho-social resources, career adaptability, and relational assets contribute to sustainable gig careers. Following the PRISMA framework, the review drew on Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar for scholarly discovery, supported by backward and forward citation tracking; Crossref and publisher records were used to verify bibliographic identity and publication versions. Of the 227 records identified, 45 publications were included in the final synthesis. The findings suggest that confidence, career security, social capital, digital reputation, and occupational identity become valuable only when workers can translate them into practical actions such as planning, skill development, client management, platform navigation, and income diversification. Career adaptability may support this process, although direct empirical evidence remains limited. Ultimately, sustainable gig careers depend on both worker agency and the wider platform, occupational, and institutional environment.

Keywords: "Gig work", "Gig careers", "Career adaptability", "Sustainable careers", "Systematic literature review".

1. Introduction

Ride-hailing, food delivery, household services, crowdwork, online freelancing, creative projects, and professional contracting are often grouped under the broad label of gig work (Friedman, 2014; Kuhn & Maleki, 2017; International Labour Organization, 2021; World Bank, 2023). Yet this common label masks very different career experiences. For some workers, platform work provides an entry point into the labour market, greater autonomy, portfolio development, or access to international clients. For others, it involves unpaid waiting time, unstable earnings, dependence on ratings, and limited social protection (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Vallas & Schor, 2020; Anwar & Graham, 2021). Flexibility and precarity are therefore not opposing conditions; many gig workers experience both at the same time.

This issue is especially important from a career perspective because most gig workers lack formal promotion pathways, employer-funded development, or an organisational ladder that

signals advancement (Ashford et al., 2018; Petriglieri et al., 2019; De Vos et al., 2020). Instead, they often have to manage their own development by updating skills, learning how platforms allocate work, maintaining useful social ties, managing clients, building a digital reputation, and diversifying income across tasks or platforms (Gandini et al., 2016; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2018; Jarrahi & Sutherland, 2019; Caza et al., 2022). The key question, then, is not simply whether gig work is beneficial or harmful, but under what conditions workers can preserve, strengthen, and carry their resources forward into a viable career.

Existing reviews have largely focused on how platform labour is organised and controlled through algorithmic management, digital governance, nonstandard work arrangements, and precarious employment relations (Spreitzer et al., 2017; Duggan et al., 2020; Kellogg et al., 2020; Vallas & Schor, 2020). Far less attention has been given to the process through which resources such as career security, self-efficacy, identity, social capital, reputation, and peer support are translated into skill development, employability, viable income, satisfaction, meaning, and career continuity. Evidence on this process remains scattered across management, sociology of work, information systems, employment relations, vocational behaviour, labour economics, and human resource management.

This review brings together research on how psycho-social resources contribute to sustainable career outcomes among gig workers. The proposed conditional resource conversion perspective is grounded in three complementary theoretical foundations. Conservation of Resources theory explains how individuals acquire, preserve, and invest valued resources to protect against loss and generate further gains (Hobfoll, 1989). Career Construction Theory provides a basis for understanding career adaptability as a psycho-social resource that supports responses to changing career demands through concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2005; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Sustainable career theory broadens this explanation by emphasising that career development unfolds through the interaction of the individual, the surrounding context, and changes over time rather than through short term employment outcomes alone (De Vos et al., 2020). Together, these theories provide a coherent foundation for examining how different resources may support career development within the distinctive conditions of gig work.

Building on these foundations, the conditional resource conversion perspective distinguishes resource inputs, conversion practices, career outcomes, and the contextual conditions that shape the process. A strong digital reputation, for instance, may improve a freelancer's visibility and access to clients, but its longer term value depends on how that resource is used through practices such as client relationship management, skill development, portfolio building, platform navigation, and income diversification. These practices may support employability, income viability, occupational legitimacy, career satisfaction, and career continuity. However, the extent to which such outcomes can be sustained is influenced by platform dependence, algorithmic opacity, occupational skill level, institutional protection, and the portability of reputational and relational resources across work settings. The theoretical contribution of this perspective lies in integrating resource investment, adaptive behaviour, and sustainable career development within a single framework that explains why similar resources may generate different outcomes across platform and occupational

contexts. Rather than replacing existing theories, it extends their application by clarifying how resources are translated into career value and under what conditions those benefits are likely to endure. Accordingly, this review aims to distinguish the main types of psycho-social resources, examine how the literature describes their use, and separate empirical observations from theoretical propositions concerning sustainable career development. The guiding review question is as follows. How and under what conditions are psycho-social resources converted into sustainable gig career outcomes?

