



Platform work represents a new organisational context for psychologists, where digital platforms act not only as technical tools but also as spaces of professional identity and belonging. Platforms actively contribute to the development of professional identity by providing resources, meanings and models of interaction with colleagues, organisational structures and patients. Focusing on psychologists working with the digital Italian platform Unobravo, this study explores how professional identity is shaped within a structured virtual environment and how this experience transforms the professional role. A mixed methods approach was adopted, including interviews, focus groups and an online survey, allowing an in-depth analysis of identity dynamics in an under-explored research field.

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Maddalena Gambirasio

**PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY
OF PSYCHOLOGISTS ONLINE**
The case study of Unobravo



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**SHAPING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF PSYCHOLOGISTS
THROUGH THE USE OF THE DIGITAL PLATFORM
The Case Study of Unobravo Organization**



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Dedication

To my PhD classmates, partners in this challenging and beautiful journey.

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Introduction¹

As I approached the study of psychological platforms, I quickly realized their significant impact on the field of psychology. Using a platform to practice this profession has numerous important implications concerning the relationship between patient and psychologist, the therapeutic alliance, the professional reputation of the psychologist, the sense of belonging to the professional community, professional autonomy, and the psychologist's training, among others. Initially, it was not easy to determine what to focus on, as every theme seemed central during the initial literature review phase. The more I read, studied, and learned, the more relevant dimensions there seemed to be to analyze. The same occurred during the data collection phase. The first interviews with the heads of various teams from the platform I observed highlighted many significant aspects of the study of psychological platforms. Understanding the organizational structure of the platform, which was the goal of the initial interviews, instead of helping me define a specific research subject, only broadened the range of possibilities. Every research direction seemed interesting or, rather, impossible to ignore. Whenever I felt close to finding a possible framework, new directions emerged. Despite this, it seemed that, little by little, I began to realize that most of the topics I considered most salient were somehow all connected to the theme of identity. This construct seemed to tie together many of the central issues arising from the study of the relationship between platforms and the discipline of psychology. For this reason, I began to delve into the topic of identity construction in organizational contexts, hoping to find a theoretical framework that would allow me to adopt a suitable approach for my research. The turning point, or as Ann Cunliffe (2022) calls it, my “wow moment,” arrived when I came across the study of Alvesson et al. (2008). This contribution summarizes how past and present organizational studies address the theme of identity construction. Specifically, the authors discuss the state of research on identity in organizational contexts, raising several central questions to be developed in future studies in the second part of the paper. These suggested questions allowed me to pause, reflect, and focus on the “why,” “who,” “what,” “when,” and “how” of my research. Attempting to answer these questions proved to be a valuable exercise in focusing on a more defined and precise structure, which I will present in the following lines of this introduction.

For the cited authors, the first question a scholar must answer is as follows: “Why do we do identity research, and what does it offer to our understandings of organizations and the individuals therein?”

¹ This study originated from an initial involvement in the WePlat project, whose early outcomes culminated in the publication of the volume *Il welfare alla prova delle piattaforme. Lavoro e servizi di cura nella transizione digitale* (Pais, 2024), published by Fondazione G. Feltrinelli

(ib. p. 17). Through my research, I attempt to deepen the understanding of an emerging phenomenon—platforms dedicated to psychologists. However, studying such a broad, complex, and dynamic phenomenon is not a simple task. There are numerous disciplines and perspectives from which it can be investigated, and various theoretical approaches can be drawn. Personally, I have chosen to borrow the lens of work and organizational psychology using the focus of identity studies in organizational contexts. This positioning stems from the awareness that an identity framework provides researchers with the opportunity to “develop novel and nuanced theoretical accounts to produce rich empirical analyses that capture the inter-subjectivity of organizational life in a thoughtful and empathetic fashion and to demonstrate how individual and collective self-constructions become powerful players in organizing processes and outcomes” (ib. p. 7). Moving from the conviction that the primary purpose of research should be its usefulness to people (Scaratti, 2021), I believe that studying a phenomenon starting from the subjects involved is a necessary and ethical choice (Cunliffe, 2016). In this sense, a study framed by identity manages to emancipate itself from a mere theoretical formulation that stops at the level of analysis and understanding of the characteristics of the phenomenon. This approach goes deeper by asking how the phenomenon affects the subjects and, conversely, how the latter influences the phenomenon itself. The aim is to produce research that is not closed in on itself but can provide meaningful theoretical understandings to the social actors involved in the study. Understanding human organizational experience, in fact, can stimulate people to reflect both on who they are and what they do, producing useful and applicable research capable of sparking reflections and giving subjects power and centrality. With this desire, I dedicate myself to studying the identity implications that the use of digital intermediaries for exercising the psychological profession brings. Specifically, I observe how using a platform to perform the activity of a psychologist influences the construction and development of professional identity. The hypothesis is that choosing a digital channel and tool in professional practice is not neutral but creates new processes through which psychologists define and construct their working identity.

Referring the reader to a more detailed explanation of the research questions in the following pages, I proceed with the second question suggested by Alvesson et al. (2008), which asks, “Who is actually constructing identity or influencing its construction?” As with most organizational studies on identity, this contribution mainly aims to examine individual experiences and attempts to grasp how psychologists experience themselves. Investigating human experience through subjects’ narratives and the ways they define and describe themselves allows for an understanding of the central role of individuals in constructing their identity. In fact, the focus on the person is configured as a privileged channel through which to understand identity construction. By adopting a qualitative methodology, I try to explore in depth the representations and the meanings attributed to the research participants’

experiences, thus exposing myself to a range of interpretations and viewpoints. In this way, I attempt to provide the research participants with in-depth reflections on their work experience on the platform without presuming to give them certain, unique, and static answers.

The third question that Alvesson et al. (2008) invite organizational identity scholars to answer considers the “what.” They ask researchers to reflect on the resources and materials through which identities are created. As suggested by Alvesson et al. (2008), in this study, I found it useful to primarily observe the discursive formations of psychologists who work through the technological *medium* represented by the digital platform. I explored the meanings attributed to the work experience and the representations of being a psychologist, trying to understand the presence of any differences in perception compared with professionals operating in this new digital context. Moreover, the study of the situated context, configured as a necessary preliminary analysis for understanding the investigated phenomenon (i.e., corporate rules, operational procedures, and organizational practices in use), proved fundamental. In accordance with a situated approach, the ability to study the organization in which the processes of constructing and developing the professional identity of platform psychologists find concrete implementation is indispensable. Corporate insiders allowed me to have access to the so-called embodied practices—that is, what people actually do at work (Barley and Kunda 2001)—and to socio-material and institutional agreements, such as divisions and hierarchies of labor and descriptions of activities and tasks connected.

Continuing with the examination of the questions posed by Alvesson et al. (2008) in studying the processes of identity construction in organizational contexts, it is useful to ask when these processes take place. Even though for some types of research this question might be irrelevant, I believe it could stimulate reflections in my study that are, in my opinion, not negligible. Although I start with an awareness that the processes of identity development and construction are constant and unstoppable, I believe that they become more salient at particular moments and under specific circumstances. The literature often refers to crisis situations that lead to significant identity changes. These can be micro (e.g., moments of questioning and individual change), meso (i.e., intended as conditions of organizational transformation or internal group crises), or macro (i.e., follow periods of transformation at the societal and overall context levels). Regarding the construction of the professional identity of psychologists who use platforms to perform their work activities, in my view, we are facing a significant transformation that involves all levels. The phenomenon of platform work represents a real change in work methods and interactions between economic actors. Platforms act as intermediaries between individuals and the market, allowing direct consumer needs satisfaction and reducing existing barriers between companies and individuals (Schwab, 2017). The same happens for psychological platforms, which, by putting supply and demand in touch, assume the role of mediator

between psychologists and patients. However, this digital intermediation between the mentioned actors represents a break from tradition, raising reflections on a possible transformation of the psychological profession. Elements such as professional practices, work tools, the organization of activities, and workplace interactions differ from the past. Thus, I hypothesize that the transformation of professional practices can go hand in hand with a change in how psychologists perceive themselves. The use of a technological intermediary can influence the processes of identity construction of psychologists, who perceive themselves in a new or different light compared with the traditional context.

Thus, it is important to dedicate part of the research to reflecting on the transformation of the labor market and its possible effect on professionals following platform work, as it represents the contextual dimension within which my study subject is placed.

The final question I am about to answer is “how.” This concerns the methodological approach used to understand the processes of professional identity construction and development of psychologists who use digital platforms. Given the various stimuli generated by the research questions mentioned above, I adopted a mixed methods approach. This approach seems intriguing, as it can feed two registers of knowledge production around the investigated theme: the richness and resonance of the results. The epistemological position underlying this option refers to a socio-constructivist orientation within which the concepts of transferability and resonance replace the generalizability of the results. Precisely because the socio-constructivist assumption starts with the premise that reality is socially and culturally constructed, the results collected by dialoguing with specific people and contexts cannot be generalized to other individuals or considered universal. Rather, access to relevant results raises the question of how they can resonate in other situations and become points of reference for non-mechanical and adaptive reproduction in various other scenarios.

In practice, through the use of qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, I was able to explore the experiences of individuals and access their creation of meaning. From the elements that emerged from these initial research steps, I was able to construct a questionnaire to be submitted to a larger sample. This second step allowed for the determination of whether the earliest results from qualitative data collection techniques could also resonate within the larger group of psychologists on the platform studied. The combination of desk analysis and qualitative and quantitative methods allowed me to study, through a rich and diversified methodology, the identity construction processes of the professionals examined. I believe this type of approach is appropriate for such a complex and dynamic study object as professional identity. Understanding how individuals deal with their often ambiguous and contradictory work experience seems achievable by adopting a dynamic and contextual vision, as proposed in this contribution. In this sense, I believe that the

Introduction

chosen methodology also reflects this complexity and contributes to an analysis that considers the peculiar registers through which researchers can access meanings.

By answering the “why,” “who,” “what,” “when,” and “how” as suggested by Alvesson et al. (2008), it was possible to outline the structure of this work. I hope that the focus I have chosen will help readers approach my work. This study is composed of six chapters. The first chapter discusses the phenomenon of platform work and the structural characteristics of this type of market. The second chapter is dedicated to studying the development of identity processes for platform workers and how they are influenced. The third chapter examines the main features of the psychological platforms present in the Italian landscape and proposes some indicators that are useful for classification. The fourth chapter presents the platform that serves as the backdrop for the case study and describes the main characteristics of the digital organization. The fifth chapter presents the research results, specifically the identity construction processes for platform psychologists, based on the knowledge of the research participants. Finally, in the sixth chapter, I discuss the results of the study, reflecting on how the new working model influences and orients the psychologist's identity processes. Aware that this research represents only a first step in understanding such a broad and complex phenomenon, I hope that it will provide insight and inspiration for future research.

Chapter 1. New Technologies and the World of Work: The Impact of the Platform Economy on Work and Workers

1.1 Introduction

Our society has profoundly changed over the past few decades due to multiple factors affecting sectors, such as the economy, politics, and institutions. However, technological innovation emerges as a central element of this transformation, enabling many of these changes (Andreotti & Pais, 2020). The extent of these changes has been so significant that they have led to discussions of a genuine revolution for humankind. The use of such a broad term is justified by the awareness that the change we are witnessing affects various dimensions of our lives. New technologies have managed to bring about a paradigm shift in the ways we work, communicate, obtain information, and express ourselves. For this reason, Klaus Schwab, founder and president of the World Economic Forum, stated that we are in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Schwab, 2016).

The impact of this revolution has been particularly significant, especially for the world of work, overturning well-established employment models (Ashford et al., 2018). New technologies have led companies to rethink themselves and challenge previous production and consumption systems to create new business models. In this scenario, characterized by strong dynamism and speed, individuals have had to seek alternative career and life paths and adapt to the new world of work (Davis, 2016).

The widespread adoption of new technologies in the workplace has simultaneously created valuable opportunities and alarming risks. This is evidenced by the clear divide among scholars who have taken polarized positions (Andreotti & Pais, 2020; Mingione, 2020; Schwab, 2016): on one side, the so-called techno-optimists who emphasize the positive effects of technological innovation, such as increased production, job growth through the creation of new roles and tasks, and improved work and life quality for professionals; on the other side, the techno-skeptics who highlight the issue of replacing human labor due to automation, digitalization, and artificial intelligence, with the consequent increase in unemployment and the control and exploitation of workers.

Regardless of the different positions taken by scholars, it can be stated that new technologies significantly contribute to the transformation process of the dominant economic model, with important effects on organizations and workers. Traditional companies, characterized by a rigid hierarchical structure and associated roles, are disappearing (Davis, 2016). Full-time jobs performed at a location owned by employers willing to invest in employee training are being replaced by more

temporary and flexible jobs that do not involve a direct and continuous relationship between the organization and workers (Cropanzano et al., 2023). Fewer and fewer people work according to predefined hours, and a growing number of professionals are only virtually connected (Ashford et al., 2018).

In this sense, new technologies serve as a central engine in the transformation of the world of work, creating new professional and identity challenges for today's workers that need to be explored in more depth.

In this chapter, I frame a new trend that is increasingly gaining ground in global markets—the so-called “platform economy.” After an initial paragraph defining the phenomenon and a second one highlighting the appropriate internal differentiations, I describe its main characteristics. I emphasize the structural specificities of this model and highlight the effects of using digital platforms on professions and workers.

1.2 The Recent Economic Model: In Search of an Appropriate Definition

As highlighted by Pais (2019), many labels have been used in the literature to define the new world of work: digital economy, sharing economy, collaborative economy, peer-to-peer economy, gig economy, on-demand economy, and platform economy. The use of different definitions indicates the variety of approaches and perspectives from which this subject can be studied. However, the term “gig economy” is the most widespread and present in the scientific literature, presumably because it emphasizes the centrality of the temporary nature of relationships between organizations and individuals. The term “gig” recalls the world of entertainment and the engagements (gigs) of workers who perform without any long-term commitment (Crouch, 2019). In this way, it refers to temporary and flexible workers who are not bound by traditional organizations. These workers often enter into contracts with many organizations and sell their services directly in the market (Ashford et al., 2018) through digital channels.

The gig economic model is characterized by the use of online digital platforms that connect employers, workers, and clients (Harris, 2017). In general, platforms can be defined as digital infrastructures that enable interaction between two or more groups of actors (Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Snircek, 2017). They allow for a drastic reduction in transaction costs between supply and demand, facilitating direct contact between individuals and organizations. In this way, digital platforms make the on-demand economy possible by reducing existing barriers between businesses and clients (Schwab, 2016).

Although this digital medium seems to serve a mere intermediation function, responding to the needs of the actors that give life to the gig economy, in reality, it enables significant transformations in the world of work. The platform model is characterized by specific features that distinguish it, such as convenience, accessibility, customer reviews, and platform control (Wood et al., 2018). These specificities are so crucial that they determine a truly new economic model called the “platform economy.” Given the central role played by platforms in the socioeconomic scenario under consideration, I have chosen to refer to the recent transformations, primarily using the term “platform economy” for this study. However, given the closeness of meaning of these terms, I will use labels such as ‘gig economy’, ‘new world of work’, ‘on-demand economy’ and ‘digital economy’ interchangeably. Although expressions such as “sharing economy,” “collaborative economy,” and “peer-to-peer economy” are used in the literature as synonyms for the phenomenon I am studying, I prefer to avoid their adoption. This choice is motivated by the fact that authors using these labels often apply them to describe non-monetary exchanges between private individuals organized through digital platforms (Gerwe & Silva, 2020; Sundararajan, 2016). By contrast, my focus is on activities carried out for compensation.

1.3 Heterogeneity of the Platform Economy

The rise of digital platforms has occurred rapidly within the international economic market, as this tool can adapt to different professional sectors and numerous work activities. The participation of workers in the gig economy is a growing trend (Boudreau et al., 2015; Spreitzer et al., 2017), and more and more professional categories are adhering to this economic model. For this reason, within the broader definition of “gig work,” some scholars (De Stefano, 2015; Stewart & Stanford, 2017) have considered it necessary to make a distinction by identifying two categories: “crowdwork” and “on-demand work.”

Crowdwork originates from the broader concept of crowdsourcing, is understood as a request on a digital platform for ideas, suggestions, and opinions from organizations or individuals to a crowd of online users, and benefits from collective intelligence to solve problems and find solutions (Fedorenko et al., 2017). However, crowdsourcing itself does not necessarily require monetary compensation. By contrast, financial remuneration is a central element of crowdwork, as those who participate provide a work service that is paid (Durward et al., 2016). In this sense, digital platforms regulate the exchange process between workers and employers, putting professionals who compete for the service in competition (Idowu & Elbanna, 2021). Competition among crowdworkers is global, as anyone with an internet connection can sell their skills on the platform (Bellesia et al., 2019). Generally, crowdwork can include two different types of activities: micro and macro (Kaine & Josserand, 2019). Microtasks are small and repetitive tasks that require limited skills from crowdworkers. Amazon Mechanical Turk is an example of a crowdwork platform that offers microtasks that coordinate the use of human intelligence to perform tasks that computers, to date, are not capable of doing (Scholz, 2017), such as product labeling and object identification in photos and videos. Conversely, macrotasks require specific industry skills and target high-profile professionals to carry out broader and more complex projects (Idowu & Elbanna, 2021). The Online Labor Index by Kassi and Lehdonvirta (2018), who analyzed the five largest online platforms in English worldwide, reports that the main occupations on these platforms concern highly skilled tasks, including design and content creation, market research, and work related to writing and translation. On-demand work differs from these purely virtual activities, as it involves the “real world” (Stewart and Stanford, 2017). Here, the platform matches the worker with the client through the online channel, but the service or product is performed or delivered offline. This category includes platforms dedicated to food delivery, such as Deliveroo, Just Eat, Glovo, Foodora, and Wolt, and ridesharing platforms, such as Uber, BlaBlaCar, Ubeeqo, and Lyft. This type of platform has been widely studied and debated in academia (Josserand & Kaine, 2019; Della Porta et al., 2022; López-Martínez et al.,

2022; Mieruch & McFarlane, 2023; Newlands, 2023; Weidenstedt et al., 2023) due to significant protests that have spread in many countries related to digital exploitation and the labour representation of this type of worker (Quondamatteo & Marrone, 2023).

These appropriate distinctions highlighted by scholars allow us to have a clear picture of the heterogeneity of the platform work phenomenon, which involves different work activities and professional categories (Broughton et al., 2018). Nevertheless, beyond the differences highlighted in the broader category of platform workers, scientific research has focused on the outcomes arising from adopting the platform model. Specifically, scholars have pointed out how gig work is transforming dimensions, such as the object of work, the relationships between organizations and workers, careers, work management methods, relationships between workers and clients, work times and spaces, professional practices, work tools, and more. These changes reflect the great transformation of the world of work that is underway and how adopting platforms has a fundamental impact on the human condition (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2010).

In the following paragraphs, I summarize the main characteristics of the platform model, highlighting the most discussed themes in the literature. Focusing on the structural specificities of platform work allows us to highlight its strengths and risks and its impact on work and workers.

1.4 Characteristics of Platform Work

As highlighted by Ashford et al. (2018), the structural characteristics of a work model necessarily affect the lived and psychological experiences of work. Each model creates working conditions within which professionals find themselves. Therefore, workers have always had to face the challenges that a working model entails, moving between advantages and obstacles.

Similar to previous models, the gig model sets specific working conditions to which platform workers must adapt and the consequent challenges that they must face (Caza et al., 2022). Identifying the structural characteristics of the gig economy offers an opportunity to understand the reference background that serves as a scenario for the professional and life experiences of platform workers. In the following subsection, the main differences from the traditional work model that dominated the West throughout the 20th century and the ongoing transformations in work are highlighted. Focusing on the salient characteristics of the platform model also allows for a discussion of the strengths and critical issues that affect workers' professional selves. The impact of gig work is so broad that it can shape the professional identities of workers and create significant identity implications for platform workers.

Before exploring the structural characteristics, I emphasize that the high heterogeneity of jobs included in the large gig category does not allow for uniform and universal reflections; therefore, the existing contradictions and the different positions taken by scholars on this topic are also mentioned. Some contributions in the literature tend to highlight the strengths of this work model, while others show the risks and criticalities, offering a picture of the platform economy as a source of both advantages and disadvantages for the workers participating in it.

1.4.1 Flexibility

Flexibility is the first term encountered when exploring the literature on digital platforms. It can be argued that new technologies have been a key factor in changing the labor market in terms of employment, contributing to the transformation of relationships between organizations and workers. Generally, automation and digitalization processes have favored an increase in more flexible working conditions compared with the past. Until a few years ago, jobs were mostly full-time, carried out at a physical location, and paid by employers willing to invest in employee training (Cropanzano et al., 2023). However, the expansion of new technologies has changed everything.

First, there has been a significant increase in part-time contracts over the last two decades. This type of contract has allowed some workers to participate in the labor market. An example is the many

women who, once they become mothers, prefer to find jobs that allow them to dedicate themselves to the education and care of their children. However, accepting part-time work is not always a voluntary act by workers. Often, these contracts are the only alternative they have because of the absence of full-time positions in the market, especially for women (Dieckhoff et al., 2015).

The second type of flexible contract is temporary work, which has increased since the 1990s. While recognizing workers' rights and protection, the temporary nature of these contracts effectively denies many of the rights enjoyed by permanent workers (Crouch, 2019).

Finally, technological innovation has played a crucial role in the exponential growth of the self-employed. It is precisely the latter category that is central to the gig economy, reflecting a form of work that allows professionals and companies great freedom. These workers are not employed by a company but are considered freelancers who have a work relationship with a specific organization to perform a task or project. Once the service is provided, the relationship between the freelancer and the company is considered concluded. In this sense, digitalization has created ideal conditions for the development of self-employment, offering companies greater flexibility and reducing the costs associated with hiring employees.

The need for more flexible relationships between individuals and organizations reflects the current dominant labor market paradigm—that is, the existence of a series of transactions between workers and companies, rather than a lasting relationship between these entities (Schwab, 2016).

The emergence of the gig economic model has been favored by a general decline in the union system since the 1980s, especially in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, which have pushed for greater labor market flexibility (Visser, 2006). The rationale that led governments to create conditions for adopting the platform economy was based on the idea that this model represented a potential source of employment, configuring itself as a possible new solution to solve the unemployment problem (Kuek et al., 2015; Zakariah et al., 2016). The creation of new jobs and opportunities allowed for the democratization of work (Scholz, 2016), representing an advantage for workers. In general terms, flexibility is advantageous for those joining the platform economy because it guarantees more freedom and autonomy than traditional full-time jobs with fixed working hours and long-term contractual obligations (Ashford et al., 2018).

From the workers' perspective, one of the arguments in favor of the gig economy is the opportunity to combine platform work with other activities (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2022). Individuals can simultaneously engage in traditional and non-traditional work (Ashford et al., 2018), as professional activities carried out through platforms can represent an opportunity for extra income. This is particularly relevant for seasonal workers who need to find different employment during off-season

periods, when their primary activity does not yield enough to support themselves (Weidenstedt et al., 2023).

Another category that seems to benefit from the flexibility offered by the gig model is women. Despite years of struggles and awareness-raising efforts aimed at achieving gender equality, women still find themselves significantly more involved than men in taking care of children and the household. Thus, the flexibility of platform work can be particularly attractive because it offers the possibility of managing a career and domestic life more effectively (Yerby, 2020). In some cases, when gig work is done remotely, it presents a professional opportunity for people with disabilities or for those who, for various reasons, cannot leave their homes (Jiang et al., 2015).

In general, as a type of temporary work, platform jobs provide great flexibility to workers who, being able to “check in and out” according to their needs, experience a certain level of control over their lives (Weidenstedt et al., 2023). In this sense, workers enjoy the freedom typical of entrepreneurs, as they have the ability to choose how much, when, and for whom to perform their professional activities (Crouch, 2019).

Organizations maximize flexibility by requiring the collaboration of freelancers only when needed and for specific tasks, avoiding the costs associated with actual hiring (Crouch, 2019). As noted by Cropanzano et al. (2023), the gig economy provides three types of flexibility for companies. First, they can increase staff during busy periods by temporarily hiring platform workers (Ashford et al., 2007; De Stefano et al., 2019). Second, this allows them to have professionals available only when they need them and adjust wages in real time based on the demand for activities (Schmidt et al., 2023). In this sense, flexibility is also financial, as employers rarely offer benefits or invest in training gig workers (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009; Virtanen et al., 2003). Third, the temporary hiring of platform workers can meet the need to bring specialized skills into the organization (Broschak et al., 2008), for example, by hiring an industry expert who will formalize a temporary relationship with the company. In this way, organizations can rely on specialized figures capable of bringing new knowledge without the constraint of long-term hiring and based on their real needs. In this sense, gig work directs economic activities toward the short term rather than the long term (Sennet, 2020), responding to the immediate needs of companies.

Therefore, one of the main characteristics most valued in the narratives of platform work supporters is the flexibility guaranteed to both workers and organizations. Techno-optimist approaches view this economic model as something that opens up new ways of working, based primarily on flexibility and autonomy (Quondamatteo & Marrone, 2023), thus allowing for meeting the emerging needs of individuals and organizations.

1.4.2 Uncertainty

While the flexible aspect of temporary work is valued, detached from organizations, and based on the temporary needs of companies, it can be argued that the flip side of the coin is represented by uncertainty. This characteristic of gig work is mainly due to the extreme precariousness caused by the constant increase in self-employment contracts. In this sense, the lack of fixed working conditions set by the organization falls on the worker in terms of uncertainty regarding hours, workload, income, and continuity (Hondros et al., 2023).

As digital platform work is linked to fluctuations in demand from clients, there may be peak moments and periods of inactivity (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2022). As a result, working hours can be unpredictable, intensifying during periods of high demand and extending beyond traditional hours, but also greatly reducing when the worker cannot secure work. This means that even though professionals are apparently fully responsible for managing their activities, they will inevitably be subject to and constrained by external conditions, such as demand trends and competition.

Uncertainty about having a constant and continuous workflow affects not only workers in terms of hours but also their income. Unlike organizational employees, who can rely on a fixed and predictable income, platform workers have to worry about their finances and income stability (Caza et al., 2022). Freelancers live in a highly unpredictable work environment characterized by feast or famine cycles and the resulting concern for income stability (Ashford et al., 2018). This condition of uncertainty leads them to adopt work management strategies to ensure a continuous flow of income that is sufficient for their sustenance. Some platform workers simultaneously manage projects for multiple clients and employers (Weidenstedt et al., 2023), while others are inclined, during periods of high demand, to take on extra work (Evans et al., 2004) to save money for periods of inactivity. This shows how workloads for gig professionals constantly fluctuate and can interfere with their private lives, preventing them from creating the right conditions for an adequate work–life balance (Wood et al., 2013). In this sense, there seems to be an objective risk of stress for gig workers due to a lack of income predictability (Doucette and Brandford, 2019) and uncertainty related to workload and hours (Gandhi et al., 2018).

Moreover, the uncertainty perceived by platform workers is linked to the strong competition created by this work model. The rise of digital platforms has allowed internet users to connect from anywhere in the world, accessing a global workforce. This creates a high level of competition, constituting a market in which most individuals are easily replaceable (Wood et al., 2018). As a result, those entering the platform economy experience insecure and precarious working conditions (Tan et al., 2021), accepting to work with the uncertainty of being replaced at any moment. The spread of flexible

and unstable jobs can be a profound trauma for people, as they are subject to fear of job loss (Sennet, 1998).