2. Literature Review

Gig work does not represent a single occupation or a uniform position in the labour market. It can serve as a source of temporary income, a pathway into employment, a primary livelihood, an entrepreneurial activity, or one part of a wider career portfolio (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017; Healy et al., 2017; Schor et al., 2020). A delivery rider, a microtask worker, and a software freelancer operate in very different markets and face different levels of bargaining power, algorithmic control, and skill portability. These distinctions matter because a resource that supports career development in one segment may remain confined to a single platform in another (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kareborn, 2019; Stephany et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2026).

Psycho-social resources include perceived career security, self-efficacy, occupational legitimacy, positive career attitudes, social capital, digital reputation, and peer support. Psycho-social resources were selected because they recur across the literature as important influences on how gig workers manage uncertainty, access opportunities, and sustain their careers. They are grouped into three analytical categories: psychological resources, such as self efficacy, perceived career security, positive career attitudes, and occupational identity; relational assets, such as social capital, peer support, referrals, and repeat client relationships; and platform linked assets, such as ratings, digital reputation, and platform specific knowledge (Bandura, 1997; Bourdieu, 1986; Gandini et al., 2016; Jarrahi et al., 2020; Lent et al., 1994). These categories are analytically distinct because possessing a resource does not necessarily translate into lasting career value. For example, a high platform rating may improve access to tasks but have limited value elsewhere, while confidence and social support may help workers respond more effectively without removing structural constraints such as deactivation risk, discriminatory evaluation, or limited portability (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Rosenblat et al., 2017; Schor et al., 2020).

Social capital and digital reputation are particularly visible in platform-based labour markets. Referrals, repeat clients, peer communities, trust, and cooperation can improve access to work, knowledge, and support (Gandini et al., 2016; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2018; Fulker & Riedl, 2024). Yet these assets become meaningful career resources only when they lead to benefits that endure, such as long-term client relationships, referrals, transferable knowledge, or credible signals that remain useful beyond a single account. Reputation portability is therefore central to assessing whether platform work genuinely contributes to employability.

In this review, career adaptability is treated as an interpretive lens rather than an established mechanism in gig work research. Career Construction Theory conceptualises career adaptability through concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2005; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), yet relatively few studies in the gig work literature have measured these dimensions directly. More commonly, studies describe behaviours such as adjusting work routines, preparing for unstable demand, seeking alternative clients or platforms, learning new skills, managing work identities, and continuing to act under uncertainty (Lehdonvirta, 2018; Jarrahi & Sutherland, 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2019; Caza et al., 2022). In the coding process, these behaviours were classified as general adaptive responses and were not treated as evidence of concern, control, curiosity, or confidence unless the original study explicitly measured the formal career adaptability construct. This distinction allows career adaptability to be used as a theoretically plausible explanation for adaptive behaviour while avoiding stronger claims that are not supported by direct empirical evidence.

A sustainable career is understood here as one that enables a worker to maintain meaningful and viable participation in work, develop over time, or make a workable transition within or beyond gig work. Consistent with sustainable career theory, this definition incorporates the dimensions of person, context, and time (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; De Vos et al., 2020). The person dimension concerns outcomes such as income viability, skill development, employability, satisfaction, meaning, and resilience. The context dimension reflects the influence of platform dependence, algorithmic opacity, institutional support, occupational skill, gender, and life course conditions on workers' career opportunities. The time dimension emphasises continuity, cumulative development, and the durability of career resources, recognising that a short period of high earnings does not necessarily indicate sustainability when skills are not transferable, reputation cannot travel, or access to work can be withdrawn without warning (Duggan et al., 2020; Parent Rocheleau & Parker, 2022; Kim, Sawyer, & Dunn, 2025).