For this reason, the challenge of sustainability created by conditions of financial instability and job precariousness (Ashford et al., 2018) is mainly accepted by certain categories of workers. Gig work can be an attractive context for young people as a market in which to take their first steps due to its flexibility and lack of constraints. However, young platform workers tend to reject this form of work as a career path and prefer the traditional model due to perceived uncertainty (Galfalvi et al., 2020). The same can be said for more experienced professionals: platform work is often used by traditional workers as an extra activity or an opportunity for more earnings, but it is not considered a primary job because it is not secure (Ashford et al., 2018; Keith et al., 2019). In this way, although flexibility is attractive, uncertainty discourages workers who seek stability and continuity from entering the gig economy. Thus, temporary work often attracts underemployed or unemployed individuals who find platform work the only solution. This is particularly true for migrants, as in most cases, they have limited options for finding work (Broughton et al., 2018; Newlands, 2022). Those entering a new country often find gig work their only paid employment. Nevertheless, similar to young gig workers, this category of migrant gig workers also portrays the transitory nature of platform work and their desire to find more secure and protected employment (Newlands, 2022).

As previously mentioned, women may find the flexibility guaranteed by the gig model particularly attractive in balancing their careers with caregiving work often entrusted to them. However, the career narratives of women with temporary work tend to be characterized by strong insecurity, resulting in high stress levels (Yerby, 2020). Thus, even in this category, perceived insecurity becomes an obstacle to choosing the gig work model.

Conversely, various studies (Henfridsson & Yoo, 2014; Bellesia et al., 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2019) have shown that for some people, uncertainty can serve as a driver for entrepreneurship. In other words, shifting the power to manage work activities from the organization to the worker seems to foster greater agency and an entrepreneurial orientation. In this sense, uncertainty becomes a push for developing greater autonomy and proactivity in one's career path.

Beyond the advantages and disadvantages of uncertainty, it is undoubtedly a central feature of platform work that characterizes these professionals' work experience.

1.4.3 Temporary, Uncertain, Plural, and Individual Careers

Hall (2002, p. 12) defines a career as “the individually perceived sequence of work-related experiences and activities throughout a person’s life.” In the traditional work model, the individual perception of one’s professional experience is strongly anchored in the organization in which one is embedded (Zwettler et al., 2023). This is because, in the vast majority of cases, individuals remain with the same company or a few others for their entire lives, changing jobs very rarely. The economic security that characterized the labor market in the West for about half a century has led to the development of stable employment relationships and linear, predictable careers (Bellesia et al., 2019). The concept of a career implies order and constant progress prescribed by the organization itself (Cohen & Duberley, 2021). In this sense, individuals refer to their company, which presents them with a clear career path and guidance on possible future roles (Tolbert, 1996).

Over the past 20 years, profound economic and social changes, largely due to the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), have significantly transformed traditional careers (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). The professional horizons of workers have become increasingly complex and unpredictable, and traditional linearity has disappeared (Arthur, 2008). New career models have started to emerge, such as boundaryless and protean careers (Hall, 2002; Arthur, 2008; Gubler et al., 2014). In the first case, a boundaryless career refers to a professional path consisting of a sequence of job opportunities that goes beyond the boundaries of a single work context (Arthur, 2008). Conversely, a protean career is a career model in which individuals can adapt, self-direct, and shape their professional path according to the surrounding environment, following their own work and personal values to achieve success and personal psychological satisfaction (Hall, 2004). In both cases, unlike in traditional careers, the focus shifts from the organization to the individual. Workers can make proactive choices free from corporate constraints and planning. They are responsible for shaping their career path, guided by their values and personal needs (Zwettler et al., 2023).

As with protean and boundaryless careers, the focus of the gig model also seems to be on individual workers, who are highly responsible for planning their careers (Ashford et al., 2018; Spreitzer et al., 2017). However, if a career is assumed to be a concept that connects individuals to their social contexts (Cohen & Duberley, 2021), it would seem that the literature on these types of careers overly emphasizes the role of individual action (Zwettler et al., 2023) and neglects the context in which workers are embedded (Akkermans et al., 2018). Indeed, while worker proactivity is central to platform work, it is the contextual factors of the new work model that lead professionals to develop self-centered behaviors. Therefore, the peculiarities of the gig model favor a shift of focus onto

individuals in the professional path. For example, the platform environment offers the possibility of performing work activities on different platforms in the same professional field, allowing professionals to develop varied and diversified skills. The wide range of work experiences has a significant effect on the professional path, helping workers accelerate their careers.

Furthermore, the ability to diversify work activities on different platforms leads to the creation of more complex career paths that include frequent changes in organizations, positions, and occupations (Kaine & Josserand, 2019). Thus, performing multiple jobs in sequence or simultaneously allows platform professionals to create multiple careers (Ashford et al., 2018). Adopting fluid careers that involve frequent changes (Spreitzer et al., 2017) is essential in an increasingly turbulent market. Professionals intending to work in the platform market must be able to adapt to new contexts, organizations, teams, and clients (Campion et al., 2020). Therefore, adaptability is configured as a meta-competence useful for success within the platform economy and is necessary to manage the uncertainty that markedly characterizes gig career paths (De Stefano, 2015; Graham et al., 2017; Petriglieri et al., 2018). Gig workers cannot predict their career paths with certainty because they are not fixed and linear, as in traditional work. Whereas individuals in organizations can envision different career stages (Ibarra, 1999) and have a clear perspective on future roles and duties, platform workers have unpredictable careers and find it difficult to make even short-term predictions about where the work might lead them (Caza et al., 2022). Thus, flexible capitalism has created new times and rhythms in career paths, with the difficulty of projecting far into the future and limiting the possibility of prediction to the short and medium term (Snyder, 2016).

In addition, as previously mentioned, most workers consider professional experience in the platform economy temporary, with the expectation of finding future employment in the traditional model. Platform work often represents a temporary condition that lacks career value (Newlands, 2022). Therefore, for some, the skills developed during the platform work experience are an end in themselves and are not part of the career plan imagined by workers.

As indicated in the title of this subsection, the career paths of gig workers seem to differ markedly from those of employees in traditional organizations, as they are temporary, uncertain, plural, and focused on the individual.

1.4.4 Autonomy

The shift in responsibility from the organization to the professional highlights another central characteristic of the gig economy: autonomy. In the traditional model, employees may experience low levels of decision-making freedom (Karasek, 1979), as organizations determine which tasks to perform, how, and within what time frames. By contrast, gig workers, being autonomous and loosely

affiliated with organizations, are free from rigid working conditions and perform their activities without a boss and without a manual (Ashford et al., 2007; Ashford et al., 2018). In this sense, the platform economy is characterized by hyper-individualism (Fleming, 2017), in which individuals have full choice and responsibility for their work. This grants professionals a high level of autonomy and independence (Kunda et al., 2002; Petriglieri et al., 2018), with great discretion over the tasks to be performed, including how and when to execute them (Caza et al., 2018; Ashford et al., 2018). They can select the activities they want to carry out, choose the platforms they want to rely on and the clients they want to work for, and set their own hours. Gig workers organize their workday with complete freedom without being ideologically or normatively subjected to the directives of an employer (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2022). As summarized by Uber's slogan, "Be your own boss."² In a platform economy, one can be one's own boss.

From this perspective, workers can be considered akin to entrepreneurs who choose how to organize their work, develop the skills to perform tasks, and acquire the "means of production" necessary to complete the tasks undertaken (Altenried, 2021). For example, in the case of food delivery workers, they must equip themselves with a smartphone and their personal vehicle, as well as skills, such as knowledge of the streets in the city where they make deliveries (Lehdonvirta et al., 2019). Other workers, mostly belonging to the category of qualified professions, must purchase software and programs useful for carrying out their activities, bearing the costs of these tools. These expenses are considered fair compensation for autonomy in the digital work environment (Yasih, 2023).

Moreover, as self-employed professionals, platform workers are often encouraged to become their own brand (Vallas & Christin, 2018), engaging in personal branding behaviors that help them advertise themselves and obtain work. Self-promotion activities through the channels offered by the web are an integral part of gig work, as many platform professionals sell their products or services directly to clients.

As entrepreneurs, these workers are exposed to risks that they are called upon to assume, unlike traditional forms of work that offer a safety net made up of training assistance and health and social protection (Chen, 2018). In this context, the autonomy offered by the platform model demands that workers assume the risk that usually falls on the employer in a traditional economy (Bajwa et al., 2018; Fox et al., 2018).

However, it is important to note that the autonomy of gig workers is not the same for all professionals, as some individuals have more limited independence due to the control implemented by the platforms. These organizations often use algorithms designed to assign tasks to be performed or services to be

² <https://www.uber.com/sk/en/drive/>

provided (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2022) and, subsequently, to monitor their performance (Ashford et al., 2018; Lehdonvirta, 2018). Thus, there is a loss of autonomy that, for the most critical scholars of this economic model, remains superficial. In his book “Will the gig economy prevail?” Colin Crouch states, “The lie at the heart of the gig economy is that platform companies tell their workers that they are independent entrepreneurs when in fact they are heavily monitored and subordinate cogs in a big machine for generating profits” (Crouch, 2019, p. 165). This critical perspective of platform work tends to highlight the low levels of autonomy, bargaining power, and agency of individuals and how power actually remains entirely in the hands of the digital platform (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Weidenstedt et al., 2023).

In general, the autonomy promised by platform organizations still seems to remain a very attractive feature for workers who decide to be part of this economic model, even when aware of the critical issues it presents and the worsening of working conditions (Wood et al., 2018).

1.4.5 Control

Control in the workplace can be defined as obtaining desired behaviors by directing, disciplining, and evaluating individuals’ activities (Edwards, 1982). Therefore, this theme is central to the study of the relationship between organizations and workers, shedding light on the dimension of power. Traditionally, the exercise of control is the prerogative of the managerial figure who is responsible for supervising an organization’s employees in carrying out their activities and evaluating them.

With the platform model, managers have been eliminated or replaced by algorithms that have absorbed many of the organizational functions they performed. For example, algorithmic management on platforms handles task assignment to workers, determines timelines, and monitors quality (Della Porta et al., 2022). In this sense, human supervision has given way to fully digital management, significantly transforming the organization of work and the power relations between companies and workers (Kinder et al., 2019).

Power in the gig economy seems to be skewed in favor of platforms, primarily through the assignment of tasks and shifts without considering the life situations of workers who have no say in the matter but are subject to the algorithm’s choices (Weidenstedt et al., 2023). This affects worker engagement and empowerment, depriving them of agency or the ability to influence their professional activities and work organization. However, although a limited phenomenon, some research has highlighted how workers can practice weaker and more individual forms of agency by circumventing algorithmic control mechanisms (Wood et al., 2019; Munoz et al., 2022). An example is represented by riders who change the geolocation of their smartphones to secure more deliveries.

Furthermore, the quality monitoring of work via platforms performed by algorithms (Duggan et al., 2020; Lehdonvirta et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2019) creates power asymmetries. Activities are controlled by automated mechanisms based on data that do not fully consider individual work and focus only on performance. Thus, the task is treated as numerical data that contribute to classifying workers.

Generally, work control is based on qualitative and quantitative mechanisms. The latter allows platforms to monitor workers to increase productivity. For example, some food delivery organizations track the location and monitor the speed of riders to reduce customer waiting times (Anjali Anwar et al., 2021). This implements a system in which the well-being and safety of workers are not considered in favor of the platform's good reputation. Moreover, performance-based work control at the quantitative level ensures that those who work more hours and perform more tasks are rewarded more (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2022) through incentives created by the platform. Here, the flexible hours discussed earlier prove advantageous for workers only in theory. In practice, platforms favor those willing to work the most hours and who are available at any time of the day (Crouch, 2019). This also contributes to the distribution of future tasks; those who have performed more services and declined fewer will be more likely chosen for assignments.

The qualitative data that allow for the control of workers' activities are derived from customer evaluations and feedback (Gandini, 2019) and are algorithmically translated into calculation devices. Therefore, work control is not only internal to the organization but transcends its boundaries, involving clients in the monitoring process. This is consistent with what Watkins and Stark (2018) argued by labeling the platform as a "Möbius organizational form," referring to an image that does not properly have an inside or outside. The platform organization's boundaries become blurred as external actors—the clients—are delegated to evaluate the workers' activities, which will legitimize internal platform decisions, such as awarding bonuses or terminating the work relationship. This control delegation mechanism that authorizes organizations' decisions is vital in the platform model. In theory, platforms cannot subject workers to traditional control measures (Rahman, 2021) without contradicting the principle that they are mere intermediaries. For this reason, customer-based work control, in addition to being an efficient mechanism, is necessary to maintain the platform economy. Thus, the evaluation system and algorithmic control do not simply transform the relationship between organizations and individuals but also restructure the relationships between workers and clients. The latter are given the power to influence professionals' career paths, as reviews are crucial for future job opportunities. For example, professionals are often led to shape their behavior in their relationships with clients, being more compliant to ensure their satisfaction (Yao, 2022). This

highlights how a power dynamic between clients and workers is created in the platform model, which differs from that in the traditional context.

It can be said that workers in the gig economy are subject to dual control involving both platforms and clients, which is a key characteristic of digital labor platforms. In the gig literature, concerns about worker monitoring and surveillance have become important, raising many questions about the power asymmetries that are created. Some authors have defined platforms as places of control and exploitation because they, despite claiming great flexibility and autonomy for workers, deprive the latter of any agency (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Crouch, 2019; Gandini, 2019).

1.4.6 Legal Ambiguity

A dominant theme in the discourse on the gig economy is the difficulty of legally classifying platform work. This issue is primarily due to the fact that organizations claim not to be employers but merely managers of platforms that allow supply and demand to connect. This allows companies to offload business costs onto workers, avoid the constraints of an employment relationship, and avoid recognizing rights such as maternity leave, paid vacation, illness, and injury (Ciccarelli, 2020). As it is not dependent work, there are no obligations on the part of platforms regarding minimum wages, tax liabilities, and social security contributions (Schwab, 2016). Employers are not required to provide pay-related benefits because they are only for employees (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019), thus escaping traditional regulation. As a result, workers, even if effectively subordinate to the authority of companies, do not enjoy any of the protection typical of dependent work (Crouch, 2019) and are excluded from social welfare (Hawley, 2018).

The previously widespread attempt to wrongly classify employees as independent contractors to avoid the burdens of an employment relationship has been greatly amplified in the platform economy (Sholtz, 2017). Here, workers are often treated as replaceable labor (Duggan et al., 2020; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Wood et al., 2019) and categorized as “partners” rather than employees. The use of terminology that emphasizes the autonomous nature of these professionals aims to obscure a work relationship that itself shows all the characteristics of dependent work (Josserand & Kaine, 2019). Many platforms leverage the concept of entrepreneurship, creating advertisements and slogans that present the possibility of “being your own boss” as an advantage for workers. In reality, classifying platform workers as self-employed relieves companies of any responsibility toward them, not only financially but also in terms of investment. Platforms rarely feel compelled to offer training opportunities to workers and avoid creating skill development pathways (Crouch, 2019). The concept of the long term, in which companies invest in individual training to benefit from the skills developed by individuals in the future, is missing in the platform economy. Therefore, workers are considered

entrepreneurs who must be able to construct individual training projects, detach from their relationships with companies, and rely solely on their own efforts.

From a broader perspective, the innovative status of platforms has allowed them to successfully circumvent collective bargaining by creating legal fragmentation (Della Porta et al., 2022). Courts have been reluctant to recognize bargaining rights for platform workers (Schiek & Gideon, 2018), resulting in difficulties in terms of union representation. The ambiguity around the classification of gig economy workers and their frequent classification as independent contractors initially inhibited collective action aimed at legally recognizing the conditions associated with employee status (Wood et al., 2019). However, with the development of the platform economy and the increase in the number of workers in this work model, protests have begun to flourish worldwide. Gig workers have taken to the streets, starting in countries such as the United States, Italy, and the United Kingdom, protesting against platforms due to low pay and lack of workers' rights (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). Unions have taken legal action against the classification of independent contractors, demanding their reclassification as employees. In some countries, this has resulted in obtaining minimum wages and paid vacations, but we are still far from fully recognizing platform workers' rights, who are still crushed by neoliberal policies and forms of digitally mediated labor relations (De Stefano, 2015).

One of the main problems with the representation of platform workers is the difficulty unions face in overcoming traditional categories, which has led them into the trap of representing only standard employees, thus contributing to the marginality of gig workers (Doellgast et al., 2018). However, there seems to be a growing awareness among trade unions of the need to rethink their way of conceiving themselves, starting with the protection of the interests of a category with considerable difficulties such as that of workers in the digital environment.. The legislative ambiguity of platform work and the consequent lack of recognition of workers' rights are becoming increasingly central issues in union, political, and legal debates. The International Labor Organization is promoting the establishment of minimum rights for workers, regardless of their status. Similarly, the need to adapt regulations concerning self-employed workers should be considered in order to align their protection and contributions with those of employees without compromising the system's sustainability or their own protection (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2022).

Thus, there is a move toward a more precise classification of platform workers that could lead to a win-win result, simultaneously achieving the flexibility requested by organizations and the recognition of workers' rights and protections.

1.4.7 Worker Isolation

Workplace relationships, understood as the connections that are formed in the work environment, are an important component of professional experience. The presence of stable and deep relationships with individuals belonging to the same work context can contribute to improving both employee performance in work activities and the well-being of individuals. Thus, interpersonal ties in the workplace bring advantages for organizations and workers, affecting both the professional and personal dimensions.

However, the development of self-employment and independent work has placed professionals outside physical spaces and organizational communities, preventing stable and continuous interaction. Platform work is often characterized by solitude, as the performance of professional activities through digital channels creates spatial fragmentation (Della Porta et al., 2022; Niebler & Animento, 2023). This can be defined as the diffusion of work across space, which means the dispersion of workers who are no longer in the same physical place because of the introduction of digital technologies. This leads to the absence of concrete spaces for socialization (Altenried et al., 2021) where individuals can get to know each other personally and establish professional and personal relationships. Platform workers are unable to build a group of colleagues with whom to interact daily as part of their work routine, which leads them to perceive themselves as perpetual strangers (Kunda et al., 2002). Thus, a real relational challenge is created (Caza et al., 2022) for gig workers who may feel separated and alone in practicing their profession. Nevertheless, some research has highlighted how self-employed workers engage in behaviors aimed at new forms of socialization to cope with feelings of loneliness, such as joining online communities (Cropanzano et al., 2023) and coworking spaces (Spinuzzi, 2012; Garrett et al., 2017).

Moreover, spatial fragmentation contributes to creating difficulties for comparison among platform workers, thus limiting the development of solidarity (Taylor, 2019). The geographical dispersion of professionals creates difficulties in building solid networks among workers worldwide (Graham et al., 2017). This isolation makes it difficult for workers to engage in collective actions, such as organizing local struggles to claim their rights (Caza et al., 2022). Not being in the same territory, or even in the same country, can inhibit participation in demonstrations and protests, transforming physical distance into a lack of activism.

The gig economic model, in which self-employed and independent workers participate, creates conditions for the development of work individualization. Here, individuals are firmly at the forefront, not only preventing the socialization processes typical of traditional work but also leading professionals to compete with one another. Thus, while spatial fragmentation is created, organizational fragmentation also emerges (Della Porta et al., 2022). This means that workers find

themselves having to compete directly with one another in the market, vying to secure work. This competition that workers experience firsthand to obtain the work necessary to support themselves economically places individuals in a state of rivalry that hinders the formation of solidarity bonds.

Finally, physical separation affects the work experience of gig professionals, as they often find themselves unsupported by professional mentors, losing the opportunity to develop practical skills useful for performing their activities (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2011). In traditional organizations, formal and informal mentoring is important because it provides key information about organizational culture and internal norms. In this sense, having colleagues as a reference point in the work process is instrumental in knowledge transfer, skill development, and subjective success (Allen et al., 2008). All this seems unavailable in online work platforms, as individuals do not work with a clear supervisor and long-term colleagues (Rockmann & Pratt, 2015; Spreitzer et al., 2017). Conversely, for some platform workers, working individually and independently can be appreciated as an escape from political conflicts and tense work relationships that can arise within organizations (Ashford et al., 2018).

Regardless of the advantages and disadvantages of individual work, the isolation of platform workers seems to represent a typical characteristic of the gig model that shapes the work experience of individuals.

1.4.8 Belonging to Digital Communities

A characteristic of platform work deeply connected with the theme of isolation in professional activity is the belonging of gig workers to digital communities. The creation of these communities appears to be a kind of reaction from platform workers who, lacking the social connections typical of traditional work, feel the need to find an alternative place for socialization (Ashford et al., 2018). Thus, joining a digital community becomes a strategy employed by professionals to cope with the social isolation promoted by the gig work model (Cropanzano et al., 2023).

These online spaces usually take the form of self-managed networking and find their ideal channel in social media. These virtual spaces, which emerge as community forums and messaging apps (Antcliff et al., 2007; Wood et al., 2019), provide workers with the opportunity to connect and build a community, overcoming loneliness and social disconnection (Mieruch & McFarlane, 2023). Therefore, social media assumes a central role in the platform economy and allows workers to communicate with each other for various purposes. First, digital communities enable the sharing of work-related information, initiate a process of knowledge circulation, and provide informational resources, contacts, and advice that help workers navigate the platform world (Cropanzano et al.,

2023). This is particularly useful for professionals who have recently joined a platform and find themselves needing to acquire new knowledge and skills useful for carrying out their activities in a new digital organization. New platform workers use digital communities to become familiar with the rules of the game, and they seek help from more experienced professionals (Wood et al., 2018). Therefore, a socialization process is activated, supporting new workers not only in terms of emotional support but also professional help. From here, social networking platforms, through the professional support of more experienced workers, can contribute to career development and promote the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. These online communities are considered to compensate for the lack of workplace relationships characteristic of traditional organizations to perform a function typically reserved for professional mentors. It should be noted that this supporting role is generally not created within the platforms themselves because they do not offer workers the opportunity to connect and communicate with each other; therefore, professionals tend to find themselves in digital communities outside the organization (Chen, 2018).

Second, the possibility of contacting other self-employed workers through online communities allows for the exchange of information about platforms and clients and warnings against possible issues, thus increasing worker safety and protection (Wood et al., 2018). In this way, belonging to a digital community means being better protected in a work model that relegates individuals to a condition of professional solitude and exposes them to great risks.

Moreover, it has been found that gig workers use online spaces as channels for organizing collective actions (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Wood et al., 2018). The ability to interface with workers from the same platform or similar platforms provides an opportunity for comparing their working conditions. Digital communities often serve as spaces to express complaints and difficulties in sharing and circulating with other users. This promotes the building of mutual solidarity and the development of a sense of community among individuals (Caza et al., 2018). For this reason, online communities represent spaces that are capable of fostering collective action and play a central role in organizing strikes and protests (Chen, 2018). These channels have allowed workers to challenge the label of “unorganizable” (Quondamatteo & Marrone, 2023), giving rise to demonstrations in favor of platform workers’ rights and contributing to improving their conditions.

The various functions described highlight how digital spaces for platform workers become environments for sharing, socializing, and personal participation that produce tangible effects on the work experience. In this sense, belonging to virtual communities has an effect on the individual level in terms of skill acquisition and career development and on the collective level through the acquisition of new protections and rights.

1.4.9 Fragmentation of Work

The structure of digital platforms facilitates the emergence of a work mode in which a single large project is broken down into many different small tasks, which are then placed on the gig market to be digitally distributed (Duggan et al., 2020). This means that the work is fragmented into small tasks performed by different professionals, which are then reassembled by the platform itself (De Stefano, 2015). The gig worker will not be involved in the entire project development process and will not see the development process in its entirety but will only deal with a small part. This work mode is reminiscent, not only vaguely, of the Tayloristic organization, which involves breaking down the production process into simple operations. In the platform model, as in the scientific organization of work, the risk for workers is losing the overall sense of the work, operating more like a machine than a human being.

Digital platforms commodify the work process precisely through the possibility of fragmenting projects into tasks to be distributed globally (Munoz et al., 2023). This is facilitated by the gig economy's business model, as labor costs are lower than in the traditional model (Kaine & Josserand, 2019). The ability to consider workers as independent contractors, avoiding the burdens associated with subordinate work, reduces costs for platforms, thus creating the essential conditions for the commodification of work.

At the same time, an economy that allows lower payments for task execution results in low earnings, forcing gig workers to engage in multiple jobs (Doucette & Brandford, 2019) to ensure a sufficient income to sustain themselves. On the one hand, this occurs through parallel work on the platform and offline, which may require different professional skills. On the other hand, the so-called “multi-apping” may emerge (Kaine & Josserand, 2019), in which workers find themselves working on multiple different platforms simultaneously. From this perspective, the fragmentation of work is twofold, both for platforms and workers who are not engaged in a single large project to be managed in its entirety but find themselves performing many different small tasks, each with distinct objectives and purposes. In both cases, this implies interfacing with a wide range of clients, organizations, and teams (Campion et al., 2020), requiring workers to have a good deal of versatility and adaptability. The opportunity to interact with different social actors can be considered a learning opportunity because the variety of work allows platform workers to develop new and diverse skills (Ashford et al., 2018). Therefore, exposure to different types of clients and projects allows for the accumulation of rich experience and a broader professional portfolio (Arenas et al., 2018).

However, from the opposite perspective, simultaneously carrying out multiple occupations may force professionals to work intensively at any time of the day, even during weekends or holidays (Arenas

et al., 2018). This can lead workers to experience high levels of stress due to the failure to achieve a balanced work–life balance.

Furthermore, the fragmentation of work, which requires tasks to be disintermediated—meaning that workers directly address the market demand (i.e., the clients)—places the economic risk entirely on professionals (Kalleberg, 2000). This means that having a job composed of many different small tasks requires carefully organizing the workload, ensuring a steady flow of tasks to be performed but not so excessive as to become overwhelmed.

This characteristic of the gig model has specifically affected the work of highly skilled professionals, transforming not only the nature of work but also the relationships with the clients who use their services. While the platform model facilitates access to professionals with specialized skills and provides more job opportunities, it also promotes the proliferation of simpler tasks (Yao, 2022). Clients who require the skills of highly qualified professionals tend to rely more frequently on digital platforms in cases in which the task is not complex, turning to offline workers for more substantial tasks or projects. Therefore, in-person interaction between professionals and clients is considered more appropriate when the work to be performed requires a certain level of complexity. Consequently, experts working online will find themselves responding to simpler job requests, for which a deeper and more continuous relationship, such as that in person, is not perceived as necessary. In general, one may question whether the characteristics of the platform model are truly compatible with the traditional meanings of professionalism, as it seems questionable whether an online interaction can convey the process of diagnosing, evaluating, and performing specialized work.

What has been described highlights how work fragmentation, more commonly known as taskification, represents a significant characteristic of the gig work model, capable of altering traditional work methods from multiple perspectives.

1.5 Conclusion

The first chapter highlights some of the main structural characteristics of the platform economy and the peculiarities of this work model. This is important to understand how entering this market transforms individuals' work experience—those who find themselves facing challenges different from those presented by the traditional work model. Describing the specificities of gig work paves the way for the literature review presented in the second chapter, which highlights what constitutes the scientific debate regarding the professional identity of platform workers. Assuming that the work model influences the construction of professionals' identities, the ways in which self-configuration is shaped in the platform economy are explored. The analysis of the characteristics of the gig work

model, combined with the literature review presented in the second chapter, will serve as the basis for the empirical work presented in this study.

Chapter 2. Professional Identity and Digital Platforms. A Literature Review Program

2.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the current state of the scientific literature on professional identity within the gig work model. The goal is to showcase the main contributions made by the academic debate on the phenomenon, highlighting the various considerations that scholars have developed regarding the relationship between identity and digital platforms. However, before beginning the study presented here, I reflected on which type of literature review would be most appropriate for the purpose of my work and the research topic. To do this, I considered the following types of reviews: narrative review, scoping review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), and systematic review (Tranfield et al., 2003; Durach et al., 2017).

While all these types of reviews aim to identify knowledge gaps, analyze a body of literature, clarify concepts, or investigate the conduct of research, the systematic review seemed the most appropriate. First, it is considered a more rigorous method of literature review than the narrative review. The latter, also known as the traditional review, is based on the author's knowledge and, by definition, takes a certain approach and perspective (Hart, 1998). In contrast, the systematic review has the advantage of reducing the biases of the reviewer and pre-existing assumptions and is thus more systematic, transparent, and replicable (Torgerson et al., 2006). These characteristics are determined by the clarity of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, which are explicitly presented by the author, allowing other researchers to replicate, update, and integrate the analysis with other findings (Cooper, 1998).