3. Methodology of Study

3.1. Identification

The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar, with Crossref and publisher websites used to verify publication details and DOI information. The final search and update were completed on 24 May 2026. Search terms combined expressions related to gig and platform work with terms concerning careers, employability, sustainable careers, career adaptability, and psycho-social resources. Searches were conducted across the bibliographic information and searchable content available on each platform, with particular attention to titles, abstracts, keywords, and other indexed text where supported. The search was limited to English language scholarly publications published between 2010 and 24 May 2026. Empirical studies, conceptual papers, review articles, and other scholarly sources were considered where they provided substantive evidence or theoretical insight relevant to workers' resources, adaptive practices, career development, or sustainable career outcomes. Search results were recorded in a structured spreadsheet containing the title, authors, year, publication source, DOI or URL, and screening decision. Duplicate records were identified by comparing DOI information, titles, authors, and

publication years and were removed before screening. The search was supplemented by backward citation tracking of the reference lists of relevant studies and forward citation tracking to identify additional publications that were not captured through the initial keyword searches. Publisher websites and Crossref records were subsequently used to confirm bibliographic information and publication status. The search strings and corresponding search activities are reported in Table 1. Overall, 227 records were identified before duplicate removal and screening.

Table 1: The search string

Search route	Search string / execution detail
Core search family A	("gig work" OR "gig economy" OR "platform work" OR "digital labour platform" OR "digital labor platform" OR "online labour platform" OR "online labor platform" OR "online freelanc*" OR crowdwork OR "crowd work" OR MTurk OR "ride hailing" OR "food delivery") AND (career* OR employability OR "career development" OR "sustainable career*" OR "career adaptability" OR "career security") AND (resource* OR "social capital" OR "self-efficacy" OR reputation OR "social support" OR identity OR "algorithmic management"))
Core search family B	(("digital labour platform" OR "online labor platform" OR Upwork OR Uber OR Deliveroo OR "Amazon Mechanical Turk" OR MTurk) AND ("social capital" OR reputation OR trust OR ratings OR "digital reputation" OR "algorithmic competenc*" OR "platform navigation") AND (worker* OR freelancer* OR driver* OR courier*))
Contemporary update family	(("gig worker" OR "platform worker" OR freelancer* OR crowdworker* OR courier*) AND (wellbeing OR "well-being" OR satisfaction OR "worker-defined success" OR "income viability" OR sustainability OR "career continuity" OR "skill development"))
Supplementary discovery	Backward and forward citation chasing from seed studies and reviews; publisher pages and DOI records were used to verify publication status and replace preprints with final versions where available.

3.2. Screening

The screening process began with the removal of 31 duplicate or overlapping records. A further 52 records were removed during preliminary screening because they were clearly outside the scope of the review, including publications that did not focus on gig or platform work, addressed consumers or platform organisations rather than workers, or lacked substantive relevance to career related resources, adaptive practices, or sustainable career outcomes. The remaining 144 records were screened independently by two reviewers using the inclusion and exclusion criteria presented in Table 2. Any differences in screening decisions were discussed until agreement was reached. Following title and abstract screening, 74 records were excluded, leaving 70 publications for full text assessment.

Eligible studies were limited to scholarly works published in English between 2010 and 24 May 2026 that focused directly on gig or platform workers and addressed career related resources, adaptive practices, or sustainable career outcomes.

Table 2 : The selection criterion in searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	2010 to 24 May 2026	Before 2010
Literature type	Empirical, conceptual, review, typology, policy-oriented or verified scholarly working paper directly relevant to gig/platform work	Media, commentary, non-scholarly material or methodological sources with no gig-work analysis
Publication stage	Final publication; accepted manuscript; verified working paper used only as supplementary evidence	Unverifiable publication status or insufficient bibliographic detail
Work and career relevance	Worker-level evidence on gig/platform work, resources, adaptability, employability, security, satisfaction, income viability or sustainable outcomes	Consumer-, firm- or platform-only studies without substantive worker career relevance

3.3. Eligibility

At the eligibility stage, the titles, abstracts, and full texts of 70 publications were assessed against the review objectives. Twenty five publications were excluded because they lacked worker level evidence, had limited relevance to careers, resources, adaptability, or sustainable outcomes, focused primarily on legal or policy issues without substantive career implications, were non scholarly commentaries, or could not be assessed adequately because of limited access or incomplete bibliographic information. The review adopted a systematic literature review design with an integrative synthesis of heterogeneous scholarly evidence. Accordingly, the final 45 included sources comprised empirical studies, conceptual papers, review articles, policy-related publications, accepted manuscripts, and verified working papers. These source types were analysed according to their evidential role. Empirical studies were used primarily to support observations about workers, practices, and career outcomes, while conceptual and review papers informed theoretical interpretation and synthesis. Policy-related publications were used to explain institutional and regulatory conditions, whereas accepted manuscripts and working papers were treated as supplementary evidence where their scholarly status and relevance could be verified. The term included sources is therefore used throughout the review to reflect the different forms and levels of evidence represented in the final corpus.

3.4. Data Abstraction and Analysis

An integrative analysis was conducted to synthesise empirical, conceptual, review, typological, and working paper evidence. For each included source, data were extracted using a structured coding form that recorded bibliographic details, gig work segment, research design, sample or data source, theoretical perspective, psycho-social resources, adaptability-related practices, sustainable career outcomes, and relevant boundary conditions. Two reviewers independently checked the extracted information and coding decisions, and any differences were resolved through discussion and consensus. The coding process proceeded in three stages. First, source characteristics and key constructs were identified. Second, findings were classified into resource inputs, adaptive practices, career outcomes, and contextual conditions. Third, conceptually similar codes were compared and consolidated into broader themes. Methodological quality was appraised using design-appropriate criteria that considered the clarity of the research question, appropriateness of the research design, transparency of the sample or data source, rigour of data collection and analysis, and the credibility of the reported conclusions. Evidence was weighted according to its directness and methodological basis rather than by assigning a single numerical score across all source types. Empirical studies were used primarily to support observed patterns and relationships, while conceptual and review papers were used to develop theoretical explanations and contextual interpretation. Policy-related sources and working papers were treated as supplementary evidence and were not given the same evidential weight as peer-reviewed empirical studies. To avoid double counting, review articles were not treated as additional empirical observations of the primary studies they summarised, and multiple versions of the same study were counted only once, using the most complete and recent version available.

Fig. 1 visually demonstrates the authors' review of the methods and findings of all 45 publications, extracted material related to the review focus, and grouped similar findings into provisional categories. These categories were then compared, refined, and consolidated through discussion. A review log was maintained to document analytical decisions, disagreements, and revisions made during theme development. The reporting of the review process was guided by PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021), while the reporting of the literature search was informed by PRISMA S (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