Scoping reviews, although similar to systematic reviews in that they follow a structured process, are useful when a field characterized by complex or heterogeneous research has not yet been the subject of a comprehensive review (Mays et al., 2001). Scoping reviews can be conducted when it is not yet clear what other, more specific questions might be posed and addressed subsequently, for example, through a more precise systematic review (Armstrong et al., 2011). Thus, the scoping review seems to be a literature review method that can quickly identify and map available evidence without describing research findings in detail (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Although the platform work model is relatively new and innovative, it has recently attracted considerable attention from researchers. In the literature, numerous works delve into the work experiences of individuals operating within the platform economy, and authors have sought to

understand the ways in which professional identity is formed and developed. Therefore, the scoping review seems more appropriate for a preliminary review phase that has an exploratory purpose. In contrast, the objective of this review is to delve into the details, thoroughly understanding what scholars have found on the topic.

The above considerations led me to choose the systematic review as theorized by Tranfield and colleagues (2003), who adapted this review method, typically applied to medical studies, to the fields of management and organizational studies. However, to have a more recent reference to the systematic review, I also considered the article by Durach and colleagues when conducting the present review (2017). This contribution, although referring to a specific context (supply chain management), has an important strength: it clearly defines the six key steps of the systematic review. Specifically, the authors summarized the different steps that make up the review procedure by cross-referencing elements from key publications on systematic reviews (Campbell Collaboration, 2016; Cochrane Collaboration, 2011; Mulrow, 1987; Tranfield et al., 2003). The key steps outlined in this article can be applied to any field of research. Thus, the source seemed in harmony with the interdisciplinary nature of my doctoral studies, providing me with a review methodology that can be transversal to different fields of study.

2.2 Methodology

Before the actual literature review phase began, a review committee composed of expert researchers in the field was formed. Specifically, in addition to the doctoral student who personally reviewed the scientific literature, the research team included the study supervisor and another professor from the same university. Both professors have years of research experience in the fields of management and organizational studies and have conducted numerous systematic reviews, thus developing substantial expertise with this methodology. Thanks to this committee, the initial phase was an iterative process of defining, clarifying, and refining (Clarke & Oxman, 2001) the review itself. Periodic meetings were held to facilitate discussion and reflection on the thematic area, subject matter, and inclusion and exclusion of studies in the review.

The literature review process was divided into six distinct phases, which are explained in the following sections. The first phase involved defining the purpose of the literature review (1), during which the research questions were established, and the search terms were planned. Next, the characteristics of the primary studies were determined by identifying the most appropriate keywords and defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria (2). The third phase involved retrieving the sample of potentially relevant literature (3), to which the established criteria were subsequently applied (4).

A coding structure was then created to synthesize the study (5). Finally, the results were reported (6) following the guidelines of Tranfield et al. (2003), which involved presenting the research findings in two phases: (6a) a descriptive bibliometric analysis to understand the current flow of research and map existing studies on identity processes in the platform economy and (6b) an in-depth content analysis of the full texts of 26 publications. For the latter, the codes and categories were derived directly from the review to ensure they were not influenced by any predefined theory. Figure 1 graphically represents the phases that constituted the research and selection process of the scientific publications considered in the review.

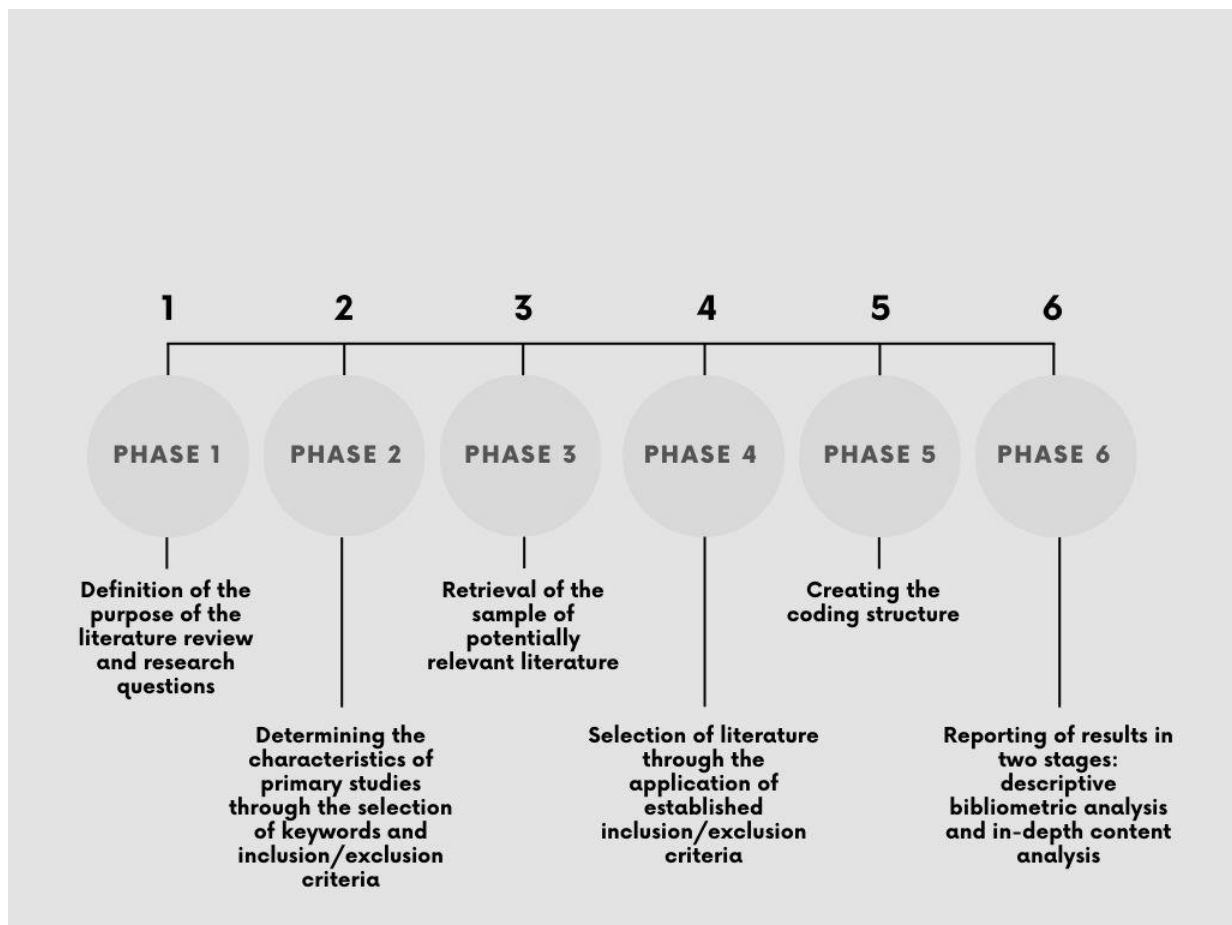


Figure 1: Steps of the systematic literature review.

2.2.1 Purpose of the Review and Definition of Research Questions

During the meetings of the research committee, the need to conduct a review exploring the existing scientific literature on the topic of professional identity within the platform economy was discussed. It was felt that the topic required urgent attention, as theories developed about work experiences in

traditional organizational contexts risk becoming irrelevant today. As shown in the first chapter of this work, the world of work has undergone profound changes, yet research struggles to keep pace with the speed of this epochal transformation. As highlighted by Barley and Kunda (2001), organizational studies often provide us with petrified images of work, anchored in models that only partially reflect current professional realities. As of March 21, 2024, according to the European Council³, over 28 million people in the European Union (EU) work through one or more digital labor platforms. This figure is expected to reach 43 million by 2025. These data shed light on the scale of the phenomenon, emphasizing the increasingly urgent need to study these new professional contexts. The world of platform work is observed and analyzed in numerous disciplines and perspectives, particularly in the economic and sociological fields; however, the psychological experience of workers in these contexts has only recently begun to be examined (Ashford et al., 2018). The structural characteristics of the gig economy, described in the previous chapter, strongly influence individuals' work experiences, altering the nature of work, the relationships between organizations and workers, career paths, methods of work management, the interactions between workers and clients, working hours and spaces, professional practices, and tools. Inevitably, these changes have a significant impact on the perception of one's professional self, affecting how platform workers form and develop their identities. This strong influence underscores the need for a literature review that presents how authors problematize the identity construction processes of gig workers and aims to understand how they adapt their professional configurations to a constantly changing environment. This initial phase, as an additional outcome of the periodic meetings held by the research committee, led to the identification of the questions guiding the literature review:

- How does a platform worker construct their professional identity in the gig economy?
- How do the characteristics of the platform model influence the identity construction processes of gig workers?
- In the absence of traditional organizational anchors, what guides the construction and development of the individual's professional identity in the platform model?

2.2.2 Determination of Keywords and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To gather the academic literature that delves into the study of the identity of professionals who use digital platforms to exercise their profession, a list of keywords was initially defined. First and foremost, the initial term considered for selecting the initial sample of scientific contributions was

³Source: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/policies/platform-work-eu/#:~:text=Nell'UE%20oltre%2028%20milioni,tali%20piattaforme%20di%20lavoro%20digitali>

“identity.” Although this study focuses on the processes of the construction and transformation of identity within work contexts, it was decided not to accompany this term with adjectives such as “work” or “professional,” as doing so could have significantly reduced the sample size.

Subsequently, to investigate what was available in the literature concerning the relationship between identity and the world of platform work, it was necessary to identify terms indicative of this economic model. As highlighted in the first chapter, the phenomenon of gig work appears in the academic literature under various labels, such as digital economy, sharing economy, collaborative economy, peer-to-peer economy, gig economy, on-demand economy, and platform economy (Pais, 2019). The use of varied terminology reflects the different approaches and perspectives through which scholars from different research areas have engaged with the topic. Therefore, a search for scientific contributions was conducted that considered this heterogeneity. Specifically, the following labels were selected: “gig economy,” “gig work,” “platform work,” “platform economy,” “crowdwork,” “on-demand work,” and “online labor markets.”. Terms containing “peer-to-peer,” “sharing,” and “collaborative” were not selected as suitable keywords for this work, as the authors who use them more frequently refer to non-monetary exchanges between economic actors who connect through digital platforms. This work, in contrast, aims to study the processes that shape the identity of gig professionals, focusing on paid work activities.

Based on the above, the following inclusion criteria were identified:

- Articles must present a research study or essay related to the theme of identity construction processes in the gig model.
- Articles must be written in English.
- The terms “identity” and one or more of the terms “gig economy”/“gig work”/“platform work”/“platform economy”/“crowdwork”/“on-demand work”/“online labor markets” must be included in the keywords, abstracts, or titles of the articles.
- Studies must refer to relationships between economic actors who connect through digital platforms based on monetary exchanges.

2.2.3 Retrieval of the Potentially Relevant Literature Sample

The search phase was conducted using the online databases of scientific articles SciVerse Scopus and Web of Science. It was decided to use both databases because the possibility of combining two sources of publications can make the literature review more comprehensive. Additionally, the characteristics of Scopus make it less selective than Web of Science, allowing for a broader search. This enabled the inclusion of articles published not only in scientific journals but also in conference

proceedings, in line with the recommendations of Tranfield et al. (2003). This decision proved valuable, as given the recent nature of the phenomenon under analysis, it was possible to explore more contributions on the topic. On the other hand, Web of Science is more structured and organized than other databases, such as Google Scholar, enabling more orderly navigation and exploration of scientific contributions.

2.2.4 Selection of the Literature

The selection of articles began in September 2023 with a final update in March 2024. The term “identity” was cross-referenced with the previously described terms indicating the gig work model, as the relationship between identity and digital platforms is relevant to the study. This initial selection identified 143 potentially relevant publications on SciVerse Scopus and 107 on Web of Science. The results of the database search are summarized in the following table.

First keyword	Second keyword	Potentially relevant studies on SciVerse Scopus	Potentially relevant studies on Web of Science
Identity	gig economy	58	55
Identity	gig work	25	15
Identity	platform work	14	8
Identity	platform economy	25	16
Identity	crowdwork	7	5
Identity	on demand work	4	4
Identity	online labor markets	10	4

Table 1: Number of publications resulting from the intersection of first and second keyword.

From the total, 69 duplicate contributions were removed, resulting in 181 publications. Additionally, because some of the results from an initial search within the databases belonged to research fields unconnected with the topic of this study (such as Computer Science and Engineering), the investigation was limited to the thematic areas of social sciences, business, management and accounting, and psychology for SciVerse Scopus and to management, applied psychology, sociology, business, economics, political science, interdisciplinary social sciences, multidisciplinary humanities, multidisciplinary sciences, experimental psychology, multidisciplinary psychology, and social

psychology for the Web of Science database. The decision to include a broad range of categories stems from the recent nature of the phenomenon of platform work: considering multiple perspectives that analyze the topic allowed for a broader and more comprehensive exploration. The literature selection phase continued with the reading of titles and abstracts, leading to the identification of contributions focused on the subject matter (n=42).

Finally, an in-depth analysis of the content of the scientific products was conducted through a full reading. During these steps, contributions that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded (n=14). The main reasons for exclusion were as follows:

- The publications did not address relationships between economic actors who encounter each other through digital platforms based on monetary exchanges.
- The publications were not focused on the ways in which gig workers form, shape, or develop their professional identities.

From this final screening phase, 26 main studies were identified, representing the final sample for the literature review.

For greater transparency in the publication selection process, the PRISMA model (Page et al., 2021) was used, as shown in Figure 2. The flowchart graphically illustrates the different phases of the systematic review, showing the number of documents identified, included, and excluded along with the reasons for exclusion.

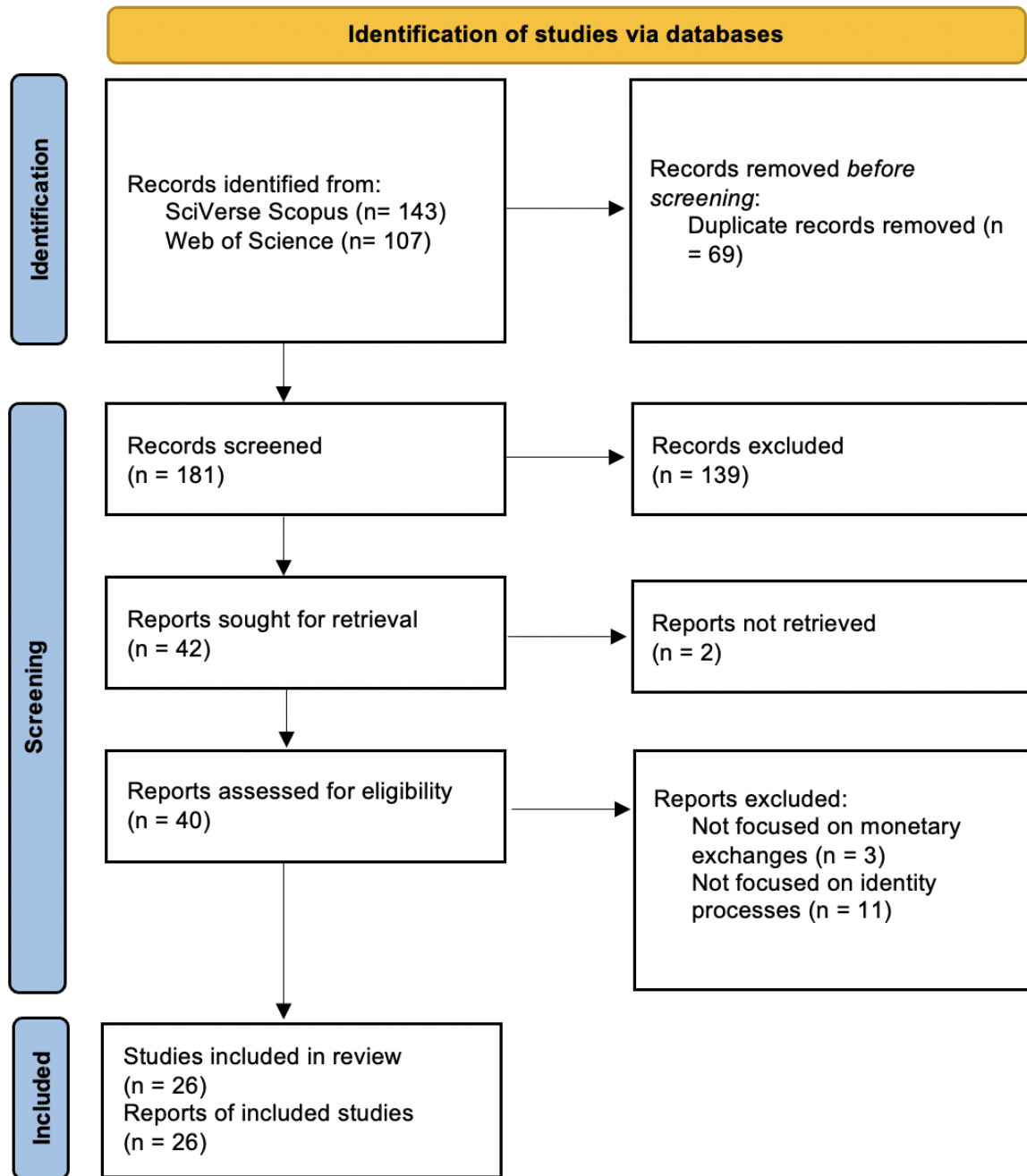


Figure 2: Flow diagram (based on PRISMA statement) summarizing the search procedure.

2.2.5 Creation of the Coding Framework and Data Extraction

As recommended by Tranfield et al. (2003), a predefined coding structure was used to extract relevant study details on various levels: general information (title, author, publication details), study characteristics, and specific information (details and methods). Specifically, the 26 selected studies were coded for title, author(s), year, document type, source (journal), country, population, type of study (empirical/conceptual), type of data (qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods), and data

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collection methods. Figure 3 summarizes the coding of the studies identified through the review process.

N°	TITLE	AUTHOR(S)	YEAR	DOCUMENT TYPE	SOURCE	COUNTRY	STUDY POPULATION	STUDY TYPE	DATA TYPE	DATA SOURCE
1	Actions in physical space: Work solidarity and collective action among app-based cab drivers in India	Shalini Parth; Dharma Raju Bathini; George Kandathil	2023	Conference Paper	New Technology, Work and Employment	India	Ride-share Drivers	Empirical	Qualitative	Observation; Interviews; Netnography
2	Gig worker organizing: toward an adapted Attraction-Selection-Attrition framework	Schmidt, Gordon B.; Philip, Justine; Van Dellen, Stephanie A.; Islam, Sayeedul	2023	Article	Journal of Managerial Psychology	Global	Gig Workers	Conceptual	/	/
3	Kicking off a Gig Work Career: Unfolding a Career Learning Cycle of Gig Workers	Zwettler, Clara; Straub, Caroline; Spurr, Daniel	2023	Article	Journal of Career Assessment	Global	Gig Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
4	Between and between: Triple liminality and liminal agency in the Swedish gig economy	Weldenstedt, Linda; Geissinger, Andrea; Leick, Birgit; Nazeer, Nabeel	2023	Article	Environment and Planning A	Sweden	Food Delivery Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews; Informal Conversations
5	One foot in the online gig economy: Coping with a splitting professional identity	Yao, Yao	2022	Article	Journal of Professions and Organization	Cina	Lawyers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews; Documentary Analysis
6	'This isn't forever for me': Perceived employability and migrant gig work in Norway and Sweden	Newlands, Gemma	2022	Article	Environment and Planning A	Norway; Sweden	Food Delivery Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
7	Different directions or the same route? The varied identities of ride-share drivers	Josserand, Emmanuel; Kaine, Sarah	2019	Article	Journal of Industrial Relations	Australia	Ride-share Drivers	Empirical	Mixed Methods	Survey; Interviews
8	Platforms as entrepreneurial incubators? How online labor markets shape work identity	Bellesia, Francesca; Mattarelli, Elisa; Bertolotti, Fabiola; Sobrero, Maurizio	2019	Article	Journal of Managerial Psychology	Global	Gig Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews; Desk Analysis
9	Beyond personal safe spaces: Creating and maintaining collective environments for meaning and identity on digital platforms	Hondros, Konstantin; Schiemer, Benjamin; Vogelsgang, Lukas	2023	Article	Organization	Global	Gig Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Netnography; Autoethnography; Interviews; Participant Observation
10	Organising fragmented labour: The case of migrant workers at helping in Berlin	Niebler, Valentin; Animento, Stefania	2023	Article	Economic and Labour Relations Review	Germany	Cleaning Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
11	Managing the Transition to Online Freelance Platforms: Self-Directed Socialization	Blaisier, Allie; Dabbish, Laura	2022	Article	Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction	Global	Online Freelancers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
12	Mobilizing against the odds: Solidarity in action in the platform economy	della Porta, Donatella; Chesta, Riccardo Emilio; Cini, Lorenzo	2022	Article	Berliner Journal für Soziologie	Italy	Ride-share Drivers; Food Delivery Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
13	Professionals, purpose-seekers, and passers-through: How microworkers reconcile alienation and platform commitment through identity work	Bucher, Eliane; Fieseler, Christian; Lutz, Christoph; Buhmann, Alexander	2021	Article	New Media and Society	Global	Microworkers	Empirical	Mixed Methods	Survey
14	Crowdworkers, social affirmation and work identity: Rethinking dominant assumptions of crowdwork 1	Idowu, Ayomikun; Elbanna, Amany	2021	Article	Information and Organization	Non-Western Context	Crowd Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews; Participant Observation; Documents Review; Observation of Social Media Chat Rooms; Online Forums
15	Reproducing Global Inequalities in the Online Labour Market: Valuing Capital in the Design Field	Demirel, Pelin; Nemkova, Ekaterina; Taylor, Rebecca	2021	Article	Work, Employment and Society	Global	Online Freelancers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
16	Gig Economy Riders on Social Media in Thailand: Contested Identities and Emergent Civil Society Organisations	Mieruch, Yannik; McFarlane, Daniel	2023	Article	Voluntas	Thailand	Food Delivery Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Digital Ethnography
17	Ties that Knot: How App-workers Co-construct Their Identities at Precarious Work Contexts	Conde, Eliana Pires; Felix, Bruno; Moreira, Nadia Cardoso	2023	Article	Revista de Administração Contemporânea	Brazil	Gig Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
18	Divided we fall: The breakdown of gig worker solidarity in online communities	Schou, Peter Kalum; Bucher, Eliane	2023	Article	New Technology, Work and Employment	Global	Gig Workers	Empirical	Mixed Methods	Social Network Comments Analysis
19	Normalizing and Resisting the New Precarity: A Case Study of the Indonesian Gig Economy	Yasih, Diatya Widiya Permata	2023	Article	Critical Sociology	Indonesia	Gig Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
20	Struggle for recognition, a lever to establish Industrial Relations from below. Reinterpreting couriers' mobilisations in food delivery sector in Italy	Quondamatteo, Nicola; Marrone, Marco	2023	Article	Partecipazione e Conflitto	Italy	Food Delivery Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Participant Observation
21	Platform-mediated Markets, Online Freelance Workers and Deconstructed Identities	Munoz, Isabel; Dunn, Michael; Sawyer, Steve; Michaels, Emily	2022	Article	Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction	Global	Online Freelancers	Empirical	Mixed Methods	Interviews; Desk Analysis; Survey
22	Identities and Precariousness in the Collaborative Economy: Neither Wage-Earner, nor Self-Employed: Emergence and Consolidation of the Homo Rider, a Case Study	López-Martínez, Gabriel; Haz-Gómez, Francisco Eduardo; Manzanera-Román, Salvador	2022	Article	Societies	Spagna	Ride-share Drivers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
23	My network, my self: A social network approach to work-based identity	Moser, Jordana R.; Ashforth, Blake E.	2021	Article	Research in Organizational Behavior	Global	Gig Workers	Conceptual	/	/
24	Agony and Ecstasy in the Gig Economy: Cultivating Holding Environments for Precarious and Personalized Work Identities	Petriglieri, Gianpiero; Ashford, Susan J.; Wrzesniewski, Amy	2019	Article	Administrative Science Quarterly	United States Of America	Independent Workers	Empirical	Qualitative	Interviews
25	Workers of the Internet unite? Online freelancer organisation among remote gig economy workers in six Asian and African countries	Wood, Alex J.; Lehdonvirta, Vili; Graham, Mark	2018	Article	New Technology, Work and Employment	Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa	Online Freelancers	Empirical	Mixed Methods	Survey; Interviews
26	From surviving to thriving in the gig economy: A research agenda for individuals in the new world of work	Ashford, Susan J.; Caza, Brianna Barker; Reid, Erin M.	2018	Article	Research in Organizational Behavior	Global	Gig Workers	Conceptual	/	/

Figure 3: Coding of selected studies.

2.2.6 Report on Results

The examination procedure included (2.1) a descriptive bibliometric analysis of the 26 contributions that address the relationship between identity and platform work, aiming to shed light the current direction of research and map previous studies on identity construction in the gig context; and (2.2) a detailed content analysis of the full texts of the 26 publications. The codes and categories used for the content analysis were derived directly from the textual data and were not influenced by a predefined theory or relevant research findings, in accordance with the systematic review methodology.

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Descriptive and Bibliometric Analysis

As highlighted in Figure 3, the topic of the identity construction and development processes of platform workers has only recently been explored in the scientific literature. Indeed, the oldest contribution selected in this review dates to 2018, while most of the articles on the topic (11 out of 26) were published in 2023. This pattern indicates a growing interest among researchers in the ways gig workers shape their own identities. In the early years of the development of the platform work model, scientific research analyzing the platform economy phenomenon was primarily based on sociological and economic approaches. More recently, the psychological scope of this phenomenon has been recognized.

The table above also provides an overview of the countries where the studies were conducted. Although the geographical location of the study is sometimes closely related to where the researcher resides or works, this indicator can be useful in understanding the spread of the phenomenon. Initially, publications mainly focused on platform work in the Western context, from the United States to Europe. However, more recently, authors have broadened their scope, analyzing the gig phenomenon in non-Western areas such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and India. Doing so has allowed researchers to highlight the possible influences that geographic, social, and economic contexts may have on the identity processes of gig workers.

Another result of the descriptive analysis concerns the populations considered in the studies. This is a central data point in examining platform work because, as explained in the first chapter of this study, the phenomenon under investigation is very broad, encompassing many different work activities and professions. In general, the considered publications investigate the following populations: gig workers, crowd workers, food delivery workers, independent workers, lawyers, microworkers, cleaning workers, online freelancers, and ride-share drivers. Some authors explore the psychological experience of workers using labels that refer to the general category without discriminating between specific activities (e.g., gig workers, crowd workers). In the selected studies, this occurs whenever the study is conceptual rather than empirical. At other times, researchers use labels such as “independent workers” or “online freelancers” to indicate autonomous professionals, often with medium or high levels of skills. However, partly due to the attention paid to these categories in the media, much of the literature has focused on studying the work experience of low-skilled professions, such as riders and drivers. Very few studies (n=1 in this review on lawyers) delve into the identity construction and development processes of licensed professionals, such as doctors, nurses,

psychologists, lawyers and engineers. This points to a significant gap in the scientific literature and represents a research perspective that this study aims, at least partially, to fill.

2.3.2 In-Depth Content Analysis

This section is dedicated to the content analysis of the 26 contributions selected from the review process outlined above. The aim of the analysis of these studies was to identify the processes of construction and development of the professional identity of gig workers, as identified by the authors. A conventional content analysis (Weber, 1990) was conducted in which the coding categories were derived directly from the textual data without being influenced by a predefined theory. This task enabled the identification and mapping of the actors and dimensions that influence and guide the identity work activated by individuals operating in the gig economy. Additionally, it was possible to trace the identity frameworks constructed and developed by platform workers that are dominant in the scientific literature.