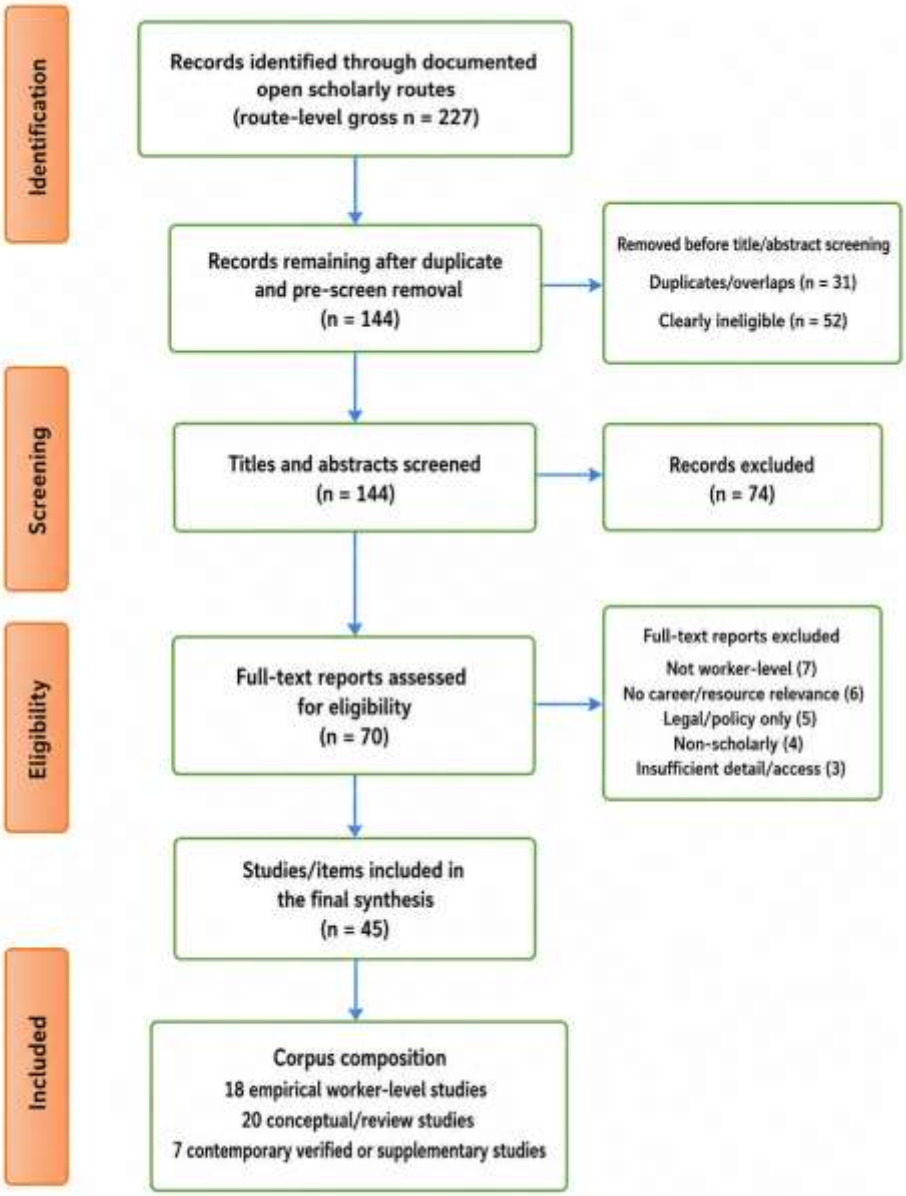


Fig 1: PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the study selection process, adapted from Page et al. (2021).

4. Findings and Discussion

The three themes capture the main resource foundations, adaptive processes, career outcomes, and constraints identified in the literature. Based on the search and analysis process, the 45 publications were grouped into: Psycho-Social Resources, Identity, and Relational Career Assets (14 articles); Career Adaptability, Career Trajectories, and Sustainable Outcomes (14 articles); and Precarity, Algorithmic Management, and

Institutional Boundary Conditions (17 articles). The full extraction matrix containing detailed information on all 45 included sources is provided in Appendix A and as supplementary material to improve the readability of the main manuscript. Table 3 and Table 4 present an aggregate profile of the evidence base together with a concise thematic synthesis, summarising the distribution of the included sources by methodological approach, geographical coverage, gig work segment, publication type, key constructs, and their main contributions to the review, respectively.

Table 3: Aggregate profile of the evidence base

Dimension	Category	n	Interpretation
Methodological role	Empirical or empirical plus conceptual worker or stakeholder evidence	24	Observed worker experiences, practices, outcomes, or stakeholder evidence
Methodological role	Aggregate labour market analyses	2	Market demand or matching evidence rather than individual psychological measures
Methodological role	Conceptual, review, editorial, policy, legal, or health assessment evidence	19	Theoretical and contextual interpretation
Platform or work segment	Online or remote freelancing	11	Primary segment represented in the extraction matrix
Platform or work segment	Microtask or crowdwork	6	Primary segment represented in the extraction matrix
Platform or work segment	Ride hailing or delivery	4	Primary segment represented in the extraction matrix
Platform or work segment	Spot gig market	1	Primary segment represented in the extraction matrix
Platform or work segment	Independent or alternative work	2	Primary segment represented in the extraction matrix
Platform or work segment	Broad, mixed or unspecified	21	Primary segment represented in the extraction matrix
Geography	Named country or country set	3	India, Italy and the UK, and Australia are explicit in the extraction matrix
Geography	Global, regional, multi country or developing country framing	4	Global, multi country, Africa, or developing country scope
Geography	Geography not explicit in current extraction	38	The current matrix does not state a specific geography for these sources
Publication type	Journal format publications	40	Classification based on the publication information in the extraction matrix

Dimension	Category	n	Interpretation
Publication type	Conference proceedings	2	Classification based on the publication information in the extraction matrix
Publication type	Edited volume or conference book chapter	1	Classification based on the publication information in the extraction matrix
Publication type	Repository working paper or accepted manuscript	2	Classification based on the publication information in the extraction matrix

Table 4 : Concise thematic analysis

Theme	n	Typical evidence	Main work segments	Key constructs	Contribution to synthesis
Psycho-social resources, identity and relational career assets	14	Surveys, qualitative studies, conceptual reviews, co design and platform studies	Crowdwork, online freelancing, couriers, independent professionals	Self-efficacy, identity, social capital, reputation, peer support, platform resources	Resources can support access, autonomy, meaning and support, but their value depends on platform conditions and transferability.
Career adaptability, career trajectories and sustainable outcomes	14	Qualitative, mixed method, longitudinal, conceptual and labour market studies	Remote freelancing, crowdwork, alternative work and spot gig markets	Adaptive practices, employability, skill development, career trajectories, worker defined success	Workers adapt through planning, learning and navigation, but these behaviours should not be treated as direct measurement of the formal career adaptability construct.
Precarity, algorithmic management and institutional boundary conditions	17	Empirical case studies, reviews, legal and policy analysis, labour process and work design studies	MTurk, ride hailing, delivery and broader platform work	Algorithmic control, dependence, precarity, health, discrimination, institutional protection	Platform and institutional conditions shape whether worker resources and adaptive effort can generate sustainable career value.

5. Discussions

The review portrays gig work as a contested career setting where opportunity and precarity often exist side by side. Its central insight is that possessing a resource does not necessarily lead to a lasting career benefit. Workers may have confidence, a strong occupational identity, useful social ties, high ratings, or detailed platform knowledge without gaining durable

employability, skill development, or career continuity. The value of these resources depends on how workers use them and whether the surrounding opportunity structure allows those efforts to produce meaningful returns as follows:

1. **Career security as a resource foundation:**
   For gig workers, security is often practical rather than contractual. Predictable access to work, manageable safety risks, workable legal arrangements, and some degree of social protection give workers the space to plan and invest in their development. Without this basic foundation, their time and resources are more likely to be directed towards immediate survival than long-term career growth.

2. **Agency, identity, and worker-defined success:**
   Self-efficacy, personal discipline, occupational identity, and individual career goals influence how workers engage with platform work. Recent studies also suggest that success should not be measured by earnings alone. For many workers, it includes autonomy, access to better clients, learning opportunities, occupational legitimacy, portfolio growth, and the ability either to remain in an occupation or move on from it.

3. **Social capital and digital reputation:**
   Networks, referrals, cooperation, repeat clients, and ratings can improve access to work, information, and support. However, reputation becomes a meaningful career resource only when it can travel beyond a single platform or be converted into off-platform relationships, referrals, knowledge, and credible evidence of competence.

4. **Career adaptability as a proposed conversion mechanism:**
   Career adaptability may provide a useful explanation for how gig workers respond to changing work demands, although the available evidence remains limited. Direct evidence comes from the relatively small number of studies that explicitly measured career adaptability or its established dimensions of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. More commonly, the literature reports indirect evidence through behaviours such as planning, exploring alternative opportunities, managing clients, developing skills, navigating platforms, and persisting under uncertainty. These behaviours are consistent with adaptive responses but should not be treated as direct evidence of the formal career adaptability construct. Accordingly, the role of career adaptability as a conversion mechanism represents an interpretive proposition developed from the synthesis rather than a confirmed empirical finding. Further research using validated measures and longitudinal designs is therefore needed to determine whether career adaptability helps explain how psycho-social resources are translated into more sustainable career outcomes among gig workers.