2.3.2.1 The Construction of Professional Identity: From the Traditional Context to the Gig Economy.

When approaching the study of identity construction and development processes within the platform economy, most of the contributions considered in this literature review begin by highlighting the most significant changes from the traditional work context. Bellesia and colleagues (2019) argue that existing management theories to explain worker behavior in professional contexts are no longer applicable to the new work model, as individuals now operate across multiple organizations. In recent years, work has become increasingly precarious, and people have begun to change occupations and affiliations frequently, embracing fluid careers (Spreitzer et al., 2017). In the past, stable employment relationships and linear careers allowed organizations to provide their employees with values, tools, and resources to support the development of a coherent sense of self, but this is no longer the case. Consequently, Conde et al. (2023) assert that individuals entering the platform-mediated workforce become organizational orphans. Platform-based work lacks an environment for organizational participation, that is, a sense of belonging to an organization capable of providing stability and psychological security to workers (Blaising & Dabbish, 2022). In this constantly changing scenario, it is challenging for individuals to develop a relatively stable work-based identity, especially those who choose to work outside conventional workplaces, opting for self-employment and freelance careers (Moser et al., 2021). As a result, the traditional anchors for constructing professional

identity—such as the organization, workgroup, and relatively stable employment—seem to disappear with the gig economy.

In the world of platform work, the frameworks for guiding identity work are unclear and, in some cases, nonexistent. For this reason, workers must constantly struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self, as they are deprived of the resources provided by the organizational context (Josserand & Kaine, 2019). The transitory nature of digital environments creates conditions where platform workers lack a stable collective environment in which to collectively create identity and meaning through interaction (Hondros et al., 2023). Thus, identity construction in the platform model, where certain working conditions and organizations are absent as sources of identity, becomes critical (Bellesia et al., 2019). The absence of traditional anchors provided by organizations is felt from the first steps an individual takes into this new work model. Entering a new job is characterized by particular uncertainty, as individuals face new tasks, roles, and expectations. In traditional organizations, formal and informal mentoring and socialization can mitigate uncertainty by providing individuals with information, feedback, resources, and social support. However, these processes are not available during the transition to digital platforms, hindering work success, knowledge transfer, and career development (Blaising & Dabbish, 2022).

Social support in the gig work model is absent not only during the entry phase into the platform but throughout the entire professional journey, making the construction of a stable work identity critical. Research on professional identity development has highlighted the strong link between the latter and organizations: the most enduring identity definitions seem to depend on the existence of structured and intense ties with an organization. Conversely, self-employed workers can no longer rely on connections formed within the organization, such as with colleagues, superiors, or mentors, but must find other sources of self-definition at work (Conde et al., 2023). For this reason, building a relatively stable workplace identity anchored in traditional groups and relationships is becoming increasingly unsustainable (Moser et al., 2021). In this sense, the lack of stable professional relationships and long-term organizational memberships contributes to the development of a precarious worker identity (Schmidt et al., 2023).

In general, the existing literature on working conditions within digital platforms has highlighted the widespread concern that professional identities are being eroded, resulting in isolation, uncertainty, and a general loss of meaning being derived from online work. The authors point out that platforms do not create cognitive, behavioural, emotional and social boundaries because there are no stable, clear and accessible relationships, affiliations, roles or job characteristics (Hondros et al., 2023). Indeed, the absence of a clear definition of work roles, a structured environment for worker interactions and stable connections leads to increased anxiety and feelings of isolation and insecurity,

hindering identity construction (Conde et al., 2023). Independent workers operate in weak and uncertain situations where roles and expectations regarding appropriate behaviors and available careers become unclear. The more organizations that traditionally provided strong identity anchors become unstable, the more challenging identity creation and development become, requiring workers to put in the effort to create and revise their own sense of self through true identity work (Petriglieri et al., 2019).

2.3.2.2 Actors⁴ and Dimensions Guiding Professional Identity in the Platform Work Model.

The scientific contributions examined explore the professional experience of platform workers, observing the identity work they must perform. Identity work is defined as “the range of activities in which individuals engage to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent and supportive of their self-concept” (Snow & Anderson, 1987). This involves the internalization of a given identity as a (partial) definition of the self. Through their research, the authors seek to understand how gig workers engage in this self-work during their professional experience on platforms, highlighting its differences from traditional contexts. Specifically, the studies collected here underline how organizations are increasingly ceasing to be sources from which individuals can draw meanings that are useful for identity construction and that people must identify alternative sources for developing their professional selves. The inability to find useful anchors for defining one's professional self within traditional organisations forces individuals to look elsewhere for resources for identity construction.

Although the contributions are rather heterogeneous, which is consistent with the extreme variety of platform work, alternative identity sources to traditional organizations can be identified. Workers draw from multiple sources meanings that are useful for defining identity frameworks that allow them to continue their professional experience within the new work model, giving rise to new and alternative processes of professional identity construction and development.

Table 2 summarizes the mapping of the different dimensions and actors identified (platform, virtual communities, local groups, clients, social context, personal networks, legal classification) that are involved in the identity construction process of platform workers.

⁴ Drawing on actor–network theory (ANT), developed primarily by Latour, objects are not merely passive tools but can exercise a form of agency. Therefore, in this chapter, the term “actors” refers to both human beings and material objects.

Identity Sources / Papers	PLATFORM	VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES	LOCAL GROUPS	PERSONAL NETWORKS	CUSTOMERS	SOCIAL CONTEXT	LEGAL CLASSIFICATION
Parth et al. (2023)	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Schmidt et al. (2023)		✓					
Zwettler et al. (2023)							
Weidenstedt et al. (2023)							
Yao (2022)					✓		
Newlands (2022)						✓	
Josserand & Kaine (2019)							✓
Bellesia et al. (2019)	✓						
Hondros et al. (2023)	✓						
Niebler & Animiento (2023)		✓				✓	✓
Blaising & Dabbish (2022)		✓		✓			
Della Porta et al. (2022)			✓				
Bucher et al. (2021)							
Idowu & Elbanna (2021)						✓	

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Demirel et al. (2021)						✓	
Mieruch & McFarlane (2023)	✓	✓					
Conde et al. (2023)		✓					
Schou & Bucher (2023)							
Yasih (2023)		✓	✓			✓	
Quondamanteo & Marrone (2023)			✓				✓
Munoz et al. (2022)	✓				✓		
Lopez-Martinez et al. (2022)	✓						
Moser et al. (2021)				✓			
Petriglieri et al. (2019)				✓			
Wood et al. (2018)		✓					
Ashford et al. (2018)			✓				

Table 2: Mapping of actors and dimensions involved in the identity building process for the platform worker.

2.3.2.2.1 Platform

As supported by Ashford et al. (2018), while employees in traditional organizations usually have a shared understanding of the characteristics of a successful employee, this is not the case for platform workers, as the references are less clear. However, the scientific literature on identity and the gig context highlights how these types of digital organizations play a central role in workers' identity-building processes. In this sense, platforms become important actors in the identity work initiated by individuals, guiding self-construction in relation to work. Specifically, platforms can have an active function or a largely passive role. In the first case, the prototypical image of the platform worker is made available by companies, especially when they need to leverage characteristics of autonomy and flexibility. This is because, in some cases, platforms need to emphasize the collaborative nature of the relationship between themselves and workers, avoiding the responsibilities that come with a subordinate employment relationship. Platforms that build and convey identity frameworks that refer to the prototypical idea of the self-employed worker are commonly food delivery and transportation companies.

Conversely, platforms that attract more qualified workers do not need to emphasize the autonomous nature of these professionals as a predominant feature of this type of profession. Therefore, in this case, platforms do not propose an ideal platform worker image; instead, the professionals themselves must build and develop it.

Through two cycles of longitudinal studies on online freelance workers, Munoz et al. (2022) highlight how the presentation of a gig worker's identity is constrained by platform features, usage policies, and algorithms. According to the authors, platforms have substantial power over workers' online identities because they can set and monitor how the workers present themselves in the market through their profiles. In this sense, from the moment they join the organisation, professionals relinquish control over the presentation of their identity in favour of the platform. Through their usage policies, features, and underlying algorithms, these digital organizations influence workers' digital identity-building processes. More precisely, platforms influence the self-presentation model by providing a structure for the presentation and management of identities, using, for example, algorithmic mechanisms. As a result, the online identity presentation is largely standardized, as it is designed by the platforms themselves.

Identity surveillance mechanisms also act as restrictions on how workers present themselves on the platform. These include, for example, the monitoring of chats and communications and identity verification requests. Additionally, work platforms control identity presentation through ranking and status logics conferred by platform-issued badges. The possibility of achieving a higher status is enticing for workers because it is associated with benefits such as lower platform fees. In terms of identity, badges are associated with desirable characteristics and identity frameworks, such as being

perceived as competent and established professionals. This drives platform workers to focus on elements that lead to the possibility of gaining higher status in defining and building their online identity. The combination of these features leads professionals to express their identity by focusing on specific marketable skills on platforms rather than on offline training and education processes. For example, many platforms allow customers to search for the most suitable professional by looking for keywords; consequently, professionals present themselves by deconstructing their professionalism into many distinct skills or specific skill packages. In this way, workers sometimes tend to downplay other aspects of their professional identity that are considered less useful to their online presentation. Munoz et al.'s (2022) study shows how workers lose control over presenting their identity on the platform due to a digital architecture that emphasizes a commodified identity; that is, they can only express their identity through criteria predetermined by the platform. In this sense, workers are seen as a set of skills and resources, which fragments and deconstructs their professional identity. It is evident that the platform, through its features and technological structure, becomes a central actor in the process of building the professional identity of the gig worker.

In Bellesia and colleagues' (2019) study of freelancers, the authors argue that work identity is reinforced in response to a constraining online environment as a result of the strategic use of technology platform features. This leads individuals to construct a new work identity characterised by an entrepreneurial orientation. In this sense, the article highlights the centrality of the platform's technological characteristics, which trigger an experiential process of identity construction. Specifically, the authors construct a basic model that starts from the motivations that led workers to join online job markets. Thereafter, the paper highlights how, to satisfy their personal and professional needs, individuals had to learn to use the platform's features to overcome difficulties encountered in the work context. Every constraint of the platform environment is overcome through the strategic use of technological features, leading workers to work on their skills and individual work identities. In this way, after learning to navigate the platform, many professionals develop an entrepreneurial orientation, expressing the desire to found a startup or local team or create a business. Thus, an entrepreneurial orientation characterized by competitive aggressiveness, autonomy, and proactivity develops.

Parth et al. (2023) also show how a platform's digital infrastructure can influence identity-building processes. Specifically, the authors conducted a study using netnography, semi-structured interviews, and direct observation to explore how taxi drivers who perform their work through platforms develop solidarity and collective resistance. The research shows how worker mobilization is created from the sense of injustice generated by the platform management's indifference to complaints about often

arbitrary and opaque algorithmic management. First, workers meet and talk with each other within virtual communities or physical aggregation spaces, sharing a common sense of being overwhelmed by the platform. This leads to an awareness of a common condition, which creates fertile ground for developing a collective identity. The latter is further strengthened by and, at the same time, contributes to forming mobilizations and struggles to gain workers' rights. In this sense, the platform algorithm and management rules become levers for building a shared, social, and collective identity of platform workers. Here, the platform, understood as a context in which resources useful for identity construction are created, is deeply connected with the virtual and physical communities that allow workers to meet. The articulation and complexity of self-formation in the gig economy work model also emerge in this research.

However, the platform is not only configured as an identity source in terms of digital infrastructure through technological constraints and features. Through the ethnographic study of two platforms, one for music creation and the other for crowdwork, Hondros et al. (2023) emphasize that digital platforms are not only places of transaction and exchange but also become shared and stable public spaces through which participants transmit and perceive identities through interaction. Thanks to empirical research, the authors highlight that the main motivations for participating in the platform are not limited to the work activity in a strict sense but also stem from the desire to be part of a group of people. This finding indicates that platforms are configured as places where a sense of belonging and a digital identity develop, bringing with them political action potential, for example, in the form of community building. Different ways of being on the platform are profiled, from using it only for work purposes to feeling part of a group. The authors stress that the identity-laden interaction does not arise simply through the encounter of individuals but is made possible by work activities that are configured as concrete and lasting, contributing to platform workers' perceptions of stability. Therefore, the workers can benefit from the experience of plurality by establishing a social identity, activating forms of help, attention, and mutual exchange that offer them a kind of identity recognition. From this perspective, the platform becomes a context that allows the construction of workers' professional identity and takes the form of a collective environment that supports identity responses. While the studies described so far (Hondros et al., 2023; Munoz et al., 2022; Parth et al., 2023) show that platforms play a somewhat implicit role in serving as sources of identity meanings for workers, other research highlights that they have a more active function. For example, Lopez-Martinez et al. (2022), analyzing the home delivery services of two different companies in the Murcia region in Spain, identify and describe the identity of the "homo rider" constructed from narratives conveyed by the platform. According to the authors, this identity framework results from a work identity construction process in which the platform plays a central role. First, they speak of a dual narrative

game carried out by companies through which on the one hand, riders are recognized as collaborators and self-employed professionals while on the other, the companies seek to instill a corporate culture in individuals in line with a subordinate worker conception. As highlighted in the first chapter of this study, flexibility is a central feature of platform work: this allows companies to propose a vision in which the worker is presented as a collaborator, emphasizing their autonomous nature. At the same time, the authors speak of a kind of acculturation process carried out by the companies aimed at the prototypical worker narrated and described by the platform itself. In this sense, an organizational culture created from a deliberate design by top management aims to establish a set of artifacts, values, and basic assumptions shared by individuals. Some devices, such as the backpacks and jackets worn by riders when at work, can contribute to creating the prototypical worker identity developed by the platform. These artifacts can promote the development of a shared identity, acting as symbols through which to recognize oneself. By leveraging the construction of a shared identity and creating the image of the prototypical worker, platforms act as if the worker is not a self-employed collaborator, adopting strategies typical of a subordinate employment relationship. In this sense, the dual narrative game developed by platforms moves between framing the worker as sometimes subordinate and sometimes autonomous, exploiting both perspectives to the platform's advantage.

However, the article highlights that workers attribute a subjective meaning to the narratives expressed by platforms. Each individual draws from the meanings made available by the platform and then reworks them based on their personal and work histories. In this sense, the dual narrative developed by platforms serves as a reservoir in which to find resources useful for constructing one's professional identity that are then individually reworked. The authors thus highlight how the interviewed subjects constructed discourses indicating the emergence of a new profile in the platform work field. A figure situated between the self-employed worker and the employee, a product of the transformation of work linked to the development of new technologies, implies assimilation and a self-perception process in the context of employment relationships. The authors therefore identify the "homo rider" as a hybrid of employee and self-employed worker, moving between the precepts of freedom and flexibility that are perceived as typical of the self-employed worker but subject to the tensions and logics common in subordinate employment relationships.

This research therefore highlights the centrality of platforms in providing stimuli and resources useful for constructing the worker's identity. However, in doing so, the authors highlight the complexity of self-development processes, underscoring the active role of workers in reworking the identity frameworks provided by companies.

In line with a perspective that emphasizes the active role of platforms, Mieruch and McFarlane's (2023) study of the online interactions of riders in the Thai context highlights how platforms propagate an identity narrative aimed at aligning workers with the organization's objectives so that normative control is configured as identity regulation. In this sense, riders are described as hard-working and service-minded heroes to persuade workers to give their best in performing their duties. A strategy for constructing this identity narrative can be represented by advertising campaigns that emphasize the delivery service, highlighting the worker's effort and describing it as a heroic action in the service of citizens. In general, advertising campaigns support the formation of an identity based on a work ethic and a service mentality. At the same time, some platforms have resorted to Marvel superhero imagery, describing couriers as workers who challenge difficulties to provide quality service and earn a living at the same time. In this sense, workers who find themselves lacking the stable and constant identity frameworks traditionally provided by organizations can draw on appealing identity narratives propagated by platforms that induce workers to perform ideal behaviors by regulating their identity. Indeed, the research results reveal that the hero narrative and associated characteristics are frequently embraced by riders. By analyzing interactions within online groups, the authors found that riders often actively portray themselves as hardworking individuals striving to provide for their families. By embracing the hero identity framework provided by platforms, workers internalize the values and norms of behavior that the platforms deem desirable. This can undermine the development of the forms of mobilization activated by social networks, as complaints and criticisms of the platform by some workers are attacked by others. In such circumstances, workers often refrain from complaining about working conditions to avoid criticism from colleagues within online groups, hindering the support processes that some research has shown to be the starting point for collective action. At the same time, within online groups, the rhetoric promoted by platforms is amplified that only through hard work and determination can a worker succeed in the platform economy, thus contributing to constructing the hero identity framework.

However, the authors highlight that protests and complaints are still found within online groups. From these types of comments, the sense of dependence that workers feel on the platform emerges, accompanied by a feeling of helplessness for which protest is considered useless. Here, an identity framework emerges that distances itself from the one promoted by the platform, configuring itself as the identity of the rider as a dependent worker. In this sense, even if the platform strategically promotes identity narratives from which workers can initiate a self-construction process, this does not always happen. Conversely, some aspects related to working conditions become central and significant to defining the identity of the platform worker, who, experiencing dependence and helplessness, will develop an identity framework closer to that of the subordinate worker. Therefore,

in such cases, the platform does not play an active and intentional role in constructing possible selves, but through its rules and features that limit the rider's autonomy, it passively creates the identity framework of the subordinate worker. When such an identity framework predominates, solidarity and mutual help are present in groups and online pages, which the authors consider to be the fundamental forms for developing collective action.

Indeed, some workers identify collective action as an effective means of addressing the criticalities created by platform work conditions. However, it is not uncommon for complaints and consequent proposals for the activation of rights struggles to be harshly criticized by workers who have embraced the hero identity. The latter, in fact, emphasize the decision-making power of the individual, who is considered free to change organization by turning to another platform. Thus, the group formed on social channels acts as a kind of moderator, capable of amplifying or curbing the workers' internalization of identity frameworks provided by platforms, as described later.

In this way, platforms and virtual groups serve as reservoirs from which to draw meanings useful for self-construction, influencing each other, contributing to creating a dynamic and complex identity construction process. These two identity representations convey contrasting meanings attributed to working conditions: on the one hand, the hero narrative outlines the profile of platform work as autonomous and independent; on the other, the rider narrative emphasizes the characteristics of helplessness and dependence on platforms. In the first case, the platform assumes an active, intentional, and strategic role, constructing an identity framework for its workers so that they work hard, embracing the hero rhetoric. In the second case, it plays a passive role, as it is the working conditions deriving from the platform model that make individuals feel dependent, as subordinate workers.

2.2.2.2.2 Virtual Communities

The creation of digital groups following work done through platforms is considered by many scholars to be a compensatory strategy enacted by individuals to fill the lack of a participative organizational environment. In this sense, workers seem to feel the need to build socialization spaces that are inherently absent in the gig model and thus aggregate in online communities. Research shows that individuals belonging to this work model do not passively suffer from the lack of traditional organizational anchors but actively mobilize by forming virtual groups that influence workers' professional experiences.

Many studies included in this literature review analyze the motivations that lead platform workers to join digital communities. The authors agree in identifying a practical role in sharing information

related to work activities and acquiring knowledge and skills. However, the pragmatic aspect of online groups extends to identity dimensions made possible by developing a sense of belonging, mutual support, and shared work experience.

Conde et al. (2023) aimed to understand how self-employed workers co-construct their work identity. To do so, the authors conducted 40 interviews with Brazilian app workers, exploring the identity formation process of independent workers who feel like organizational orphans and showing the paths they take to circumvent the lack of guides for action and group interaction. The research highlights how workers experience a perceived absence not only in terms of organizational structure, such as the lack of a physical workplace, but also relationally. In platform work, in fact, there is not always an organization capable of effectively responding to the problems workers encounter while at work. Consequently, to circumvent the lack of an organizational structure, workers tend to form informal groups, thus creating personalized identity-building strategies. In this way, professionals create small islands of collective identity with colleagues who use the same platform.

The study emphasizes that this identity management process begins with the awareness of the lack of a formal structure capable of helping them in their work. The creation of groups identified by the authors has allowed for the development of a personalized organizational environment, enabling the creation of both individual and collective identity-building processes. A sense of belonging is created, which becomes a source of meaning. Specifically, the sense of belonging communicates expectations of behaviors and roles and becomes part of the selves of the participants. Therefore, while it can be said that the lack of an organizational reference leads to increased anxiety, feelings of isolation, and insecurity, hindering identity construction, Conde and colleagues show how workers can implement compensatory strategies. The need to contain anxiety leads individuals to join informal groups formed to create a sense of belonging that favors the construction of both an individual and a collective self. Therefore, the authors add to the studies that emphasize how self-employment causes job insecurity and uncertainty by suggesting that some identity formation strategies are implemented by individuals to deal with anxiety. This study thus highlights the importance of social bonds in constructing professional identity, reinforcing the idea that structured environments and connections are necessary to minimize tensions and feelings of uncertainty and loneliness.

The results of the research conducted by Blaising and Dabbish (2022) also highlight the need experienced by workers to refer to social bonds capable of replacing traditional organizational anchors in the platform work experience. The authors demonstrate how gig workers engage in self-directed socialization processes to proactively seek support since it is not provided directly by the platform or the clients. According to the authors, self-directed socialization helps gig workers learn how to manage platform work, build credibility, and overcome doubts about themselves and their

careers, addressing the problem of professional identity ambiguity. Entering the gig work world is characterized by high levels of ambiguity, especially for freelance professionals, who find themselves alone in learning the rules of this economic model. Specifically, the authors interviewed newly joined freelancers on platforms such as Fiverr and Upwork, observing how they approached managing the new work.

The study highlights the creation of a highly self-directed socialization process built through a combination of various support sources (friends, family, online communities) and behaviors to cope with transition challenges. Without mentors or colleagues defined from an organizational perspective, new freelancers turned to online communities and social networks to develop the skills useful for platform work. Regarding online communities, many of the newly interviewed freelancers used forums, platforms, and online groups to obtain informational support. First, through these channels, they activated self-managed training on the platform, independently seeking information on onboarding, profile development, and platform policies. Furthermore, online communities proved essential for solving individual problems, providing opportunities to interact with other freelancers. Participants emphasized that interaction with colleagues helped them quickly learn new skills and technologies to adapt to client demands effectively and efficiently. From this, Blaising and Dabbish highlight how, through the socialization process that occurs in online communities, platform workers learn to navigate the new work environment, gradually building their professional identities. In this sense, the discussion made possible by online groups becomes a means of self-construction in terms of acquiring work knowledge and skills.

Research shows that professional identity construction in the gig context is an articulated and complex process achievable through multiple channels: the self-directed socialization referenced by the authors is certainly a path activated by the individual, but it is made possible through interaction with online groups (analyzed here) and social networks (discussed below).

The agency of platform workers in building social bonds through the creation of virtual groups also emerges in the research by Niebler and Animento (2023), who identified some ways in which platform cleaning workers organize collectively to face risks and intervene against corporate strategies. A first channel is represented by exchange groups through messaging applications such as WhatsApp or Telegram. In the absence of physical workplaces or urban socialization spaces, these social groups play a central role in exchange and collective socialization. Here, workers help each other, for example, by exchanging information about clients, especially in problematic cases, warning colleagues of potential dangers and damages. Additionally, within these spaces, there is a real knowledge transfer: by helping each other, an interaction is created that allows skills and

competencies to be transferred from one worker to another, influencing each one's professional development. In some cases, conversations in these groups led to the organization of collective protests against a company and subsequent legal actions.

Messaging groups, combined with communities created in physical spaces, such as consulting services and political groups, become resources for urban organization and possible meeting spaces for platform workers. In these places, the possibility of building a shared and collective identity is encouraged, and thus they become important anchors for self-development for this category of workers. Furthermore, these collective organization strategies show that platform cleaning workers are not entirely passive victims of the platform economy but know how to actively use the platform in their interest, demonstrating agency. In this sense, practical needs for information circulation intertwine with identity needs for belonging and sharing, leading individuals to actively seek meeting spaces.

Through the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) theoretical framework, Schmidt and colleagues (2023) delve into the motivations, some of which were mentioned earlier (Niebler & Animento, 2023), that lead gig workers to form online communities. The research highlights how gig workers organize in online groups to achieve different goals and shows how they have come together by creating websites and applications to address the gig model's critical issues. First, workers share their experiences about the tasks and services they found financially useful. Second, online communities contain pages dedicated to general strategies for success in performing specific activities. Moreover, organizing workers into online groups is useful to avoid bad employers; that is, platforms present various critical issues for workers, such as increased control, excessive resources required from workers, financial penalties, unfair negative reviews, and unwarranted expulsion. At the same time, information exchange among platform workers concerns clients: professionals warn each other about work experiences with clients with whom problems have arisen or, conversely, about those worth working with. Finally, these online communities are useful in an organizational phase aimed at mobilizing gig workers to demand better working conditions from the platform.

However, this research highlights the further role played by online groups, which are not just spaces for circulating information but become real reference points for individuals. Since platform workers lack stable professional relationships and lasting membership of an organization, they often have a precarious identity. This leads them to search within online groups for not only practical information and support for managing and carrying out their professional activities but also emotional support and collegiality. In this sense, the authors argue that online communities, by contributing to developing a shared sense of self, provide identity-related responses to platform workers.

Wood et al.'s (2018) research on online platforms in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa highlights how internet-based communities play a vital role in the gig economy. The results show that forums and groups that appear on social media significantly influence the work experiences of online freelancers and serve various purposes. As with Schmidt and colleagues (2023), these authors' research emphasizes that workers use the internet to communicate with each other and to share information about work and the market. One type of communication aims to identify clients with whom they can work peacefully and, vice versa, those who have created problems. Furthermore, gig workers' communications can concern the tasks to be obtained through the platform: discussions often revolve around jobs considered poorly paid and well paid. Sometimes, the online groups are created to improve working conditions, for example, through petitioning or writing letters to the platform's CEO.

However, forum-based networks are fragmented in some ways, such as platform type, worker nationality, task type, and worker seniority. Nevertheless, the authors highlight that online groups are a powerful means of obtaining information and exchanging communications, contributing to peer support, reducing social isolation, and creating a sense of belonging to the community. In this sense, starting from the exchange of practical communications strictly related to the work object, solidarity among workers is created, contributing to developing a shared identity.

Similarly, Mieruch and McFarlane (2023) highlight how much of the literature underestimates the role of social media, often considering them merely communication tools. This has led to the dynamics of socialization and identity construction in the online environment being neglected. For this reason, the authors seek to analyze the role played by social media in shaping workers' identities by observing online communications among riders. First, the research reveals that social media constitute a virtual environment that is useful for socialization and mutual help. Specifically, digital spaces such as Facebook help riders overcome the loneliness and social disconnection that are characteristic of platform work, fostering peer solidarity. However, the function of social media is not limited to this: in terms of identity, online spaces are configured as environments where self-narratives are actively expressed and disseminated, promoting the creation of collective identities. First, within online groups, the rhetorics promoted by platforms can be amplified. As seen earlier, some digital organizations play an active role in constructing identity frameworks that platform workers can adopt.

Yasih (2023) argues that the experience of atomized and individualized work, which is typical of the gig economy, is made more tolerable by creating physical and digital spaces where the workers in the Indonesian online transport sector studied in the research can meet and socialize. Focusing on online

environments, the author highlights that social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are, first and foremost, frequently used for information exchange and peer support. The communities created in digital spaces operate through informal social mechanisms that help workers tolerate job insecurity through mutual assistance and information exchange. However, alongside their purely informative function, digital spaces are configured as worker communities to which their founders often assign names and logos, contributing to developing a sense of identity and belonging among their members. In this way, dimensions such as recognition and sharing are encouraged, as, through distinctive signs like the group name and associated logo, members can recognize each other and feel part of a community. Moreover, these elements can become symbols of a shared culture within the organization, providing a common point of reference for members and helping to consolidate the group's traditions and norms. All this contributes to forming and developing a shared identity created through the formation of the virtual group. In this sense, Yasih's study, like the three previous ones, highlights the ability of online groups to go beyond a purely practical role of exchanging information and peer support, providing identity-related resources.