5. **Sustainable outcomes beyond income:**
   Career sustainability involves more than earnings. It includes income viability, skill development, employability, satisfaction, meaning, resilience, and continuity. Gross income or a one-off measure of satisfaction cannot show whether work remains

sustainable once unpaid time, operating costs, income volatility, health risks, and the possibility of losing platform access are considered.

6. **Differences across gig-work segments:**
   Online freelancers, crowdworkers, ride-hailing drivers, delivery couriers, and professional contractors operate within different opportunity structures. Higher-skilled freelancers may be able to turn portfolios, reputation, and long-term client relationships into broader career opportunities. By contrast, workers in standardised app-based jobs often use adaptive practices mainly to manage short-term income rather than build lasting career value.

7. **Boundary conditions:**
   Platform dependence, algorithmic opacity, institutional protection, occupational skill, gender, and life-course constraints shape every stage of the conversion process. Adaptability alone cannot overcome precarious working conditions. Any worker-centred explanation must therefore avoid placing responsibility on individuals for limitations created by platform design or labour-market institutions.

Furthermore, the findings support a proposed Conditional Resource Conversion Model for gig careers that explains how workers may translate available resources into more sustainable career outcomes under varying contextual conditions. The model distinguishes four interrelated components. Resource inputs consist of psychological resources, relational assets, and platform linked resources that provide workers with potential forms of support or advantage. These resources may be mobilised through conversion practices such as planning, exploration, learning, client management, platform navigation, and income diversification. Such practices may contribute to career related outcomes including skill development, income viability, employability, satisfaction, meaning, resilience, and career continuity. However, these relationships are not assumed to operate uniformly. Their strength and direction may be shaped by boundary conditions such as platform dependence, algorithmic opacity, occupational characteristics, institutional protection, gender, and life course circumstances. The reviewed literature provides direct evidence for the presence of particular resources, practices, outcomes, and contextual constraints, while the proposed relationships among these components are supported mainly by indirect evidence and cross study interpretation. The model should therefore be understood as an integrative theoretical proposition rather than a confirmed causal mechanism. Its contribution lies in extending sustainable career theory by incorporating platform rules, reputation systems, algorithmic management, and institutional conditions directly into the career system and by explaining why similar resources may produce different career outcomes across gig work settings. Table 5 summarises the proposed Conditional Resource Conversion Model by outlining its main components, their respective roles in the conversion process, and the evidential status of each relationship. It distinguishes resource inputs, conversion practices, career outcomes, and boundary conditions, while also clarifying which relationships are supported directly or indirectly by the reviewed literature and which remain theoretical propositions requiring further empirical testing.

Table 5: Proposed Conditional Resource Conversion Model

Model component	Description	Evidence status
Resource inputs	Psychological resources, relational assets, and platform-linked resources available to gig workers	Direct and indirect evidence across the included sources
Conversion practices	Planning, exploration, learning, client management, platform navigation, and income diversification through which resources may be mobilised	Mainly indirect evidence based on reported worker behaviours
Career outcomes	Skill development, income viability, employability, satisfaction, meaning, resilience, and career continuity	Direct evidence for individual outcomes, with more limited evidence for long term sustainability
Boundary conditions	Platform dependence, algorithmic opacity, occupational characteristics, institutional protection, gender, and life course circumstances	Direct and contextual evidence across the literature
Proposed relationships	Resource inputs may support conversion practices, which may contribute to career outcomes under more favourable contextual conditions	Author proposed relationships requiring further empirical and longitudinal testing

Future research should measure career adaptability directly, follow workers over time, and compare clearly defined platform segments. Longitudinal studies are particularly important because resources may accumulate, erode, or lose value as workers move between platforms, change occupations, or encounter different institutional conditions. Research should also examine whether portable reputation systems, transparent allocation and deactivation rules, accessible grievance procedures, peer support, digital-skills training, and portable benefits genuinely expand career opportunities or simply make insecure work more manageable.

The practical implications of this review should be interpreted cautiously because the included studies provide stronger evidence about workers' challenges and existing practices than about the effectiveness of specific interventions. For ride hailing and delivery workers, platform companies could consider clearer explanations of rating, allocation, and deactivation procedures, as studies consistently identify information asymmetry, algorithmic control, and job quality concerns in these settings (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Rosenblat et al., 2017; Goods et al., 2019). However, this recommendation is based mainly on evidence of existing problems rather than direct evaluations of transparency interventions. For delivery couriers, worker organisations and platforms may also support accessible peer information and support channels, drawing on evidence that workplace solidarity can provide information, protection, and collective voice (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). For online freelancers and independent professionals, training providers and career services could offer support in skill development, portfolio building, digital reputation management,

and career transition planning, although current evidence is primarily indirect and does not establish the effectiveness of such programmes (Petriglieri et al., 2019; Fulker & Riedl, 2024; Kim et al., 2025). At the policy level, measures related to social protection, grievance procedures, and access to development opportunities may be particularly relevant to economically dependent platform workers and workers operating in settings with weaker institutional protection (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Rani & Furrer, 2021). These recommendations should therefore be regarded as evidence-informed directions for practice and future evaluation rather than as established interventions. Table 6 exhibits the stakeholder practical implications derived from the review, showing the relevant gig worker segment, the proposed action, and the corresponding evidence status. The table helps distinguish recommendations that are supported by direct evidence of existing problems or practices from those that are based on indirect evidence or remain tentative suggestions requiring further empirical evaluation.

Table 6: Stakeholder practical implications

Stakeholder	Gig worker segment	Suggested action	Evidence status
Platform companies	Ride hailing and delivery workers	Improve transparency of ratings, allocation, feedback, and deactivation procedures	Direct evidence of the problems, but indirect evidence for the effectiveness of the proposed intervention
Worker organisations and platforms	Delivery couriers	Support peer information, communication, and support channels	Direct evidence of existing solidarity practices, with intervention effects still requiring evaluation
Training providers and career services	Online freelancers and independent professionals	Support skill development, portfolio building, digital reputation management, and career transition planning	Mainly indirect evidence and a tentative practical recommendation
Policymakers and labour institutions	Economically dependent platform workers and workers in weak protection contexts	Strengthen social protection, grievance mechanisms, and access to development opportunities	Contextual and empirical evidence of vulnerability, but limited direct evidence of intervention effectiveness

6. Conclusions

This systematic literature review explored how psycho-social resources are translated into sustainable career outcomes in gig and platform-mediated work. The analysis of 45 publications identified three broad themes: psycho-social resources, identity, and relational career assets; career adaptability, career pathways, and sustainable outcomes; and precarity, algorithmic management, and institutional boundary conditions. Taken together, the findings suggest that flexibility and individual agency can support career development, but neither is enough on its own to make a career sustainable.

The review's main contribution lies in distinguishing between having resources and being able to convert them into lasting career value. Security, self-efficacy, social capital, reputation, and peer support may create opportunities, but the benefits depend on whether workers can plan, learn, explore, manage clients, and navigate platforms effectively. They also depend on whether skills, relationships, and reputational signals can extend beyond a single platform or task market. Career adaptability offers a useful explanation for this conversion process, although the direct evidence remains limited and should be interpreted cautiously.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The review relied on documented open scholarly search routes rather than institutional database exports, did not retain a paired-screening record, and included a small supplementary group of accepted manuscripts and working papers. The evidence was also uneven across countries and occupational groups. Future research should therefore use validated measures of career adaptability, longitudinal and mixed-method designs, direct indicators of net income and income volatility, and comparisons across online freelancing, crowdwork, delivery, ride-hailing, and professional contracting. Such studies are needed to determine when adaptive effort leads to lasting career development and when structural constraints prevent workers from converting resources into meaningful returns.

Overall, sustainable gig careers are more likely to emerge when workers can turn fragile resources into learning, viable income, employability, meaning, and continuity, and when platform and institutional arrangements allow those gains to endure. The resource-conversion perspective provides a useful foundation for future empirical research and for interventions aimed at improving the developmental quality of platform work.

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