Finally, Parth and colleagues (2023) show in their study of Indian taxi drivers how creating online groups contributes substantially to creating a shared identity. For the authors, repeated communications within online groups not only facilitate social relationships but also activate and amplify a sense of belonging to a community. In this sense, community membership becomes a facilitating element in creating a shared collective identity. Moreover, new forms of digital spaces, mainly consisting of social media platforms, play a prominent role in facilitating labor collectivization and mobilization movements. In this sense, the creation of virtual communities, combined with the establishment of local groups (analyzed in the following pages), can facilitate the development of a shared identity among platform workers, laying the foundation for the struggle for better working conditions.

2.3.2.2.3 Local Groups

Alongside the virtual groups described above, some research highlights the role played by the interaction and exchange that occurs among platform workers meeting in physical spaces. In this sense, local groups become central actors in the identity work performed by individuals belonging to the platform economy, influencing their development.

Authors often discuss digital and in-person communities in parallel, emphasizing that the creation of informal groups results from the need for information exchange and socialization experienced by individuals operating in the gig economy. However, while local groups initially serve a practical

function, over time they become actors capable of providing identity-related responses to platform workers, as seen with virtual communities.

Parth and colleagues' (2023) study of taxi drivers who work through platforms highlights how physical and digital groups help workers develop solidarity and collective resistance. Specifically, the results emphasize the centrality of the enabling fusion of physical and digital spaces, which the authors call the "phygital space." The dispersion of individuals in different locations and differences among workers in terms of activities and tasks performed—characteristics of platform work—create an obstacle to solidarity among gig workers. From here, the authors stressed the importance of creating shared spaces, whether physical or digital, as they can facilitate unity and solidarity even among different groups of workers.

Moreover, Parth et al. (2023) highlight how there is strict platform control over attempts at worker socialization and collectivization. For example, if railway or airport parking lots could be configured as spaces where platform taxi drivers could socialize, such places were monitored by platform representatives who thwarted every attempt at interaction. This surveillance discouraged taxi drivers from engaging in group conversations and led them to seek other places to spend time. Despite platform monitoring, some physical spaces were still created: first, the companies' offices where workers went to resolve issues such as penalties or incentive reductions led drivers to exchange complaints and critical observations about the platform, amplifying a sense of injustice that, as previously highlighted, could lead to worker mobilization. Secondly, stops at rest areas to eat meals at strategic points on the roads most frequented by taxi drivers created regularity in meetings, helping to develop a certain degree of bond among workers. Furthermore, physical spaces have been opened, made necessary by the low level of digital literacy among Indian taxi drivers, who therefore found it difficult to interact in digital groups.

The parallel creation of physical and digital spaces, according to the authors, contributed to the creation of the so-called "phygital space," or the blending of these two types of closely connected spaces. On the one hand, the increased frequency of interactions in the digital space increased the frequency of physical meetings; on the other, greater regular interaction in the physical space helped develop and structure WhatsApp and Facebook groups. All this contributed to creating a sense of collective identity based on the shared awareness of common characteristics and interests, leading to the emergence of embryonic solidarity at work. Increasing interactions in digital and physical spaces began to create a sense of connection and belonging, accompanied by a sense of injustice and frustration due to the treatment meted out by the platform management. The ability to share

frustrations in a common space led to the feeling of not being alone in suffering injustice, fostering active solidarity.

Parth and colleagues' work effectively shows how local and digital groups are firmly intertwined, contributing in parallel to the process of constructing the work identity of individuals who use platforms to perform their professional activities.

Similarly, Yasih (2023) emphasizes the importance of exchanges and discussions made possible through online and local groups. For the author, the experience of the atomized and individualized work typical of the gig economy is made more tolerable by the creation of physical or digital spaces where workers in the Indonesian online transport sector can meet and socialize. Regarding the former, the author shows the emergence of kiosks or spaces adjacent to parking lots where drivers meet in different parts of the cities. As previously reported for digital communities, the communities created in physical spaces also operate through informal social mechanisms that help workers accept work ambiguity through mutual assistance and information exchange.

As highlighted by Ashford et al. (2018), the constant change of workplaces and clients that is typical of the platform model seems to contribute to creating relational fragility. Unlike in traditional contexts, where relationships with colleagues belonging to the same organization and clients are more stable, such bonds in the gig economy are fragile and dynamic. Consequently, the ability to form, maintain, and quickly dissolve working relationships productively becomes crucial in the gig economy. Hence, in the work experience, the relationships developed through communities are increasingly more important than those derived from work activity with colleagues and clients. These relationships can be virtual, as described in the previous pages, or local, formed through face-to-face meetings and interactions. In this sense, as already argued for digital communities, the formation of local groups is not simply a result of the need for information exchange but is loaded with relational and identity meanings, analyzed more specifically in the description of the next research studies.

Della Porta et al. (2022) use in-depth interviews, observation techniques, and document analysis for fieldwork in the cities of Turin, Milan, Bologna, and Florence to investigate the protests of platform workers. Although the platform economy promotes processes of work fragmentation and individualization, which are notoriously capable of limiting collective action, the study emphasizes the ability of Amazon drivers and food delivery couriers to mobilize for their labor rights. Specifically, the workers' struggle activates the construction of specific collective identity frameworks made possible by the solidarity-in-action process. The latter can be defined as the growth of a sense of solidarity during and as a result of one's action. Collective struggle is configured as both a manifestation of and a catalyst for the identity formation process. In this sense, collective action

allows for the creation of new social relationships of solidarity, transforming workers' daily experiences, breaking old routines, and promoting new actions and new collective identities.

Public spaces, such as squares that served as the backdrop for these workers' mobilizations during their protest for their rights, have become valuable for developing collective identity. The ability to meet other platform workers face-to-face allowed for the birth of direct interaction and discussion among colleagues who faced the same difficulties. In this sense, public squares became fundamental in developing collective solidarity and identification among platform workers. Through the sharing of drinks and meals, the workforce developed a common sense of belonging, thus contributing to defining workers' identity, both internal and external. Thanks to the meetings in the physical spaces of the cities where the protests took place, on the one hand, workers were able to perceive themselves as belonging to a social group; on the other, a broader public, namely, those who witnessed the mobilizations, including on television, began to recognize a common identity in this category of workers. In this way, the local groups formed to fight for rights played a central role in defining and constructing platform workers' identities, providing a context from which to draw meanings useful for forming their selves.

Similarly, Quondamatteo and Marrone (2023) focus on the importance of mobilizations in forming the collective identities of platform workers. Through research conducted in the city of Bologna, the authors investigate the successful path taken by unions bargaining for workers in the food delivery sector. In doing so, they highlight how collective identities are configured as symbols that allow community members to recognize themselves as such. This becomes a fundamental basis for developing solidarity and actions of struggle. Therefore, the possibility of worker mobilization necessarily requires the prerequisite of recognition; that is, workers must first form a collective identity to develop a common fight for their labor rights. Local activists played a key role in creating and developing solidarity among platform workers. In addition to providing necessary resources, such as flyers and training courses on the topic, they brought about social meetings that became central to building social bonds and developing solidarity. This type of activity supported by local groups allowed for exchange, interaction, and mutual help among platform workers, contributing to creating a collective identity.

2.3.2.2.4 Personal Networks

As reiterated several times in this work, the platform model elicits feelings of insecurity, uncertainty, and precariousness in the individuals who participate in it, with significant consequences for professional identity construction. As highlighted by Petriglieri et al. (2019), identity work and the

processes of constructing a professional self have long been studied within traditional contexts, namely, organizations, which serve as the main reference points for individuals. In contrast, gig workers operate in weak and uncertain situations where roles and expectations regarding appropriate behaviors and available careers become unclear. The absence of traditional organizational anchors pushes gig workers to seek relational reference points in other contexts. Virtual communities and local groups, described thus far, represent only two of the channels sought by platform workers to obtain information, learn new knowledge and skills, and meet their need for socialization. In fact, studies identify other personal networks that provide support for individuals navigating the ambiguity of the gig economy.

Starting from the observation of the precariousness and fluidity of the gig context, Moser et al. (2021) seek to understand how people anchor their identity in the platform work world. They propose the concept of network identity, understood as the distinctive and central character of a set of social ties that can last for varying durations. The authors assert that a relatively stable workplace identity, anchored to traditional groups and relationships, is becoming increasingly unsustainable and giving way to a networked identity. Through network identity, which, by definition, is self-constructed, fluid, and portable, workers manage to anchor their selves in this type of economic model. The characteristics of network identity allow a sense of self to be developed that seems to fill the void left by the dissolution of conventional identities. Additionally, the features of networks enable individuals to transcend specific contexts, move within the network or between different networks, and adapt to changing circumstances, all of which are typical of the gig context.

Similarly, Petriglieri et al. (2019), focusing their research on the development of personal holding environments, show the centrality of connections in platform work. Specifically, their inductive and qualitative study analyzes the work experience of independent professionals, that is, people neither affiliated with an organization nor a consolidated profession. The theory of work identity management developed by the authors starts with the observation that platform workers strongly perceive the absence of a containing organizational environment. In this sense, the participants recognized that organizations provide guidance in work, clear tasks, a reference community, practical support, and stability. However, the results also show that platform workers interpret integration into an organizational context as a kind of cage that limits the professional's freedom, demanding too high and too personal a price and stifling self-expression. The lack of a strong reference, such as that represented by the organization in traditional work contexts, leads to pervasive uncertainty, especially in ensuring a steady flow of work; thus, economic and financial concerns gradually become existential concerns. From here, independent workers develop a precarious identity, as they struggle to derive meaning from their work and create a stable self-definition.

In parallel, the results show a personalization of work and identity, as the possibility of working autonomously is configured as a means of self-expression, reflecting one's skills and experiences. However, personalization can become a double-edged sword since all successes and all failures define the professional's self. To cope with the resulting emotional tensions, gig workers are led to build personal holding environments in which they cultivate connections to personal routines, physical places, significant people, and the purpose of work. These connections have helped independent workers remain productive and manage the emotions related to their work.

Within this broad set of connections identified by Petriglieri and colleagues, connections with significant people proved crucial for the productivity, creativity, and sometimes even the mental health of the professionals interviewed. Such connections supported workers even during more difficult times at work, allowing them to experience uncertainty while continuing to look forward with confidence. In general, for the authors, personal holding environments are indispensable for creating a vital work identity, that is, perceiving one's ability to sustain one's working life. Feeling able to manage one's work, removing distractions, and containing emotions helps individuals live their precariousness as tolerable. At the same time, connections to places, people, routines, and the purpose of work have restored vitality to the work self, understood as the perception of being present, authentic, and invigorated by work. In this sense, personal holding environments have been able to make up for the lack of a containing organizational environment, serving as identity workspaces.

Focusing specifically on the study of freelancers recruited from the platforms Fiverr and Upwork, Blaising and Dabbish (2022) note how the absence of mentors or colleagues defined from an organizational point of view led new freelancers to turn to online communities and social networks to develop the skills needed for platform work.

Referring to the personal networks discussed in this section, new freelancers described relying on the following main groups: colleagues belonging to the same platform, family members, friends, and former colleagues. The first group served as internal mentors, instructing newcomers on platform-related issues that required an understanding of longer-term dynamics. In this way, participants were able to reduce the uncertainty associated with platform practices. Additionally, several freelancers reported identifying and acquiring skills outside the digital infrastructure by turning to family, friends, or former colleagues. The need to develop and refer to personal networks arose when, in carrying out specific projects, they felt they did not have sufficient knowledge. Experts belonging to their personal networks also proved valuable support by giving guidance on managing self-employment, including taxes, budgets, and allowances. Thus, through interaction, comparison, and support provided by their personal networks, freelancers were able to develop new knowledge and skills that contributed to

shaping their identities as platform workers. The study thus shows how personal networks do not only respond to a need for socialization, dictated by the individuality of online work, but also provide identity-related responses capable of influencing self-construction processes.

2.3.2.2.5 Customers

After describing how the identity-building processes of gig workers are guided by platform functionalities, digital communities, and physical spaces, it is necessary to discuss another actor: clients. The gig economy is based on a triangular model that involves the interaction between the worker, platform, and clients. This structure gives a central role to those who use a digital organization to access services or obtain goods, which is not limited to the purely pragmatic aspect of using the work service. The research analyzed in this literature review highlights the identity function of clients, who, through their expectations, the reviews they leave, and the relationships they establish with professionals, influence the ways in which platform workers build their identity.

Through two cycles of longitudinal studies on online freelance workers, Munoz et al. (2022) highlight how the presentation of a platform worker's identity is constrained by customer evaluations and feedback. According to the authors, reviews contribute to how the worker presents themselves and builds their digital identity. The authors start from Goffman's dramaturgical approach, according to which identity is configured as a performance shaped by the environment and the audience. From this perspective, individuals offer a version of themselves in a sort of front-stage performance. Through the self-presentation framework, the study examines how individuals interpret their identity when presenting themselves online through the design and maintenance of digital profiles. In this sense, identity construction on platforms is a bidirectional process between the self and the clients, interrupted by a third actor, the platform, which acts as an intermediary in online interaction. Hence, the ability to build and present an identity that fully reflects the worker is limited and constrained by audience expectations and platform functionalities (described in previous pages).

Specifically, interviewees highlighted that in online presentation, the central and determining factor is not their self-perception but a dynamic interaction of multiple forces that influence the online identity process. In this sense, there is a constant negotiation between three main actors: the platform, worker, and clients. Thus, it becomes clear that workers do not have full power over constructing their online profile but are subject to external forces such as client expectations and platform functionalities. For example, presenting themselves as competent professionals is perceived by online workers as essential to conveying a professional identity to their clients. This is pursued through the choice of a profile picture deemed professional. More generally, customer evaluations immediately influence individuals' work experience. For those who have recently entered the platform, in particular, the lack of evaluations puts them at a disadvantage compared to their colleagues; hence, the authors identified strategies workers implement to increase their ratings. Some resort to lower pay; others add workload to obtain more feedback. However, these strategies represent a kind of

professional humiliation, as workers subordinate their professionalism to the need to obtain high ratings. Reviews and ratings left on the platform place workers in a deferential position in relation to the client, as they must constantly worry about the ratings clients might leave due to the immediate impact of these ratings on their work opportunities and careers. According to the authors, the result of this mechanism is that the online identities of many professionals completely overlap with their ratings. In this sense, it becomes clear how expectations, ratings, and relationships with clients strongly influence the processes through which platform workers build their professional identity in the gig model.

Moreover, according to this research and as seen previously, self-formation is a highly complex process shaped by multiple agents and factors. Here, the influence of the audience is firmly intertwined with the platform's functionalities and structure. In a more traditional context, a worker's professional reputation is managed by the individual and built over time; in gig work, it is controlled by the platform itself, as it is the platform that establishes how workers' ratings are defined and used. Yao's (2022) study also focuses on the role clients play in the identity-building processes of platform workers. Analyzing qualitative data collected through research involving lawyers who practice the legal profession both traditionally (offline) and through digital platforms, the author highlights the creation of a split in professional identity. Specifically, as the characteristics of platform work contradict those of traditional legal work in terms of content and client relationships, these differences lead to the coexistence of two contradictory identities. According to the author, although the platform facilitates entry for professionals to perform their activities digitally, some of its characteristics seem incompatible with the traditional and dominant meanings of professionalism. Firstly, the author refers to the relationship between client and professional, which, in the platform model, is heavily influenced by the ability to leave reviews on the service received through online ratings. Client relationships have been found to be more short-term and superficial, as the tasks required are simpler and more trivial than the traditionally requested legal consultations. Furthermore, the study showed the emergence of situations where experts were openly questioned about their professional skills and qualifications. All this has contributed to generating experiences misaligned with the professional identity of lawyers in traditional practice, gradually leading to a split in professional identity.

According to the author, the division of professional identity has been mainly caused by the difference in the value attributed to lawyers' competence, that is, a gradual differentiation of the lawyer's status in their relationships with clients. Specifically, the decrease in the professional's power and the client's respect during the working relationship led platform lawyers to lose the status of highly qualified professionals. Hence, client relationships and reviews influenced professional identity, leading to a demarcation line between the sense of self in online work and professional identity in

traditional contexts. In this way, two different concepts of self in the performance of professional activity have developed, creating two sub-identities. From this study, it is understood that platform work, characterized by new relational modes with clients, does not simply change the type of activity performed but leads to a reformulation of the concept of profession and, with it, the professional identity of these workers.

2.3.2.2.6 Social Context

An additional dimension that influences the identity-building processes of platform workers is the social context. Contextual characteristics related, for example, to geographic location, economic development, and the culture that characterizes the places where individuals perform their work activity affect the ways in which individuals develop their selves in relation to work. The research considered in this literature review frequently shows how the society in which individuals are embedded guides the incorporation of identity frameworks by workers as a result of the social reputation present in the collective imagination. In this sense, the social context not only impacts the development of the self through its characteristics but also allows or excludes the internalization of possible identities. In all the studies reported here, reflection on the influence of context on identity-building processes is made possible by studying the platform work experience in non-Western contexts.

First, Demirel et al. (2021) argue that despite the narratives of platform owners, the digital marketplace is not a neutral space useful for the democratization of work. Instead, differences in the knowledge and resources of workers, in line with their geographical origin, cause disparities in work experience. The research shows that such differences mean that the possibilities for constructing a professional identity are not completely free but are, rather, constrained by economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

Using Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction, the authors explore how groups of freelance designers from the Global North and South experience the platform work world. Specifically, they show how reputation and resulting work opportunities essentially derive from the capital possessed by professionals, who therefore have limited action possibilities. Their work experience in the digital world does not depend entirely on their agency and will but is subject to the skills possessed and developed during their past professional training. The disparity in economic capital (goods, properties, and material wealth) of professionals dictates their ability to undertake certain types of work, for example, when they require the use of expensive software or hardware. Moreover, cultural capital, which in the study is mainly represented by knowledge of the English

language and the ability to use appropriate technical terminology, also influences the ability to obtain certain specific jobs. In this sense, the basic knowledge and resources that freelancers bring with them (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital) are essential for their ability to understand and respond to the rules of the game in the online design field.

However, access to certain types of capital is often closely linked to the geographic context of origin. The authors show, for example, that in most cases, platform workers located in the Global North are highly advantaged. Conversely, many professionals from poorer countries find themselves trapped as in quicksand, unable to control and shape their work because they do not have the capital sources necessary for success. In this sense, the agency of the individual in constructing professional identity is limited and constrained. Specifically, the research shows how the formation of the professional self is inevitably linked to the social context of origin of the subjects and therefore limited to predetermined possibilities.

In the previously described study, Parth et al. (2023) show how the formation and development of the identity of Indian taxi drivers who use the platform for their work activity are influenced by the social context. The authors highlight how the spread of digital groups and the consequent creation of solidarity among workers face greater difficulties in developing countries since platform workers have lower levels of education and digital literacy. For example, the spread of digital communities to which platform workers can belong, allowing for dialogue and the development of a sense of belonging, has been limited by the language barrier: apps and social media platforms are often developed in English, creating difficulties for those who have not had sufficient education to learn this language. This acts as a barrier to interaction among workers and consequently to developing solidarity and mutual help. As seen above, dialogue and solidarity are starting points for forming a collective and shared identity. Therefore, through this study, Parth and colleagues highlight how the possibility of constructing a common self is influenced by the geographic and social context to which platform workers belong.

Yasih's (2023) study of professional identity within the gig economy adopts the lens of Foucauldian governmentality, tracing the political-economic processes that have been historically shaped and that condition the acceptance of the new precariousness, influencing the collective resistance of platform workers in Indonesia. According to the author, the creation and development of entrepreneurial identities in the platform model have partly resulted from the exercise of neoliberal governance in the country, which creates a favorable environment for reiterating the entrepreneurial identity of workers. The results show how many online transport drivers have developed the identity of micro-entrepreneurs, claiming to consider the risks derived from work as a fair exchange for the autonomy guaranteed by the gig model. In line with neoliberal principles, workers accept the status of platform

partners by normalizing the new precariousness brought about by the gig economy. In this sense, Indonesia is an entrepreneurial society based on a market logic within which workers develop entrepreneurial aspirations.

Idowu and Elbanna (2021) also conducted inductive research that allows for a deeper understanding of the experience of crowd workers in a non-Western context, providing evidence on the role of social context in shaping the work identity of professionals. The authors begin their reflection by observing that internet-based work carries a social stigma in Nigeria. Specifically, workers using the internet in this country are socially and institutionally associated with criminals and considered fraudsters. Thus, the social context of reference denies an identity framework, and that identity cannot therefore be assumed by these workers. This contrasts with the positive aspects experienced by workers, such as flexibility, freedom, and autonomy. In this way, the advantages of platform work clash with the negative image in the Nigerian collective imagination. There is therefore a very strong institutional stigma that creates an incongruity between workers' identities and social evaluations. Hence, platform workers need to reconcile these conflicts by taking actions to find a better alignment with social perception. For example, they rent office spaces and formalize their work by registering it as a small business, emphasizing a public identity of employees or entrepreneurs and denying that of crowd workers, as crowd working is not socially accepted.

The study reveals that this type of platform worker engages in entrepreneurial practices not only out of necessity and personal desire but also to publicly validate their identity as businesspeople and entrepreneurs, as they must distance themselves from the image of crowd workers who are socially associated with criminal activities. In this sense, the entrepreneurial identity is actively pursued by Nigerian crowd workers due to social pressure and the need to achieve social congruence. This consideration enriches what has been said previously about entrepreneurial identity, showing once again how identity construction processes are complex and articulated. The study by Idowu and Elbanna intersects the identity construction action activated by the individual with the social context. The authors highlight how social ideas created internally by the reference society become central to the identity construction processes of platform workers. In this way, Nigerian crowd workers deal with the incongruity of their identity with their social environment by creating a new identity as businesspeople and suppressing any identity related to crowd working. They refuse to be identified as crowd workers and reshape their work practices to fit the identity of businesspeople, creating a circular process through which they extract useful meanings for their identity construction from the social context, shaping their work activities and professional practices.

This article challenges the notion that platform work is independent of context and universally uniform, highlighting how the social context affects the construction of the platform worker's identity, for example, by excluding identity frameworks that are not socially accepted. In the absence of typical sources for forming work identity, platform workers themselves become responsible for self-definition concerning their work activity and also draw from the resources available in the social context.

Like Idowu and Elbanna (2021), Newlands (2022) shows the importance of the social context within which platform workers operate. The author argues that social reputation influences the worker's identification process in platform work: low occupational prestige leads the riders studied in this research to refuse to perceive themselves as and be considered platform workers even in the future. Professional stigma and occupational prestige are central factors, as these serve as identity resources provided by the society in which one is embedded, contributing to constructing one's professional identity. To cope with the incongruity between the professional identity of a rider and social stigma, workers often implement the psychological strategy of perceiving themselves as temporary platform workers as a useful solution to remain in the gig economy. In this sense, the identity construction process of these workers is influenced by the context, provoking an active reaction in the individual, who builds a temporary identity in response to a low social reputation.

Finally, Niebler and Animento's (2023) study of migrant platform workers in the cleaning sector shows how social reputation influences the possibility of developing a collective identity, which is a driver of mobilization. Firstly, the authors highlight the presence of a low identification of workers with the activity carried out. This is common in low-wage service sectors, where individuals often consider the work to be temporary and a means to support other desired activities. The lack of identification can be explained by the stigma associated with cleaning activities, leading individuals to avoid associating their self-image with that of a cleaner. In this sense, the social context, through constructing reputational frameworks related to work activities, influences the identity-building process. If a job is stigmatized by the society of belonging, the individual will hardly integrate the image associated with it into their identity. Therefore, as already highlighted in Newlands' (2022) work, the platform worker will be inclined to assume a temporary platform worker identity, allowing them to resolve the experienced incongruity.

Moreover, the lack of identification of the worker with platform work prevents the development of a collective identity. If the individual does not recognize themselves as a platform worker, they will not feel part of the reference community and will not interact and talk with other workers and embrace a shared identity. This is considered by the authors an obstacle to mobilization and the common struggle to acquire greater rights. In this sense, the study described here highlights the close link that connects

the identity-building processes activated by the individual with the social context and local and virtual communities.

2.3.2.2.7 Legal Classification

The final source of identity meanings for platform workers found in the scientific literature is not represented by an actual actor but by a legislative gap. More precisely, the ambiguity that characterizes the legal classification of platform workers leaves room for an identity ambivalence that individuals must manage. Here, the authors highlight how the legal gap, on the one hand, hinders the creation of defined identity frameworks while on the other, it pushes gig workers to engage in identity work aimed at resolving identity ambiguity.

Niebler and Animento (2023) highlight how the legal ambiguity of platform work hinders the development of a common identity and, with it, the collective organization of individuals. An uncertain legal framework, in fact, conveys ambivalent and, in some cases, contrasting images associated with platform work. Specifically, as previously argued, the gig model brings with it two identity frameworks in parallel: the self-employed worker and the subordinate worker. The coexistence of these images associated with platform workers contributes to creating confusion among professionals, hindering their identification with one or the other. According to the authors, this makes it impossible to build a shared identity with other workers, who, not recognizing themselves in a specific and defined identity framework, will not be able to develop a sense of belonging and commonality of work experience. Thus, collective organization, mobilization, and the fight for rights become difficult.

In the same vein, Quondamatteo and Marrone (2023), studying the mobilizations of workers in the food delivery sector, highlight the critical issues hidden behind the lack of legal classification of platform workers. The authors argue that such legislative ambiguity leaves room for the narratives conveyed by digital platforms. In this sense, the lack of recognition of workers' rights overlaps with the spread of an identity narrative of the self-employed and independent worker. For example, by requiring their workers to own a smartphone and a bicycle, platforms emphasize the entrepreneurial characteristics of this type of work, spreading an image of the platform worker as their own boss. The lack of recognition plays a key role for the platform, allowing organizations to avoid regulation, reduce labor costs, and maintain control over the workforce, undermining unionization and discouraging complaints. In this way, platforms not only deny workers' identities as employees but also reduce the possibilities of developing a collective identity while simultaneously proposing a convenient entrepreneurial identity framework. Like Niebler and Animento (2023), the authors of

this study highlight how the difficulties of creating a common identity make the mobilization of platform workers critical.

Josserand and Kaine (2019) take a step further than the previous authors. They do not merely highlight the criticalities arising from the lack of a clear and defined legal framework for platform workers but show how the latter engage in real identity work. Specifically, the riders considered in their research build narratives that allow them to reconcile the legal classification of the occupation, their professional identity, and the work activity. In this sense, workers form, repair, maintain, strengthen, or revise their identity frameworks through identity work. The narratives identified by the authors are central to constructing a coherent discourse that can accommodate the compromises that platform work entails. On the one hand, they develop narratives of dissociation, rationalization, and distancing to address the legal ambiguity of their work; on the other hand, as seen previously, they build narratives that make the platform work a temporary activity, providing a positive representation of their work.

The legal ambiguity highlighted in the first chapter allowed platform owners to misclassify workers as independent contractors, that is, as partners. Hence, the frequent narratives offered by platforms identify such platforms as workplaces where an individual can be their own boss. This legal ambiguity constitutes the backdrop for the identity work carried out by platform workers, who find themselves needing to activate identity construction processes based on an unclear occupational classification. Identity work is carried out through the production of narratives through which individuals tell the stories of themselves and their work experience, trying to maintain a continuous self-narrative that offers them a sense of security. This becomes even more complex within the gig work world, as workers face chronic uncertainty dictated by platform work conditions: hence, identity work that seeks stability and coherent meanings becomes even more challenging.

The authors identify several narratives through which workers reconcile the contradiction between their legal identity and their work experience. First, they implement a process of dissociation, separating the legal classification as presented by their platform from their own experience and differentiating between the images of an independent contractor and a subordinate worker. Another narrative identified was labeled rationalization, where platform workers define themselves as contractors or entrepreneurs, embracing the identity framework provided by the platforms. A third group of narratives can be classified as distancing, which involves workers distancing themselves from existing legal categories. In this sense, the results show how platform workers often experience an ambiguous situation, leading them to construct narratives that seek to reconcile the contradictions that arise between their legal identity and work experience.

2.3.2.3 The Most Common Identity Frameworks for Gig Workers in the Literature

As stated in the first chapter of this study, the characteristics of the platform economy influence the work experience of the individuals who participate in it, impacting the ways in which they activate and develop their processes of self-construction. The peculiarities of this work model lead individuals to engage in identity work that allows them to endure the uncertainty and precariousness inherent in this type of economy. Hence, authors have highlighted how workers develop identity frameworks useful for this purpose. Within the scientific literature, four dominant identity frameworks can be identified: entrepreneurial identity, provisional identity, identity as a subordinate worker, and identity as an autonomous worker. These are identities developed as a result of entering the gig work model and as an outcome of the work experience through the platform.

2.3.2.3.1 Entrepreneurial Identity

Numerous studies highlight the development of an entrepreneurial identity following the performance of professional activities in the digital platform market (Bellesia et al., 2019; Blaising & Dabbish, 2022; Josserand & Kaine, 2019; Schou & Bucher, 2023; Weidenstedt et al., 2023; Wood et al., 2018; Yasih, 2023; Zwettler et al., 2023). For these studies, platform work becomes a channel for developing a professional identity made possible by acquiring knowledge and skills typical of an entrepreneur. For some authors (Bellesia et al., 2019; Blaising & Dabbish, 2022; Weidenstedt et al., 2023; Wood et al., 2018; Zwettler et al., 2023), it is the experience of working in the gig context that acts as a driver for entrepreneurship. In this sense, many individuals navigate the uncertainty and opacity inherent in this work model by building capacities that allow them to avoid succumbing. These professionals learn strategies and work methods and accumulate experience and knowledge that start a process of self-molding. Workers create their own set of skills and knowledge, which gradually leads them to perceive themselves not only as freelancers but, increasingly, as entrepreneurs. According to the cited authors, becoming familiar with work practices, technological constraints, and resources, and, in general, with what the gig work model requires, allows the development of an entrepreneurial orientation. In this sense, in the gig economy work experience, workers activate a cycle of professional learning that leads them to develop an aspiration toward an entrepreneurial identity, as the platform can be used as a springboard for future entrepreneurial activities (Zwettler et al., 2023). As work experience on the platform matures, professionals build and develop an entrepreneurial identity, increasing their agency in managing activities.

Many individuals perceive platform work as a temporary step toward a more structured entrepreneurial work activity, such as starting their own business (Wood et al., 2018). Thus, platform

work is seen as an activity through which they can earn enough initial capital to achieve the set goal. In fact, many gig workers want to become their own boss. Consequently, the work experience in the gig economy is influenced by the workers' entrepreneurial aspirations, which guide their strategies. Indeed, if workers are responsible for the costs and risks of their work activity, they are led to personalize their problems and solutions, resorting to individualized strategies (Yasih, 2023). The development of entrepreneurial identities thus reflects a highly individualized work experience in the gig economy.

However, other researchers (Josserand & Kaine, 2019; Schou & Bucher, 2023) point out that the gig work experience allows for the development of different identity frameworks and therefore cannot be reduced only to that of the entrepreneur. In this sense, an entrepreneurial identity becomes just one of various possibilities for self-construction for platform workers.

2.3.2.3.2 Provisional Identity

The second identity framework found in the literature is the result of a process of constructing a provisional identity. This identity framework is intentionally and strategically formed by the platform worker, as it is useful for staying in the gig model. Thus, the provisional identity, although precarious and temporary, becomes necessary to remain in the platform economy. Specifically, some authors (Bucher et al., 2021; Newlands et al., 2022; Weidenstedt et al., 2023) agree in considering the development of a provisional self to be a coping strategy employed by workers to remain in the economic model. They go so far as to define the provisional and temporary identity as an “analgesic” and “relief” for individuals who find employment in the platform economy. Indeed, the workers who operate in the gig economy may not have chosen to do so. For example, research has shown that food delivery work via platforms is often the only paid job migrant workers can find upon arrival in the new country. Therefore, these workers are unlikely to feel a sense of pride in participating in the gig economy and express their intention to remain in this market only as long as necessary to find a job in the traditional economy (Newlands et al., 2022). As a result, some individuals engage in a form of identity work through which they construct discourses about the self around anticipated future trajectories, even though these trajectories, in some cases, are neither clear nor defined. This short-term orientation toward temporary work means that workers accept the working conditions offered by the platform model, such as low wages, making them tolerable. In fact, the development of a provisional identity can make platform work, often perceived as alienating and exhausting, bearable (Bucher et al., 2021). Thus, it can be said that the perception of oneself as a temporary platform worker serves as an identity framework useful for remaining in this economic model.

In this sense, the context of the gig economy can represent a liminal work context, situated between regulated conventional models and new forms of work and business (Weidenstedt et al., 2023). Liminality is configured as an uncertain state of in-betweenness or as a rite of passage leading to a more familiar and stable situation. For example, platform workers in food delivery, especially migrants, may experience the liminality of work identity. This occurs because, being unable to find permanent full-time employment in traditional work settings, they choose to enter platform work as temporary employment. As a result, many workers may experience a feeling of being suspended in limbo and see platform work as a temporary situation that provides them with an intermediate identity. When individuals have a developed work and professional background in their country of origin (in particular, migrant platform workers, who are forced to accept low-wage and low-skill jobs), they may lose their sense of professional self, experiencing a liminal identity following many failed attempts to find work in their field. Moreover, the risk of being stuck in a work situation that fails to provide the expected springboard can cause a sense of a precarious and unstable self. However, the opportunity to enter the platform market by performing temporary work can offer some relief to migrant workers who, upon arriving in the new country, feel rejected by the professional market. Specifically, the opportunity to perform gig work allows them to acquire specific skills, such as communicative, cultural, and spatial knowledge, and to develop social contacts to progress toward greater integration.

Overall, the platform work experience can be seen as an educational opportunity that contributes to building a professional portfolio that is useful for developing a career beyond the boundaries of the gig model (Zwettler et al., 2023). As some types of platform work are extremely varied, professionals can build a wide portfolio of work experiences. In fact, the ability to quickly accumulate a wide range of work experiences allows individuals to develop and acquire diverse professional skills. These skills become part of the worker's professional portfolio and are transferable outside the online world. Therefore, some workers acquire skills and experience in platform work that allow them to expand their offline activities while gradually reducing platform work. In this sense, the development of an identity, even if precarious, related to platform work proves useful and necessary for strengthening the worker's professional identity in general terms. For this reason, platforms can be seen not only as simple places of economic transaction but also as important actors in the development of the awareness of an identity as platform workers. For this reason, the gig work experience, although precarious and temporary, can provide an identity response to this category of workers.

2.3.2.3.3 Identity as a Self-Employed/Independent Worker

The legal ambiguity surrounding gig work allows platforms to strategically move between representing workers as independent contractors and employees. As highlighted in the first chapter of this study, flexibility is a central feature of platform work: it allows companies to present a vision in which the worker is portrayed as a collaborator, emphasizing their autonomous nature. Some studies (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2022; Niebler & Animento, 2023; Quondamatteo & Marrone, 2023) have highlighted how platforms sometimes emphasize the image of the worker as their own boss to legitimize the lack of regulation and, with it, the protections typical of dependent work. Furthermore, encouraging workers to adopt the identity framework of being self-employed and independent can undermine unionization and discourage complaints. Thus, by denying the workers' identities as employees, platforms reduce the possibility that a collective identity will develop and consequently that workers will mobilize to acquire rights and protections.

In addition, the literature review, highlighting the need for individuals to obtain useful information to carry out their work activities within the platform economy, shows how they actively seek out reference points. Virtual communities, local groups, and personal networks thus assume a supportive function, providing gig workers not only with practical support but also relational and identity-based support. The active search for these points of reference by individuals denotes the absence of an organizational structure capable of supporting the worker. This lack is overcome in an agentive way by the individual, who therefore tends to behave in ways typical of the self-employed worker through the development of networks external to the digital organization.

Similarly, the central role assumed by the client in the triangular model of platform work leads to behaviors on the part of the worker that differ from those of someone operating within traditional organizations. Platform workers must often adapt their activities to the expectations of clients and engage in self-promotion through self-branding techniques, once again assuming behaviors typical of an independent worker.

In this sense, the platform work model leads those involved to develop and strengthen the characteristic behaviors of an independent worker and, with them, a coherent professional identity. The identity framework of an independent worker therefore seems to be the result of the identity work carried out by the individual following professional experience in this economic model, conditioned and oriented by the actors and dimensions that are part of it.

2.3.2.3.4 Identity as a Subordinate/Employee Worker

The last framework frequently found in the scientific literature, which contrasts with that presented above, is represented by the identity of a subordinate or employee worker. The structural characteristics highlighted in the first chapter of this study create working conditions that, in some cases, lead individuals to perceive themselves as subordinate to the platforms. From this perspective, workers do not feel independent in their work but rather subordinate to digital organizations, attributing their professional success or failure to the platform (Schou & Bucher, 2023). Elements such as the opacity of rules and the lack of clarity in algorithmic management create a lack of agency for workers, making them feel strongly dependent on the digital organization through which they work (Parth et al., 2023).

It is further necessary to emphasize how platforms can sometimes foster the image of workers as employees or subordinates, for example, when they leverage ideal worker characteristics contributing to the creation of the prototypical platform worker (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2022; Mieruch & McFarlane, 2023). As previously seen, some artifacts, such as the backpacks and vests worn by riders when at work, can favor the development of an image of the worker as part of a specific organization. The formation of a prototypical worker identity serves as a means of recognition for workers, who will adopt behaviors that tend toward this representation. Moreover, the diffusion of the image of the prototypical worker allows for the creation of a shared identity composed of and constructed through symbols by which they recognize themselves. By leveraging the construction of a collective identity and through the dissemination of the model worker image, platforms operate as if the worker were not a freelancer, employing tactics common to the employee–employer relationship.

The identity framework of the subordinate worker is therefore configured as an identity often developed by individuals operating in the platform economy who, although not legally classified as employees, perceive themselves as having limited agency and being dependent on digital organizations.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature review conducted in this chapter of the study has allowed for the mapping and analysis of contributions that have examined and studied the ways in which platform workers form and develop their professional identities. First, the descriptive analysis shed light on recent trends in scientific research on the subject, noting a growing interest in the phenomenon and a shift in focus from the Western to the non-Western context. Thereafter, the descriptive analysis highlighted the

different categories of platform workers studied, revealing a gap regarding regulated intellectual professions.

The content analysis in the second part of this chapter identified the most common identity frameworks in the literature as well as the actors and dimensions that guide the identity work of gig workers. In analyzing the processes of construction and development of the work self in the platform model, authors have shown the influence of certain actors and dimensions. The gig worker, despite being the main agent in constructing their own professional identity, draws meanings and elements useful for the formation of their self from different sources. As highlighted in the previous pages, the platform, virtual communities, local groups, personal networks, clients, social context, and legal classification all condition the ways in which the platform worker develops their professional self.

First, the platform plays a central role in constructing the worker's identity, sometimes assuming an active and sometimes a passive role. In the latter case, the platform's own functionalities constrain the subject through algorithmic management, structure, and usage policies. In this sense, the worker isn't entirely free in the identity formation process but is instead subjected to the structural constraints of the digital infrastructure. However, the platform's function in influencing identity development can also be seen as an intentional strategy by management through the construction of identity frameworks. The platform builds narratives that convey the prototypical image of the platform worker, conditioning the ways of developing the professional self.

Second, virtual communities and local groups serve as points of reference for the subject operating in the gig economy. Individuals navigating the uncertainty that characterizes this work model seek support in these communities, which can provide not only practical answers by circulating useful information for work activities but also identity-related responses. Through online or in-person groups, the individual develops a sense of belonging, identifying with the community and developing a collective identity.

Similarly, personal networks act as support for gig workers, helping individuals navigate the new work context while they build a self-image and develop a professional identity.

Another central actor in the identity formation process for platform workers is the client. Through their expectations, the reviews they provide, and the relationships they establish with professionals, clients influence the ways platform workers construct their professional identity.

Moreover, the study of non-Western realities has highlighted the influence that the social context has on the identity development of gig workers. Contextual characteristics, such as geographical location, economic development, culture, and social reputation, shape the identity processes of these workers, for example, by favoring or hindering the internalization of identity frameworks.

Finally, the legal ambiguity that characterizes platform work impacts how individuals perceive themselves, specifically guiding the identity work carried out by the individual between the frameworks of the subordinate worker and the self-employed worker.

The actors and dimensions described influence the identity construction process of platform workers, who, following their gig work experience, tend to develop a professional identity consistent with it. Specifically, within the scientific literature on the subject, four prevailing identity frameworks can be identified: entrepreneurial identity, provisional identity, identity as a dependent worker, and identity as an autonomous worker. With the first, the individual builds the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills that are necessary to remain in the gig economy but are also useful to start their own business in the traditional model, for example, by founding a startup. Similarly, the provisional identity results from a coping strategy employed by gig workers to remain in the uncertainty determined by the working conditions of this model. Nonetheless, this type of identity framework seems to be particularly developed by individuals who find employment in the gig economy out of necessity, such as migrant workers. Alongside these, two other identity frameworks are often discussed in opposition by researchers: the identity of a dependent worker, primarily determined by the workers' perception of subordination to the platforms due to the arbitrariness with which these can operate in the gig market, offering them little protection; and the identity of an autonomous worker, determined by the independence and freedom typical of gig work, which allows platform workers to perceive themselves as not bound by organizations.

It is important to emphasize that the adoption and internalization of these identities by individuals may not be a linear and straightforward process. Research shows that gig workers can develop multiple identity frameworks simultaneously, including at different moments of their work experience. For example, an individual who is forced to enter the gig model for economic reasons might initially consider the platform work experience temporary and develop a provisional identity. However, the working conditions found in this model might lead such an individual to perceive themselves as highly dependent on the platform, guiding them toward developing an identity as a subordinate worker. Then, the individual might become familiar with the platform model and begin to develop independence in work activities and management skills. Therefore, they may abandon the initially internalized identity frameworks in favor of the identity of an autonomous worker and entrepreneur. This example demonstrates how the identity construction process in the gig work model is complex, articulated, and dynamic, leaving no room for a static and deterministic conception. Therefore, Figure 4, constructed to help the reader understand the identity work carried out by the individual in the platform model, should be interpreted as a synthesis of what emerged from the

literature review conducted here and shed light on the fact that the processes described are far more complex than the image can represent.

The image shows the influence that the mentioned dimensions and actors can have on identity construction processes. According to this literature review, the platform, local groups, legal classification, personal networks, social context, virtual communities, and clients seem to influence and shape the identity construction and development processes of platform workers, acting as alternative and substitute sources to traditional organizational anchors. The decision was made not to indicate the direction of the arrows representing this relationship, as it is possible that the ways in which the platform worker develops their self may also impact the actors themselves. However, bidirectionality does not apply to all relationships, and in the articles considered in this literature review, it is not always possible to understand the nature of the influence. Conversely, identity construction processes have been connected to the four identity frameworks, specifying the direction of the arrows. This was made possible as the contributions analyzed here specify that the described identities—entrepreneurial, provisional, subordinate worker, and autonomous worker—are the outcome of the work experience within the platform model.

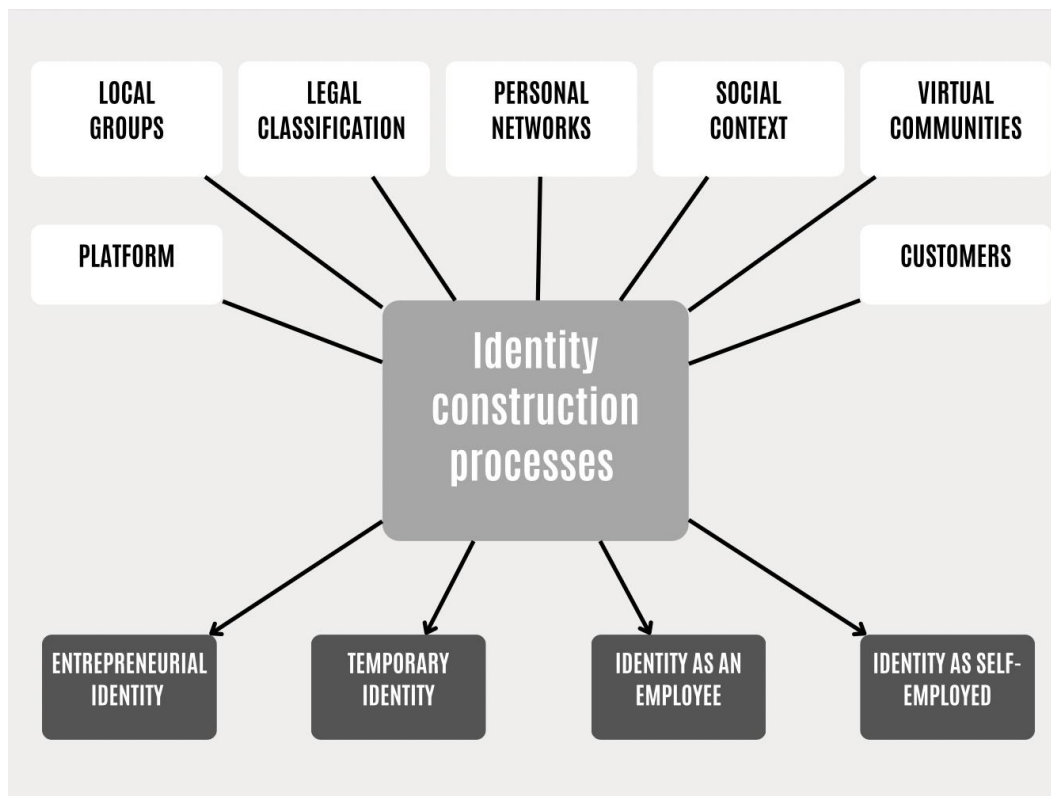


Figure 4: Identity work in the platform model.

A Literature Review Program

Based on the findings of this literature review, in the following chapters, I investigate whether: (1) the identity construction processes of psychologists who use the platform as a tool for their professional practice are guided and influenced by the same actors mentioned here; and (2) the work experience of psychologists in the platform model leads to the construction and development of the same identity frameworks.

Chapter 3. The phenomenon of psychological platforms in Italy: indicators for classification.⁵

3.1 Introduction

New technologies aimed at the care and wellbeing of individuals are increasingly used in healthcare practices, as they serve as useful aids for professionals and facilitate their work activities. The continuous advancement of technological devices has required various disciplines to adapt their practices, and these have undergone rapid transformation in recent years. In healthcare, the term “telehealth” has emerged to indicate the close connection between new technologies and person-centered care services. A specific definition of telehealth has been provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Advancement of Telehealth, namely, “the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support long-distance clinical healthcare, patient and professional health-related education, public health, and health administration” (2015, para. 3).

Within the broader field of healthcare professions, a similar trend can be observed for psychology. New technologies have been present in the field of psychology for more than 20 years. At the end of the last century, the scientific literature began to explore this phenomenon, primarily focusing on the effectiveness of psychological interventions mediated by digital devices. Specifically, the term “telepsychology” was introduced, referring to the delivery of psychological services using a broad spectrum of technologies (Murphy & Mitchell, 1998). However, a more specific definition of telepsychology is provided by The Joint Task Force for the Development of Telepsychology Guidelines for Psychologists, which, focusing solely on the psychological discipline, describes it as “the provision of psychological services using telecommunication technologies [...]” (p. 792). These may be synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous, including “[...] telephone, mobile devices, interactive videoconferencing, e-mail, chat, text, and Internet [...]” (p. 792). This definition clearly shows the diversity of tools used in telepsychology, and it is further highlighted by the variety of labels used in the literature to describe the same phenomenon, including teletherapy, e-therapy, cyberpsychology, teleanalysis, and web counseling (Pierce et al., 2020).

More recently, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many professionals to use technological devices to continue providing psychological interventions, a new digital medium has

⁵ A shorter version of this chapter has been already published as a paper. Reference: Gambirasio, M., Ivaldi, S., & Scaratti, G. (2024). How platformisation transforms the psychological profession: Reflections from a proposal of indicators for the classification of psychological platforms. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 34(4), e2861.

gained prominence, namely, the platform. The phenomenon of psychological platforms refers to the growing presence of online services and resources offering psychological and therapeutic support. These platforms allow users to access various psychological services, such as counseling, online therapy, emotional support, and educational resources, through digital tools such as video calls, chat, or specific apps. The platform tool is becoming increasingly popular, and it is now one of the most widely used digital media for delivering psychological interventions.

The aim of this chapter is to study this emerging phenomenon by observing the ways in which it manifests. To this end, I initially conducted a mapping of the psychological platforms available within the Italian landscape. This allowed for the observation of the different characteristics the platforms reveal depending on their structures and objectives. Mapping can be extremely useful, first and foremost, for obtaining a clear and comprehensive overview of what is available in the market within a particular sector or field. Additionally, capturing a snapshot of what is present enables the identification of emerging trends, providing an in-depth and strategic understanding of the operating context. Subsequently, based on the identification of different possible manifestations, I constructed indicators for classifying platforms dedicated to psychologists. This analytical approach aims at a thorough understanding of the phenomenon, allowing for the organization of large amounts of data in a coherent and orderly manner, facilitating access to and the management of information. Classification helps break down complex information into simpler, more manageable categories, making it easier to study and analyze. Thus, mapping and the creation of indicators have allowed me to both explore a complex and articulated phenomenon and create a classification tool that will be useful for the case study conducted in the next chapter.

3.2 Psychological Platforms

Although the psychological profession has used new technologies for many years, working through psychological platforms is a much more recent phenomenon and one that rapidly expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting in March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued recommendations aimed at limiting interpersonal contacts to contain the spread of the virus (WHO, 2020), prompting companies and organizations to quickly adopt online technologies to carry out their daily activities (Adalja et al., 2020). Psychological associations and regional and national professional bodies also encouraged professionals to continue their activities through online interventions.

In this context, psychological platforms began to emerge as a significant force, becoming key players in the mental health market within just a few years. These platforms present themselves as true “online clinics” (Omran et al., 2017), offering a variety of psychological interventions based

on different therapeutic approaches. They are structured as complete organizations with a defined leadership, specific rules, contracts binding professionals to the platform, privacy practices, a business model, and consequently an implicit culture (Caffieri & De Maio, 2023). Working through a platform thus means becoming part of an organization, which influences not only modes of professional practice but also dimensions such as professional identity and the sense of belonging to the community. Therefore, the study of platforms offering psychological services is an important research area for understanding how these professionals build and develop their sense of self in relation to their work.

3.3 Classifying Platforms to Understand the Phenomenon

One way to achieve a broader understanding of a complex and multifaceted phenomenon such as platform work is to conduct an analysis through a process of classifying existing platforms. In the literature on the subject, several attempts have been made to differentiate platforms based on various criteria.

A first attempt at classification that can be useful for our study was proposed by Srnicek (2017), who divided platforms into five distinct groups. The first category consists of advertising platforms, with one of the most notable examples being Facebook, which relies on extracting and analyzing user information to sell advertising space. The second and third groups are platforms that provide hardware and software to companies, with the distinction that the former, cloud platforms, involve digital organizations, while the latter, industrial platforms, pertain to traditional businesses. Product platforms, the fourth category, transform products into services; for instance, the Spotify platform purchases musical products and resells them to users as subscription-based services. Lastly, lean platforms are those based on either capital valorization (capital-based) or matching labor supply and demand (labor-based).

We focus on this last group, as it includes the platforms that are the subject of our analysis. Although all labor-based platforms directly mediate professional services, various authors (De Groen & Maselli, 2016; De Groen et al., 2016; De Groen et al., 2018; Fabo et al., 2017; Guarascio, 2018; Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Mexi, 2019; Persole et al., 2018) have identified further differentiation criteria. Firstly, for example, platforms that mediate labor supply and demand can be divided based on the mode of service delivery, either physically (such as babysitting services) or online (like teleconsultation services). A second criterion is based on the skills required of the workers, who are generally classified as low/medium-skilled or high-skilled. Another differentiation concerns the business model, that is, whether the platform takes a percentage of the transaction or applies a fixed

commission. The methods through which task assignment occurs also serve as a useful criterion, distinguishing platforms that allow the client to make a choice from those that handle the professional–user matching. Finally, platforms can be differentiated based on whether they compensate workers monetarily or through credits that can be spent within or outside the platform itself.

Although these are only a few of the criteria identified by authors in the literature on labor-based platforms, they illuminate the characteristics that best define such platforms. Specifically, they served as important starting points for the desk analysis conducted here. More generally, the studies on the platforms mentioned above guided us in the research process aimed at studying psychological platforms, culminating in the proposal for indicators presented below.

3.4 Methodology

The indicators developed in this chapter result from an in-depth desk analysis conducted by examining websites and app stores, including the Play Store and Apple Store. The desk analysis involved observing various pages that make up the platform in question, such as the main homepage, different pages accessible from the menu, terms and conditions, privacy policy, and cookie policy. In general, every page that a user can access through the platform via an Internet search without needing to register or sign up was analyzed. More precisely, the inclusion criteria adopted for selecting the platforms were as follows:

- Psychological platforms active within the timeframe of our study until the completion of the desk analysis, namely, from January 2023 to September 22, 2023.
- Psychological platforms offering a service in Italian or in multiple languages including Italian.

With this provisional mapping in mind, I focused on creating indicators suitable for an analytical examination of the platforms used for psychological interventions. As a reference point, I used the theoretical characteristics proposed by Eurofound (2018) (Fig. 1). The approach adopted drew inspiration from the Weplat project⁶, particularly from the work of Bonifacio et al. (2022) on the classification and mapping of care platforms, because the profession under analysis can be appropriately placed in this context. Both studies served as fundamental starting points for identifying the most suitable indicators for studying psychological platforms. Modifications and additions were made to make the indicators more applicable to the research objective. The mapping was an essential part of constructing the criteria because it allowed for the observation of the different characteristics

⁶ <https://www.weplat.it/>

of the platforms. Only by observing the various peculiarities and specificities presented by the platforms was it possible to understand how the latter can assume different structures and answer different purposes. Although Eurofound and Weplat were crucial starting points in defining the indicators, they needed to be adapted to the field of psychology; thus, observing what was already present in the mental health landscape was an indispensable step.

The applicability to psychological platforms of each indicator suggested by Eurofound (Fig. 1) and the Weplat project (see Note 1) was considered, as were any adaptations needed to make it more suitable and appropriate for use. This led to the development of indicators specifically useful for classifying platforms dedicated to psychological intervention.

3.5 Indicators for the Classification of Psychological Platforms

The following list provides a meaningful overview of the ecosystem of psychological platforms active in Italy as of September 22, 2023, the date the desk research concluded. Currently, the mapping includes 44 platforms offering psychological intervention services that adhere to the criteria mentioned above. This representation is by no means exhaustive, and it is hoped that future research will provide further integrations and enrichments. However, it captures a diverse and representative set of the platforms currently in existence.

The following platforms are considered:

- Aptoide
- Belproblema.com
- Centro Apice
- Con te all'estero
- Contactu
- Doctolib
- Doctorium
- E-therapy
- Gli psicologi online
- Guida Psicologi
- H24psicologo
- Hedepy
- Huknow
- iDoctors
- Intherapy

- Loqui
- Mama Chat
- Medelit
- Mindwork
- MioDottore
- Mi Digital Healt
- ParentSmile
- ProntoPro
- PsicoDigitale
- Psicologi Al Telefono
- Psicologi Italia
- Psicologi Online
- Psicologi.me
- Psicologo di base
- Psicologo in Chat
- Psicologo vicino
- Psicologo4u
- Psicon
- Psicoterapia Aperta
- Psiqo
- Psycare
- Santagostino Psiche
- Serenis
- SOS Psicologo
- Sygmund
- Take a sit
- Terapeuta Online
- Therapyside
- Transiti.net
- Unobravo

As previously explained, the intersection between the mapping conducted and the criteria created by Eurofound and the Weplat project led to the development of the indicators listed below. These indicators are described, and their applicability to the analysis of psychological platforms is commented on (see Table 3 for a summary).

The phenomenon of psychological platforms in Italy

No.	Characteristic	Variants
1	Relationship between platform, client and worker	Platform owner ≠ client, undefined crowd of clients and workers Employer-owned internal platform (platform owner = client, defined group of workers) Company-owned outsourcing platforms (platform owner = client, undefined crowd of workers) Cooperative platform structure (client = members of the platform, undefined crowd of workers)
2	Geographic scope of the platform	Regional/national International/several countries
3	Size of platform	Number of clients (relative to other platforms) Number of workers (relative to other platforms) Number of tasks or activities (relative to other platforms) Platform revenue
4	Market position of platform	Monopoly Oligopoly Competition
5	Sector, occupations	NACE (alternatively, as often used: transport, household tasks, professional tasks) ISCO (alternatively: task descriptions)
6	Dynamism of platform	Stable/static Dynamically changing
7	Transparency of client and worker	Anonymous Disclosed
8	Fees to platform	Registration (client, worker, task) Successful matching Successful task completion
9	Realisation of payments	Directly between client and worker Through the platform (deposit)
10	Conduct of platform	Existence and characteristics of terms and conditions Adherence to specific codes of conduct (for example, anti-discrimination) Data protection mechanisms Control/surveillance mechanisms Information provided to workers and clients (transparency) Ratings
11	Autonomy, including price setting	Hierarchy-like (low autonomy) (working time restrictions imposed by clients/platform; price determined by platform (standard or minimum prices) or client) Market-like (high autonomy) (worker free to choose when and how long to work; price determined by worker)
No.	Characteristic	Variants
12	Additional services offered by the platform	Matching vs. management of tasks Guidance or recommendations for clients and workers Pre-screening of ads or offers Training for workers
13	Type of contract/employment status between platform and platform workers	Employment relationship/labour law Civil law contract
14	Access to social protection	Full access Partial access No access
15	Access to representation	Full access Partial access No access
16	Clients	Private individual Private organisation Public organisation
17	Accessibility of platform (technical)	Generally open Restricted (eligibility criteria, vetting of workers)
18	Accessibility of platform (social)	Generally open Restricted (eligibility criteria, vetting of workers)
19	Form of matching	Competition/cortest Procurement/specification/offer
20	Initiator	Client Worker
21	Selector	Client Platform (by algorithm, manual) Platform worker Third party/panel
22	Number of paid platform workers per assignment	One winner Several winners All participants
23	Scale of tasks	Micro Larger (projects)
24	Complexity of tasks	Routine tasks (simple, non-innovative) Complex tasks (moderately complex) Creative tasks (sophisticated, innovative, cognitive)
25	Type of activities	Generalist Specialist
26	Required skills	Low (manual, amateurs) Medium (clerical) High (professionals, specialists)
27	Format of service provision	On line On-location (platform, client and workers in the same location) On-location (platform, client and workers in different locations)

Fig. 5: Eurofound's theoretical characteristics of platform work and their variants.

3.5.1 Relationship between Platform and Psychologist (Indicator Derived From Eurofound and Weplat)

This first indicator distinguishes between the possible relationships that can be established among the actors characterizing the platform model, namely, clients, workers, and the platform itself. Eurofound (2018) identifies four possible scenarios: 1) the platform owner is different from the client, and workers and clients are not defined; 2) the platform is owned by the employer and is internal; 3) the platform is owned by the company that outsources the work; and 4) the platform has a cooperative structure.

Bonifacio et al. (2022) deviated from this approach, choosing to classify welfare platforms in the Italian context based on their legal form because it was significant for the purposes of their study to differentiate between platforms with cooperative and non-cooperative structures. Specifically, they distinguished between limited liability companies (srl), consortia, cooperatives, joint-stock companies (spa), benefit corporations, limited partnerships (sas), and associations.

For platforms dedicated to psychologists and for the purposes of the current study, it seems sufficient to distinguish between platforms whose corporate objective is profit and those that are non-profit. Knowing whether a platform is a for-profit or non-profit organization facilitates an understanding of not only the organizational model but also the corporate mission. This information is particularly interesting because it provides insight into the organizational context of which the worker becomes a part. The implications can be significant not only for the platform itself but also for the psychologist who chooses to work there. Profitability is a necessary objective for the sustainability of a business. Consequently, it is more likely that policies aimed at achieving this goal, such as customer retention mechanisms and promotional activities, will be found in a profit-oriented context.

However, in the context discussed, the client is a patient, and the service is a psychological intervention. In this sense, the indicator raises questions and suggests a point of reflection on the possible direction of the platform model, which might lead to the commodification of psychological services. Therefore, for this indicator, named “relationship between platform and psychologist,” the following variants are proposed: profit and non-profit.

3.5.2 Geographic Scope of the Platform (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

This indicator concerns the geographical area within which the platform aims to provide its services. Eurofound’s (2018) classification distinguishes between platforms that operate on a regional/national level and those that offer services across different countries or on an international scale. Bonifacio et al. (2022) include a third category of platforms—those that provide services at the local level—

because proximity to the territorial context emerges is a significant aspect of their classification of welfare platforms,

The current study proposes a two-level classification: local and supra-local, as this distinction considers implications that are relevant to the psychological profession. Specifically, the ability to provide psychological interventions through digital channels has rendered borders between regions, nations, and even continents invisible. Indeed, the first psychological platforms in our country were created to provide services to Italians abroad and are still widely used by expats who prefer to speak with a psychologist in their mother tongue. For this reason, differentiation between the national and international levels becomes less relevant, as an Italian abroad only needs to search online to find a platform in their native language. Therefore, the language in which the service is provided becomes a central characteristic of a complete classification of psychological platforms. However, this characteristic may serve as a separate indicator and is therefore discussed in a later section.

Regarding the geographical scope, the possibility of distinguishing between platforms at a local or supra-local level seems sufficient in the context of psychological interventions, as it can highlight the presence or absence of a connection with the territory. Specifically, platforms that operate exclusively at a local level may sometimes originate from an initiative by the public sector, third sector, or collaborations between the two and may have a strong relationship with the local territory, becoming a reference point for mental health in the community. For this reason, a professional providing psychological intervention through these platforms is more likely to be embedded in a local professional network, and their professional reputation will be more closely tied to the local context. In this sense, mechanisms such as word of mouth or referrals by a professional in the social and health sector (e.g., social worker, midwife, doctor) will be more frequent means of matching supply and demand. Conversely, when psychological platforms operate at a supra-local level, they are essentially detached from the territory and develop exclusively online. Here, the psychologist's digital identity becomes central to publicizing their professional activity: the psychologist's website and social networks are indispensable channels for reaching potential patients. Similarly, the psychologist's reputation is built through digital channels, and their reference community will also be digital, whether internal or external to the platform.

In light of the above, the platform's connection to the territory is a significant characteristic that can create an important differentiation within the category under examination. As can be seen from the specificities listed, the connection with other local entities, such as cooperatives, counseling centers, associations, and other third-sector and public-sector organizations, has various implications in terms of impact on the psychological profession and the role of the psychologist.

3.5.3 Sector, Occupations (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

The occupational sector indicator allows for a division based on the nature of the services provided through the platform. Eurofound employs this methodology using two classification codes, ISCO-08⁷ and NACE⁸, which represent the International Standard Classification of Occupations and the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community, respectively. The platforms examined in the Weplat project are categorized using these codes and according to whether they belong to the welfare sector, which includes health, social and health care, education, and childcare.

For psychological platforms, while maintaining references to ISCO-08 and NACE codes, it is crucial to distinguish between psychological and health platforms. This initial distinction allows us to understand whether the digital infrastructure provides only psychological services or the user also has access to other healthcare services. In the health sector, many platforms offer not only psychological services but also medical, physiotherapy, nursing, midwifery, and other services. Additionally, within the first group, it is essential to differentiate between psychological and psychotherapy services. This distinction is central in a context where the patient directly approaches the market offer. There is often a great deal of confusion in this regard, and many patients are not aware of the differences between a psychological counseling process and psychotherapy. Given the easy accessibility to psychological wellbeing services made possible by new technologies, patients today are rarely guided in the decision-making process or directed toward a professional based on their diagnostic needs.

Thus, the occupational sector indicator will have the following variants: psychological platforms (psychological services, psychotherapy services) and health platforms.

⁷ <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco08/>

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/competition/mergers/cases/index/nace_all.html

3.5.4 Transparency of the Psychologist's Profile (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

The seventh indicator outlined by Eurofound (2018) concerns the transparency of user and worker profiles within the platform and distinguishes these as either anonymous or open. Profile visibility refers to the availability of public information about the platform's workers and users. For instance, on a platform dedicated to babysitting services, one might simultaneously view the profiles of both babysitters and parents, representing both supply and demand. This characteristic, however, is clearly inconceivable for psychological platforms for several reasons. First, due to current privacy regulations, patient profiles on platforms used for psychological interventions cannot be made public. Moreover, even if legal, ethical, or professional issues did not exist, it is easy to imagine the fear and reluctance a patient would feel if asked to create a personal profile on a platform dedicated to mental health. For these reasons, in the classification of psychological platforms proposed in this work, the "profile transparency" indicator will refer exclusively to the workers' profiles, namely, those of the psychologists providing their professional services through the platform.

Bonifacio et al. (2022) introduce another element related to user registration. Specifically, the authors suggest distinguishing between platforms that allow free access to information about workers and users and those that require registration or a fee to view such profiles. This distinction also represents a significant variant for the platforms considered here, as it has implications for the digital identity of the psychologist. The anonymity of professionals on the platform, understood as the inability of potential clients to access information such as resumes, professional experiences, and areas of expertise, makes it unnecessary for the psychologist to create a personal presentation page. Thus, professional identities and self-promotion must be built outside the platform, for instance, on the psychologist's personal website, social networks, or other platforms the professional uses to practice. Conversely, an open profile, even if its accessibility is subject to a fee, implies the presence of a descriptive page for the professional within the platform where the patient can access information about the psychologist. The platform in this case becomes a medium through which workers can position themselves in the market, making their skills and areas of intervention visible and accessible. However, the registration requirement poses a limitation on a professional's self-promotion, as the information is accessible only to those registered on the platform and not to the entire market represented by the demand. Therefore, professionals will likely build their digital identity outside the platform and not rely exclusively on a digital intermediary.

The proposed indicator will thus be labeled "transparency of the psychologist's profile," distinguishing between publicly visible identity, privately visible identity, and anonymity.

3.5.5 Fees to the Platform (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

This indicator refers to the timing of the payment for the service. Eurofound distinguishes between platforms that require payment 1) at the time of registration, 2) when the matching occurs, and 3) after the service is provided. For an adequate classification of psychological platforms and to ensure greater clarity, it is advisable to distinguish between the roles of professionals and patients. In this context, the service is twofold. Platforms dedicated to psychological services may require payment from both psychologists and those requesting psychological intervention. For professionals, payment options may include 1) at registration (a one-time payment to the platform), 2) subscription-based (monthly, annual, etc.), 3) per service (a percentage paid to the platform when a psychological intervention is performed), 4) per contact (a percentage paid to the platform when a patient requests an intervention), 5) after matching, 6) periodically, or 7) free registration. On the other hand, patients may be required to pay 1) per service, 2) in packages (payment for multiple sessions), 3) a subscription (monthly, annual, etc.), 4) per contact (to request a contact with a psychologist), or 5) after matching.

The authors who proposed the mapping of welfare platforms have added the option of a free service. For our purposes, it is appropriate to include this option, as patients are sometimes exempt from payment. Psychological platforms often provide an initial consultation between the patient and the psychologist free of charge. In other cases, more than one meeting may be free, especially when the service is offered by public-sector or third-sector entities. Therefore, we will add option 6) free service to the payment variants required from the patient.

3.5.6 Mode of Payment (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

This indicator, differentiated in the same way as the classifications considered here (Eurofound, 2018; Bonifacio et al., 2022), identifies whether the service is paid for within or outside the platform. It evaluates whether the platform plays an active role in processing the payment or simply intermediates between supply and demand, with payment management handled by the client and the worker.

For psychological platforms, this distinction can also be useful, although it is appropriate to highlight more prominently any additional operational role the platform might take. Specifically, in some cases, the platform not only manages the payment but also handles invoicing. As a result, the psychologist will not have to issue an invoice for each patient but will instead issue a single invoice (e.g., monthly) to the platform. This type of service provided by the platform assists the professional in managing their activities, particularly in terms of accounting. This impacts the psychologist's practices, which may be altered due to the use of the technological intermediary under consideration. Thus, the

proposed variants for this indicator are as follows: 1) managed and invoiced by the psychologist, 2) managed and invoiced by the platform, and 3) managed by the platform and invoiced by the psychologist.

3.5.7 Autonomy of the Psychologist (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

The eleventh indicator outlined by Eurofound and in the Weplat project focuses on the level of autonomy of workers using the platform to carry out their activities. This relates to both the management of working hours and the setting of service prices. Specifically, the proposed variants are of two types: the first refers to platforms that adopt a hierarchical model, characterized by low autonomy, where the platform sets both the hours and the prices; the second is configured as a market model with high autonomy for workers, where they are allowed to determine the rates and schedules for their work.

Regarding psychological platforms, the autonomy of the professional emerges as a central topic in the discussion. Psychologists who choose to become sole traders are typically looking for work that allows them complete control over their activities without being subject to corporate directives or constraints. In the platform model, the widespread contractual form of collaboration is potentially ideal for such professionals seeking independence. Numerous platforms that serve purely as intermediaries between supply and demand do not impose price restrictions on the psychologist. However, in the Italian market, many platforms offer patients a fixed pricing model, whether it involves a single service or packages that include multiple sessions. This relates to the platform's competitiveness in the market, as the ability to offer competitive rates affects the platform's success. On the other hand, this inevitably impacts the autonomy of the psychologist, who cannot freely set a rate based on professional criteria and contextual factors. Professional criteria may include factors such as professional experience, possession of a psychotherapy license, or the number of areas of specialization. Contextual criteria might involve elements such as the cost of living in a particular city (psychologists in Milan generally charge higher rates than those in Crotone) and any office rental costs if the service is provided in person.

Similarly, the way the activity is conducted, such as the platform setting the psychologist's working hours, can restrict the professional's autonomy. Few platforms impose a predetermined work schedule (e.g., 8–12:00, 14:00–18:00); rather, psychologists are often required to guarantee certain working days (weekdays and holidays) and time slots (daytime or evening). It is common for psychologists to be asked to ensure that they will be available for a certain number of hours per week or month, and in some cases, platforms ask the professional how many hours per week they wish to

work. In any case, this factor also contributes to reducing the professional autonomy of the psychologist and opens reflections related to the theme of power. Specifically, professionals who, due to a lack of work, are forced to work through a platform may be inclined to accept any conditions, whether related to pricing or hours, placing themselves in an asymmetric situation where the platform holds all the power. This could be more likely in poorer geographical areas with high unemployment rates. Consequently, there is a potential drift in the psychological platform economy where only the most disadvantaged professionals choose to rely on digital intermediation.

Following Eurofound and Weplat, an index named “autonomy of the psychologist” is adopted, which distinguishes platforms with a hierarchical model from those with a market model, which uses pricing and modes of exercising the activity as criteria for differentiation. However, in cases where the platform adopts some elements of both models, it will assume a model called “mixed.”

3.5.8 Platform Support (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

This indicator focuses on the additional services offered by the platform beyond its primary function of facilitating the meeting between supply and demand. Over the years, platforms have evolved beyond merely acting as intermediaries between clients and workers. As a result, Eurofound and Weplat focus on services such as activity management, user support, pre-screening of offers, and worker training. First, it is important to distinguish between the services provided to the psychologists who work through the platform and those dedicated to patients. For the first category, a classification is proposed that seems to reflect the main types of assistance offered to professionals by psychological platforms and differentiates between technical support, clinical support, and administrative support. The first group includes all services related to the technical management of the digital tool as well as activities aimed at training psychologists in the use of the technological mediator. These activities are central to this type of platform because the scientific literature has shown that the strong skepticism within the psychology community toward using new technologies in professional practice is closely linked to a lack of technical skills. The restrictions due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic have, in this sense, made psychologists more willing to use technology, and an increase in registration requests on platforms has been seen. Thus, technical support for professionals is clearly essential to ensure a quality service. The second category of support dedicated to psychologists refers to activities managed by the platform that support clinical practice. These may include training services, in-depth exploration of psychological disorders and conditions, professional updates, supervision activities, and peer discussions. This type of support is found on platforms that go beyond simply matching supply and demand and accompany the professional in their development. Finally, administrative support refers to services provided by the platform related to billing management and training

psychologists in accounting. This type of service is also central, as taking the first steps as independent professionals can be challenging, especially for younger professionals. This section does not mention additional services related to activities disconnected from professional practice, opting instead to create a dedicated index that is discussed in a later section.

On the patient side, we draw from the classifications taken as starting models, specifically the “user support” variant, which is here called “patient support.” This includes activities such as technical support in using the platform, solving technical problems, and help with choosing the most appropriate service.

The indicator is thus named “platform support,” and support for the psychologist (technical, clinical, administrative) is distinguished from support for the patient.

3.5.9 Type of Contract between Platform and Psychologist (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

Eurofound distinguishes this indicator into employment contracts and civil law contracts. For psychological platforms, it is deemed appropriate to differentiate between collaboration contracts and subordinate employment contracts. The literature shows a heated debate regarding the classification of platform workers as self-employed, which is considered an interesting topic of discussion concerning professional psychologists.

Until recently, there was a widespread belief that self-employed workers generally had better remuneration and working conditions than employees (Mingione, 2020). However, especially with the development of the platform economy, it has become clear that this belief is not based on reality. In fact, platforms have no obligations toward professionals in terms of minimum wages, taxes, or social security contributions (Schwab, 2016). On the one hand, as platform workers are not employees, they can choose their working hours and decide both when and how much to work. On the other, companies might choose to accept services only from those who are willing to work for a certain number of hours and during specific periods of the day. Moreover, traditionally, self-employed workers offer services to various clients. In contrast, especially in oligopoly or monopoly regimes, platform workers often end up working exclusively for one company. Platforms might consequently hold significant power over workers without bearing any responsibility toward them (Crouch, 2019).

Another relevant topic for this study is platform work as an alternative to unemployment. Many workers choose to become self-employed because they cannot find regular employment; indeed, the rise of precarious work has led entire groups of workers to accept professional conditions under which

they relinquish their rights to work, representation, and negotiation. This situation could also be true of psychologists, and it is important to explore their motivations in choosing to become platform workers.

Therefore, the proposed distinction between collaboration contracts and subordinate employment contracts is central but not exhaustive. For this reason, as proposed in the Weplat classification, we include the contractual conditions and merge Eurofound indicators 14 and 15, related to social protection and representation, to create a section that uniformly addresses labor law issues. This index is named “type of contract between platform and psychologists.”

3.5.10 Users (Indicator Derived From Eurofound and Weplat)

Following the Weplat project, this indicator (referred to as “clients” in Eurofound) has been renamed “users” because some platforms offer services that are not paid. Following Bonifacio et al. (2022) as well as Eurofound, we distinguish service users between public organizations, private organizations, and individual citizens. In the context of this study, this distinction can be particularly useful because a rapidly growing trend in the mental health platform market is psychological counseling services for employees. In such cases, even though the final patient remains the individual person, the platform user—who makes the request and pays for the service—is the organization.

3.5.11 Psychologist Selection (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

This indicator identifies who makes the match between the worker and the client. Like Eurofound, the Weplat project considered the following variants: client/user, platform, operator, or third parties. For the classification of platforms dedicated to psychologists, no platforms have been identified in which the professional directly selects the patient or selects from a list of patients provided by the digital infrastructure. However, in some cases, the psychologist can choose whether to accept or refuse a patient’s request for intervention, for example, because they do not consider themselves the appropriate specialist for that person. More frequently, it is the patient who makes the choice by entering the platform and browsing the profiles of the various professionals available. In this case, there may be mediation by the platform itself, which, through an algorithm or via an operator performing this operation manually, selects a group of psychologists according to the patient’s request. However, even in these circumstances, it is the patient who makes the final choice. Finally, more and more platforms are offering a matching service, either algorithmic or manual, that directly pairs a patient with a psychologist. In this case, the individual must fill out an initial questionnaire, which often requires information about their symptoms or psychological and physical conditions.

Subsequently, based on these data, the platform suggests a psychologist to the patient, allowing them the option to accept or reject.

This indicator allows us to reflect on how the implications differ between the patient's selection of the professional and a match proposed by the platform. In traditional practice, the patient's decision-making process is considered an important phase of the therapeutic process itself and a foundation for building the relationship between the patient and the psychologist. When the platform makes the match, through an algorithm or manually by an operator, these assumptions are removed, with possible repercussions that future research should explore. Moreover, when a direct match is made, the criteria used by the platform become central. The initial questionnaire, which platforms frequently use, assumes a method of data collection that focuses on certain types of information while inevitably excluding others. For this reason, it is necessary to understand the choice of criteria that different platforms use in processing information and making matches, observing the possible outcomes in terms of effectiveness.

Regarding the selection criteria, the following considerations may be relevant. First, whether the psychologist works online or in person, they may have been chosen by the patient because they were recommended by another professional who considered them suitable for the intervention requested by the patient. In this sense, a selection, preceding the patient's choice, has already been made by a specialist in the social and health sector, such as a doctor, social worker, or educator. This presupposes the existence of a network among professionals based on competence and interprofessional trust criteria. Trust is also an important criterion when the psychologist is recommended by a relative, friend, or acquaintance: as when a referral is made by a professional, there is a kind of pre-selection in this circumstance that can be useful for building the relationship between psychologist and patient, as the latter is more likely to start the process with a positive attitude.

Given the above, the indicator is named "selection of the psychologist," and the following variants are proposed: patient choice (direct or mediated by the platform) and platform matching (algorithmic or manual).

3.5.12 Required Qualifications (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

Eurofound's "required skills" indicator identifies what is necessary to work on the specific platform and distinguishes between low, medium, and high skills. In addition, the Weplat classification includes a differentiation regarding whether an educational qualification is required. The platforms we analyzed, offering psychological services, are environments where professionals are highly qualified. Some platforms in the Italian market require workers to have a specialization in

psychotherapy or be enrolled in a psychotherapy school as a barrier to entry. Others only require a master's degree in psychology and registration with the Order of Psychologists, which remains the minimum requirement to work through psychological platforms.

Therefore, an indicator named "required qualifications" is suggested that divides platforms based on the psychologist's eligibility, such as registration with the Order of Psychologists, enrollment in a psychotherapy school, or possession of a specialization in psychotherapy.

3.5.13 Format of Service Provision (Indicator Derived from Eurofound and Weplat)

As regards the service delivery method, Eurofound distinguishes between online, in-person with operator and client in the same place, and in-person with operator and client in different locations. As with welfare platforms, the distinction between the types of platforms where the service is provided in person loses relevance since a psychological intervention conducted in person necessarily occurs in a single location. Furthermore, the item in the Weplat project concerning the home-based nature of the service is not suitable for our study and is therefore not considered. Consequently, in the current study, the variants of interest are online and in person.

However, based on the literature on the topic of telepsychology, it is necessary to include an additional differentiation within the first group related to the tool that enables contact between psychologist and patient. Firstly, platforms can be distinguished between those providing services that involve synchronous interaction between professionals and patients and those offering services exclusively through asynchronous means. Moreover, while the vast majority of platforms that provide online interaction offers psychological intervention services via videoconferencing, cases of consultations through different digital media, such as telephone, chat, or email, are not infrequent. Therefore, in a detailed classification of the technological mediator under examination, it is considered useful to include these data as well.

3.5.14 Reputational Mechanisms (Indicator Derived from Weplat)

This indicator is not present in the classification proposed by Eurofound, but it was added in the work on welfare platforms (Weplat). The authors considered it important to highlight the role of the performance evaluation system for operators based on reviews. Specifically, there are platforms where brief textual comments from users who have used the offered service can be found. The three types found for welfare platforms refer to reviews that are 1) present and visible to the public, 2) present but not visible to users accessing the platform, and 3) absent.

As the platform model has spread, psychologists have also found themselves being evaluated within the infrastructure they use in their professional practice. This has sparked debate, for example,

regarding the competencies of patients who leave a judgment on the performance of a highly qualified professional. In addition, there is questioning about the object of the review itself, that is, whether the platform, the service offered, or the psychologist is being evaluated. If the latter, the question is raised of what, precisely, patients are evaluating: relational modalities, professionalism, competencies, or something else.

Moreover, reviews play a significant role in the construction of the psychologist's professional reputation. This marks a departure from the traditional context, as the reputation is based on patient evaluations rather than recognition of competencies and skills by the professional community. In the platform model, a psychologist's good name is constructed through the judgments of people who, even though they have used the service, may not be able to determine its quality level. Even work experience becomes a blurred criterion, as reviews can result in a newly practicing professional who receives good reviews enjoying a better professional reputation than a psychologist with many years of experience and diverse training. Additionally, in a traditional context, building a professional reputation typically happens rather slowly, developing over the years. New technologies, characterized by great speed from multiple perspectives, also accelerate the recognition processes, leading to potential issues. For example, if a young professional who is still in the early stages of constructing a professional identity is highly rated by patients, they may enjoy a reputation that does not reflect actual professional solidity. Conversely, a very experienced psychologist who struggles with, for instance, the use of technological mediators might be judged negatively by patients, compromising their professional reputation.

Furthermore, reviews, especially in a personal services context, cannot be considered a completely reliable tool. For instance, when the service involves personal interaction, people are unlikely to leave negative feedback, as they know they could harm the professional. Therefore, when dissatisfied with the service, users prefer not to leave feedback (Arcidiacono & Pais, 2016). Additionally, positive reviews may be written more frequently and emphasized since the user knows they are rewarding the worker in terms of visibility. Another discussion point that represents a potential drift of reputational mechanisms that is worth noting is the possibility that the psychologist may adapt their clinical practice and way of relating to the patient to be positively reviewed, thus putting therapeutic objectives second.

Considering the relationship between professional and platform, reviews can serve as a monitoring and control function over the worker's activities. Unlike a Tayloristic organizational model, where activity evaluation is the responsibility of a manager equipped with the necessary competencies for such a task, the platform model eliminates the managerial figure, replacing it with professional

evaluation based on patient judgments. In this sense, the platform becomes what Kornberger et al. (2017) call an evaluative infrastructure that delegates control to the patients while retaining power. Given the above and with the proviso that the variants proposed here may represent only the beginning of a broader debate concerning reputational mechanisms in the platform economy for psychologists, we propose present, present but not visible, and absent within the platform.

3.5.15 Exclusivity (Ad Hoc Indicator)

This indicator has not been identified in other platform classifications, but it has been specifically created here based on a desk analysis of platforms dedicated to psychological services. It was deemed necessary to distinguish between platforms that require professionals to use only that specific platform in their professional practice and those that do not impose an exclusivity requirement. This indicator allows reflection on how professionals manage their work, which has implications for their professional activities and identity.

A psychologist bound to the exclusive use of a single platform can choose to work either in-person or online as a freelancer but cannot use the demand intermediation services of another platform. Such a requirement binds the professional more closely to the organization itself, whose corporate rules and management practices will influence their activities. From this, one can infer that the construction and development of the professional identity of a psychologist working through a platform with an exclusivity requirement will be influenced solely by that platform apart from any professional activities outside the technological mediator. In contrast, a professional who uses the intermediation services of multiple platforms will be less constrained by individual organizations and can thus have a more diversified professional path in terms of activity execution and identity development. On the other hand, a platform that requires exclusivity, if it also supports the professional in their professional activities, can become a valuable support for the psychologist. Particularly for young professionals just starting in the workforce, a platform that offers support services to the worker can become a growth environment for developing knowledge, skills, and abilities, impacting professional identity. Hence, the following variants are considered: exclusive relationship and non-exclusive relationship.

3.5.16 Language of Service (Ad Hoc Indicator)

At the beginning of this section, reference was made to the ability of psychological platforms to make workers geographically unbounded, allowing them to offer their services anywhere in the world. However, language can inevitably create a barrier between psychologist and patient. For this reason, this indicator has been created as it can distinguish, first, between platforms that provide their services in multiple language options and those that offer monolingual content. In the first case, the platform addresses different patient groups, ensuring broader development and recognition in multiple markets; and second, according to the psychologist's language proficiency: some platforms offer the psychological services of professionals who know more than one language. In this case, beyond the language in which the digital tool is presented, the worker provides the psychological service in multiple different languages. This feature can be helpful for foreign patients who, despite knowing the language in which the platform is presented, prefer to find a psychologist with whom they can express themselves in their native language.

For this reason, the indicator is composed as follows: monolingual content, multilingual content, monolingual service, and multilingual service.

3.5.17 Extraprofessional Services for Psychologists (Ad Hoc Indicator)

This indicator, like the previous ones, is not present in Eurofound or the Weplat project, but it has been created here because the mapping revealed the presence of numerous platforms that, in addition to providing support related to the professional practice of psychologists, offer another type of service. As previously discussed in the indicator named "platform support," this includes all the activities carried out by the digital organization aimed at assisting the professional in terms of technical, clinical, and administrative support. However, some platforms offer their psychologists services that could be defined as corporate welfare, as they are made available to improve their private and professional lives. Specifically, activities such as fitness courses, yoga sessions, gym discounts, and more have been observed.

A platform could offer such services for many reasons. Firstly, there is the desire of an organization to create a positive work environment for the professionals who use it for their activities. However, it is worth noting that this occurs in a context where the contracts between the platform and psychologists are, in most cases, for collaboration rather than employment. Therefore, one might assume that the adoption of corporate welfare services is part of a strategy to retain freelance workers, making the platform more competitive than others. The same logic underlies events organized by the platform, both online and in person, designed as times when psychologists working with the same

organization to meet and gather. Examples include annual events, such as the company's anniversary or team-building meetings, which serve as networking opportunities among professionals. Organizing these opportunities to socialize can help create a professional community within the platform, responding to a need for belonging. Workers in the gig economy, such as freelancers, have a weak affiliation with an organization and often lack organizational attachment (Spreitzer et al., 2017). For this reason, it is understandable that platforms wanting to retain psychologists present themselves as organizations capable of meeting workers' belonging needs offer services and organize events dedicated to the worker. Therefore, the extraprofessional services offered to psychologists aim to create a favorable organizational climate and foster an internal community on the platform that can serve as a professional and identity reference point.

Thus, the proposed indicator comprises the variants “welfare services and networking events” or “absent” if such services are not present.

3.5.18 Gamification Mechanisms (Ad Hoc Indicator)

The final proposed indicator refers to a topic studied within the literature on platforms, specifically, the mechanisms of gamification. Some platforms use game elements to keep both clients and operators engaged according to a retention logic (Gera & Hasdell, 2020). It is essential to bear in mind that the sustainability of the platform model is based on the active and continuous participation of a good number of users. Keeping clients and professionals engaged, therefore, is a valuable goal. Platforms often use reviews left by clients who have purchased a product or used a service as a criterion on which to base the gamification mechanism. The more positive the reviews, the more benefits the worker receives—for example, the “Superhost” badge for property owners on the Airbnb platform (Liang et al., 2017). This label, which acts as a kind of reward given by the organization based on traveler ratings, ensures greater visibility and becomes a symbol of the quality of the service provided.

Gamification mechanisms are also observed, albeit to a limited extent, on platforms dedicated to psychology professionals. However, it is believed that as these technological mediators develop, this phenomenon could increase. An example that can help the reader understand the potential risks in adopting such strategies is found on platforms that mediate between supply and demand by providing patients with a list of professionals to choose from. The platform will “showcase” psychologists who have received better ratings, making them more visible to patients seeking psychological intervention. From the mapping conducted, no gamification mechanisms were detected for patients; however,

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observing what has happened to platforms in other sectors, it can be hypothesized that such elements might be adopted in the health sector in the future.

For these reasons, concerning the indicator reported here, we distinguish gamification mechanisms as targeted at psychologists, targeted at patients, or absent.

1	Relationship between platform and psychologist -profit -non-profit
2	Geographic scope of the platform -local -supralocal
3	Sector, occupations -psychological platforms (psychological services, psychotherapy services) -health platforms
4	Transparency of the psychologist's profile -publicly visible identity -private visible identity -anonymity
5	Fees to the platform For the psychologist: -during registration (one-off payment to the platform) -on subscription (monthly, annual, etc.) -per service (a percentage is paid to the platform when a psychological intervention is carried out) -on contact (a percentage is paid to the platform when a patient requests an intervention) -successful matching -periodically -enrolment is free of charge For the patient: -by service -per package (payment for several sessions)

	-by subscription (monthly, annual, etc.) -by contact (to make a contact request to a psychologist) -successful matching -free service
6	Mode of payment -managed and invoiced by the psychologist -managed and invoiced by the platform -managed by the platform and invoiced by the psychologist
7	Autonomy of the psychologist -hierarchy-like (low autonomy) (working time restrictions imposed by platform; price determined by platform) -market-like (high autonomy) (worker free to choose when and how long to work; price determined by platform) -mixed
8	Platform support -support for the psychologist (technical, clinical, administrative) -patient guidance
9	Type of contract between platform and psychologist -collaboration contracts -employment contracts Also report: -contractual conditions -social protection -representation
10	Users -private individual -public or private organization
11	Psychologist selection -patient selection (direct or platform-mediated) -matching by the platform (algorithmic or manual)
12	Required qualifications

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	-enrolment in the Order of Psychologists -enrolment in school of psychotherapy -specialization in psychotherapy
13	Format of service provision -online (synchronous or asynchronous; tool used) -on location
14	Reputational mechanisms -present -present and not visible -absent
15	Exclusivity -exclusive relationship -non-exclusive relationship
16	Language of service -monolingual content -multilingual content -monolingual service -multilingual service
17	Extra-professional services for psychologists -welfare services -networking events -absent
18	Gamification mechanisms -addressed to the psychologist -addressed to the patient -absent

Table 3: Indicators for the classification of psychological platforms.

3.6 Conclusion

This research highlights the internal variety of the world of psychological platforms present in the Italian landscape, emphasizing their different characteristics. Firstly, the mapping of psychological platforms involved the systematic collection and analysis of information on the various platforms available to provide online psychological support. This process included evaluating different aspects of the platforms, offering an overview that can be used to better understand the sector. Indeed, mapping provided a comprehensive picture of the different platforms available, illuminating the variety and breadth of options available in the field of online psychology.

Additionally, the work of developing ad hoc indicators for platforms dedicated to psychological services was useful in classifying the phenomenon itself. Indicators allow for the transformation of abstract concepts into measurable data, enabling comparisons between different situations. Moreover, they help break down a complex phenomenon into simpler components, facilitating the analysis of underlying causes and contributing factors.

It follows that the work carried out in this chapter, involving the mapping and creation of indicators useful for classifying psychological platforms, can help shed light on a complex and continuously evolving phenomenon. Having a clear understanding of the current state of affairs allows the current context to be captured and its various manifestations to be identified. For this reason, before proceeding with the case study, I considered it important to further explore the current state of psychological platforms in Italy to understand the many directions they have taken. I found it useful to undertake this analysis because it is necessary to know the context within which the subject of investigation is positioned. Without a clear understanding of the current landscape, the results of the case study could be misinterpreted. A contextual analysis can reveal perspectives and dimensions of the phenomenon that might otherwise not be considered, enriching the overall interpretation and understanding. In this sense, understanding the context allows for a more precise and meaningful interpretation of the results, considering external factors that could influence the case. Furthermore, the preliminary analysis helps to assess how representative the studied case is of the broader phenomenon. This is important to position one's study within a wider landscape, highlighting its specificities and peculiarities.

Specifically, the indicators developed based on the mapping will allow me, in Chapter IV, to classify the platform that is the subject of this work's case study. In this way, I will be able to place the analyzed digital organization within the vast landscape of platforms dedicated to psychologists. Additionally, doing so will enable me to show how the characteristics of the studied platform, captured through classification, can affect the professional identity of platform psychologists. In this sense, the present work will show how the use of a digital platform for exercising the psychological

profession, declined in the specificities of the studied organization, impacts the processes of the identity construction of psychologists. However, although the results of my study will be intrinsically linked to the investigated platform, similar reflections could be extended to platforms with the same characteristics. Thus, with the appropriate adjustments and considering the indicators developed here, the findings of this study may be useful to other researchers exploring the professional identity of platform psychologists.

Chapter 4. Presentation and Classification of the Unobravo Platform

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the platform that is the subject of the case study for this study. Specifically, before proceeding with the analysis of the collected data regarding the processes of construction and development of the professional identity of psychologists using the Unobravo platform, I considered it essential to provide the reader with a clear overview of the company. Thus, the following sections describe the core business, history, and organizational structure of Unobravo.

In scientific research, presenting the organizational context in which data are collected is crucial for several reasons. First, it allows the collected data to be placed within a specific frame of reference to show the internal dynamics and socio-material conditions on which the findings are based. Describing the context gives a useful perspective to identify and understand the characteristics and dimensions at play. The results of a case study are inevitably influenced by specific aspects of the context in which they were collected, which offer insights for a more relevant and meaningful interpretation. Hence, the idea emerged of presenting the characteristics of the Unobravo platform using the indicators specifically designed and constructed for the classification of Italian psychological platforms described in the previous chapter. This process allows for a detailed analysis of the specificities of the platform under examination, providing the reader with a complete picture of the context in which identity processes occur and develop. Furthermore, a thorough description of the organizational context enhances the transparency of the research, enabling other scholars to replicate the study in similar contexts and opening discussions of the applicability of the results of this study to other psychological platforms based on the characteristics and specificities they present.

The content reported in this chapter is the result of a multi-level information-gathering effort. Firstly, the chapter's drafting relied on the research work conducted in 2023 through the Weplat project, culminating in a recent scientific contribution⁹. This research project served as my starting point for exploring the topic of psychological platforms and was a preliminary stage aimed at collecting essential data and information. This initial phase enabled me to lay the foundation for the development of the research project contained in this work, which is centered on the analysis of the Unobravo platform and specifically focused on the professional identity of psychologists operating through this platform.

⁹ Reference: Gambirasio, M., Ivaldi, S., Mainieri, M., Manzo, C., Negri, A., Scaratti, G., ... & Zampino, L. (2024). Unobravo. In *Il welfare alla prova delle piattaforme. Lavoro e servizi di cura nella transizione digitale* (pp. 171–202). Fondazione Feltrinelli.

To proceed with the study of Unobravo, I systematically collected information about the company through an in-depth desk analysis of its website. This analysis allowed me to gather significant data concerning the services offered and the platform's history and operational methods. A further crucial element of my study was the collection of information through semi-structured interviews with the heads of the various departmental teams within the company. Talking directly with the heads of Unobravo proved to be an effective strategy for obtaining data useful for understanding the general functioning of the platform and the internal dynamics of the organization.

Below is a table summarizing the interviews conducted, specifying the roles of the interviewees within the company and the dates on which the interviews were conducted:

Interview No.	Professional Role	Date
Int. 1 HO	Team Leader Manager	11/09/2023
Int. 2 HO	Clinical Director	13/09/2023
Int. 3 HO	Team: HR	11/10/2023
Int. 4 HO	Team: B2B	11/10/2023
Int. 5 HO	Team: Product	12/10/2023
Int. 6 HO	Team: Customer Success	13/10/2023
Int. 7 HO	Team: Marketing e Comms	21/11/2023

Table 4: Interviews with Unobravo Team Leaders.

The various sources of information allowed me to construct a comprehensive overview of the organization and management of Unobravo. This process of data collection and analysis was a fundamental step in beginning to understand the organizational structure within which psychologists operate. As previously highlighted, in-depth knowledge of the organizational context is essential for correctly interpreting the processes of construction and development of the professional identity of platform psychologists, providing an appropriate basis for the analyses presented in the subsequent chapters of the study.

4.2 Presentation of the Unobravo Platform

4.2.1 Core Business

Unobravo S.r.l. is the leading Italian platform offering online psychological counseling services, founded in 2019 and rapidly evolving into an innovative startup in 2020. The company facilitates the meeting of users who wish to undertake a psychological support journey online and qualified psychologists or psychotherapists, providing effective intermediation and a user-friendly digital platform for delivering psychological consultations.

Although Unobravo's operational headquarters is in Milan, its legal and administrative office is in Casalnuovo di Napoli, the hometown of the founder, Danila De Stefano. This strategic choice allows the company to maintain a connection with its roots while operating in a highly professional and dynamic context. Unobravo adopts a flexible work model, allowing employees and collaborators to choose among different work modalities: online, hybrid, or in-person at co-working spaces or the company's physical headquarters. This flexibility is designed to be adaptable to individual needs and promote an inclusive and productive work environment.

Unobravo's primary goal is to make psychological support accessible and flexible for an increasing number of people through online sessions. However, the widespread stigma that still surrounds psychological wellbeing and the role of the psychologist makes it essential to take action to combat the adverse perceptions of therapy and the negative social representation of seeking help from a psychologist. For this reason, since its inception, Unobravo has launched numerous educational initiatives about mental health and psychological wellbeing. Among these, the #DilloLiberamente campaign, now in its second round, stands out for its promotion of self-care, prevention, and the fight against stigma.

In 2022, Unobravo further expanded its services to include family, couple, and group therapy and services dedicated to businesses. These services offer tailored programs to meet various organizational needs, allowing the clients to take care of their employees' psychological wellbeing through customized packages. In 2022, Unobravo also expanded its offerings beyond national borders with the creation of Buencoco, an online psychology platform based in Spain. This expansion aims to make mental wellbeing increasingly accessible to a broader audience by promoting the Unobravo method.

Finally, Unobravo adopts a multidisciplinary approach to ensure patient care that goes beyond simple psychological counseling. The platform collaborates with various professionals who work synergistically to promote the patients' physical and psychological wellbeing. The Unobravo team includes psychotherapists and nutritionists, personal trainers, and psychiatrists. Nutritionists, for

example, work to improve patients' eating habits, recognizing the importance of nutrition for mental health. Personal trainers contribute to the physical wellness program by implementing exercise regimens that can relieve stress symptoms and improve mood. Psychiatrists provide essential support for patients who require medical evaluations and pharmacological treatments, completing the therapeutic framework offered by Unobravo.

When required, the interaction among these professionals allows for the creation of personalized and integrated treatment plans that holistically address the patient's needs. Each professional brings specific expertise, contributing to a comprehensive view of psychophysical wellbeing. This integrated approach is particularly effective in treating complex disorders that may have psychological and physical components and aims to provide the patient with a comprehensive and coordinated therapeutic intervention. Adopting a multidisciplinary model represents a significant evolution in online psychological counseling that aims to offer a range of services that meet the diverse needs of patients.

4.2.2 History of the Company

Unobravo was founded in 2019 when psychologist Danila De Stefano, then in London, realized the difficulties that Italians abroad face in accessing psychological support in their native language. These difficulties, both financial and linguistic, led her to create an online psychological counseling service aimed at Italians living abroad. De Stefano combined her professional skills with a passion for digital innovation to launch this initiative, initially creating a Facebook page where she offered online therapy sessions. The service quickly gained popularity, prompting De Stefano to officially found Unobravo. From the outset, Unobravo distinguished itself with a matching system that pairs each patient with a professional based on their specific needs. This algorithmic system contributed to the platform's rapid growth. To further develop the project, De Stefano collaborated with Gregorio Maria Diodovich, Corena Pezzella, and Valeria Fiorenza Perris, who currently serve as chief operating officer (COO), Human Resources (HR) Manager, and Clinical Director, respectively. The first version of the platform was launched on August 7, 2019, and within the first few months, it attracted around 20 users, supported by a clinical team of a few dozen professionals.

A significant turning point occurred in early 2020 when Unobravo was accepted into the SocialFare incubator acceleration program in Turin. This program provided initial funding of €50,000 with an additional €100,000 investment from CDP Venture Capital. In June 2020, Unobravo was established as an innovative startup. Although initially intended for Italians abroad, the service quickly expanded to residents in Italy, driven by the increasing digitalization during the pandemic.

In 2022, Unobravo became a Benefit Corporation, and in the same year, it completed a €17 million funding round led by the American fund Insight Partners. This investment aimed to strengthen the company's growth by expanding the team and clinical staff, introducing new continuous training plans for psychotherapists, investing in technological development, consolidating the Buencoco platform in Spain, and forming partnerships with the private sector.

Just a few years after it was founded, Unobravo is the leader in the Italian online psychology market, with over 5,500 mental health professionals in its clinical team, more than 200,000 patients assisted, and over 3,000,000 therapy sessions conducted.

4.2.3 Organizational Structure

Unobravo has introduced a complex organizational structure in a sector traditionally characterized by professionals working as freelancers or in small associated practices. This structure follows a departmental logic, allowing for the organized division of various corporate functions. At the top of Unobravo's organizational structure are the chief executive officer (CEO) and COO, who are responsible for defining the corporate strategy and its operational implementation across the various departments. These departments include the Clinical Team, HR, Tech Lead, Product, B2B, Customer Experience, Marketing & Communication, Legal & Finance, and Operations. Each department is managed by a "Head of," who is tasked with monitoring performance and ensuring consistency in behavior and performance within their sector.

The Clinical Team, which is the core of the service offered by Unobravo, is overseen by a Clinical Director and a Clinical Operation Manager. These two key roles coordinate the Team Leader Managers, who, in turn, supervise the Team Leaders. Team Leaders are crucial points of reference for Unobravo's psychotherapists, providing clinical discussions and assistance in resolving any issues that may arise in the relationship between therapist and patient. Each Team Leader is responsible for a team of about 80 therapists, offering continuous support and managing the clinical staff.

The departmental approach allows for a distribution of responsibilities and a monitored workflow that are essential for the success and continuous growth of the platform in the competitive field of online psychological counseling.

4.3 Classification of the Unobravo Platform

Based on Chapter III and previous published work¹⁰, the following sections classify the Unobravo platform according to the indicators specifically designed for psychological platforms.

4.3.1 Relationship Between Platform and Psychologist (Profit; Non-Profit)

Unobravo is a for-profit company, adopting a fixed and uniform pricing model for all patients: €49 for an individual session and €59 for a couple's session. From this amount, the platform retains a portion for business management, paying psychologists a lower fee than that paid by the patients. The rationale behind this choice is Unobravo's commitment to offering an affordable rate to anyone who wishes to undertake a psychological therapy journey. The proposed fee falls within the 17th percentile of the fee range established by the National Council of the Order of Psychologists (CNOP). According to the Unified Text of the Professional Tariff of Psychologists, the fee for an individual psychological counseling and/or support session ranges from a minimum of €35 to a maximum of €115¹¹. For an individual psychotherapy session, the range is between €40 and €140, positioning the fee of €49 for an individual psychotherapy session in the 9th percentile of the CNOP's range. This pricing policy has significantly contributed to the company's growth, enabling over 3,000,000 therapy sessions to be delivered to approximately 200,000 patients. Hence, Unobravo has expanded and strengthened its organizational structure to meet the growing demand, assuming a central role in combating the stigma associated with mental wellbeing.

Furthermore, the platform adopts the benefit corporation model, meaning it operates as a company that, in addition to pursuing profit objectives, is committed to generating a positive impact for the common good. For Unobravo, being a benefit corporation means not only providing online psychotherapy services but also ensuring that its actions have positive effects on society, contributing to collective wellbeing and reducing the stigma associated with mental health.

4.3.2 Geographical Scope of the Platform (Local; Supra-Local)

As mentioned above, Unobravo was launched as a psychological service platform targeting Italians abroad. Initially, the company's target audience consisted exclusively of Italian expatriates living abroad for personal and/or professional reasons. The collaborating psychologists on the platform were

¹⁰ Reference: Gambirasio, M., et al. (2024). How platformisation transforms the psychological profession: Reflections from a proposal of indicators for the classification of psychological platforms. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 34(4), e2861.

¹¹ <https://www.psy.it/nomenclatore/>

thus required to manage psychological suffering and difficulties related to being far from home, adapting to new socioeconomic and cultural contexts, and lacking a social support network.

Due to several factors—such as becoming a market leader among Italian psychological platforms, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the widespread acceptance of this mode of psychological service, and the increase in demand—Unobravo’s target audience has changed. The company has seen growing demand from people residing in Italy and thus expanded its offerings to a new type of patient. Currently, the platform provides services to a pool of Italian users both residing in Italy and abroad. Moreover, with the creation of the Buencoco platform, Unobravo has diversified its target further, offering services in Spanish to patients residing in Spain and abroad. This has involved hiring Spanish psychologists or psychologists fluent in Spanish and transferring psychologists who were already collaborating with Unobravo to Buencoco. Another change in the target audience occurred due to the provision of services in French, enabling the company to extend its user base to French-speaking patients.

Regarding Indicator 2, Unobravo is classified as a platform operating at a supra-local level. Despite the described target transformation, the company is not tied to a specific territory. The provision of services to patients abroad gives Unobravo a supra-local character without defined geographical boundaries.

4.3.3 Occupational Sector (Psychological Platforms – Psychological Services, Psychotherapeutic services –; Healthcare Platforms)

Unobravo presents itself to the public as an “online psychology service,” emphasizing psychological services. However, to collaborate with the platform, professionals must be at least in their third year of specialization in psychotherapy. Therefore, those who are only licensed to practice psychology without being enrolled in a psychotherapy specialization program are not selected. While psychologists primarily provide support, counseling, and diagnosis, psychotherapists work on pathology, specifically targeting symptoms. Consequently, the platform is mainly dedicated to psychotherapeutic services, as most professionals initiate therapies aimed at treating disorders. Additionally, Unobravo collaborates with other professionals, such as nutritionists, psychiatrists, and personal trainers. For this reason, according to the criteria suggested in the previous chapter, Unobravo must be classified as a healthcare platform, as it is not exclusively dedicated to offering psychological services.

4.3.4 Transparency of the Psychologist's Profile (Publicly Visible Identity; Privately Visible Identity; Anonymity)

This indicator only analyses the transparency of practitioner profiles. In fact, a platform offering psychological services is not allowed to make user profiles transparent due to current privacy regulations for patients. As regards this indicator, Unobravo is classified as a platform that makes the identities of its professionals publicly visible. On the “Psychologists” page of the Unobravo website, the complete list of professionals is available, including a photograph, first name, last name, and therapeutic orientation. By clicking on a single profile, users can access the psychologist's personal page, which contains the following sections: profile, therapies, areas, CV, reviews, and articles. The “Profile” section includes a description based on the therapist's orientation, which is broad and generic and does not give specific details for each professional. The “Therapies” section indicates the type of therapy offered by the psychologist, distinguishing between couple, individual, and group therapy. The “Areas” section specifies the areas of intervention in which the professional operates, information provided by the psychologist during the onboarding phase and used to match patients and psychologists. In the “CV” section, details such as registration with the professional board, specific degree course, university where the degree was obtained, and the year the private practice began are indicated. Additionally, the psychologist's personal page includes a section with reviews left by patients, as discussed below in the section related to that indicator. For psychologists who have written articles for the Unobravo website, there is a section that links to their texts.

The construction of personal pages is entirely managed by the Product Team, which creates a page for each professional collaborating with the platform. Psychologists provide the necessary information to build the page at the initial stage of their collaboration with the platform.

4.3.5 Payment to the Platform (Professionals can pay the platform 1) upon registration, 2) by subscription, 3) per session, 4) per contact, 5) after matching, or 6) periodically, or they can 7) register free. Patients can do so 1) per session, 2) in packages, 3) by subscription, 4) per contact, or 5) after matching, or they can 6) obtain free services)

According to this indicator, Unobravo is classified as a platform that makes periodic payments to professionals. Specifically, the psychologist does not have to pay a fee to the platform; instead, the platform itself retains a fee from the amount paid by the patient. At the end of the calculation period, usually once a month, the company adds up the number of sessions conducted by the professional and calculates the amount to be paid. In this way, the relationship resembles that of an employee,

with a monthly salary payment. For patients, the payment may be required per single session, in packages, or, in the case of the “psychologist bonus,” as a free service. This means that the patient can choose whether to pay before each session or pay for multiple sessions at once in advance.

4.3.6 Execution of Payment (Payments can be 1) managed and invoiced by the psychologist, 2) managed and invoiced by the platform, or 3) managed by the platform and invoiced by the psychologist)

The Unobravo platform plays an active role in executing payments by managing the financial transaction between the patient and the therapist. This allows the company to receive the payment from the patient, retain its percentage, and allocate the compensation to the therapist. Additionally, the platform offers to take on the task of invoicing, relieving professionals from the burden of issuing an invoice for each client and allowing them to create just one addressed to the company itself.

4.3.7 Autonomy of the Psychologist (Hierarchical Model; Market Model; Mixed Model)

Based on pricing and the mode of practice as distinguishing criteria, the Unobravo platform presents a mixed model concerning the indicator that analyzes professional autonomy. Regarding pricing, the platform adopts a uniform fee for all patients: €49 for an individual session and €59 for a couple’s session. Consequently, professionals also receive the same rate, regardless of their place of residence, specializations, or years of professional experience. This aspect might suggest a hierarchical model for Unobravo, but the platform diverges from this model in other respects.

Regarding work organization, Unobravo allows professionals to self-manage, agreeing on the days and times of appointments with the patients. In certain cases, the platform recruits professionals for specific time slots, with this requirement clearly stated in the job advertisement. However, professionals are expected to strictly adhere to the appointments scheduled with patients, avoiding rescheduling or postponing sessions except under extraordinary circumstances. This policy is a central priority for management, aiming to protect patients and ensure the delivery of high-quality services. Consequently, the autonomy of psychologists at Unobravo appears to balance between a hierarchical and a market model, characterizing the platform as a mixed model.

4.3.8 Platform Support (Support for the Psychologist—Technical, Clinical, Administrative—; Patient Support)

Platform support is a central theme for Unobravo, particularly regarding the services offered to professionals. The assistance provided justifies the fee withheld from the professional's compensation, as described in previous indicators. This support is divided into three main categories. First, there is technical support, covering all services related to the use of the digital tool. Unobravo uses a dedicated team to assist psychologists with practical aspects of the service, from video calls to appointment management and from patient–therapist chat to report compilation. Whenever a professional encounters technical difficulties or has questions, they can turn to the platform, which offers help to make the work experience as smooth as possible. Additionally, Unobravo offers administrative support, including billing services. Besides providing a digital area where professionals can upload and manage their invoices, the company has recently developed a method to reduce the perceived accounting burden on professionals. Specifically, Unobravo has introduced the possibility of issuing invoices on behalf of psychologists through the invoicing mandate, thus relieving psychologists of the need to issue an invoice for each patient.

Lastly, Unobravo provides clinical support, which is considered by both management and professionals to be the company's hallmark. This support includes initial training during onboarding, where professionals learn the patient management methods required by Unobravo and online therapy. This is considered necessary so that professionals adopt company values such as empathy, trust, collaboration, and respect and understand the Unobravo method, which involves guidelines for managing online patients. The platform clinically supports professionals throughout their tenure with the company, providing free “intervisions” and “clinical discussion”. Clinical discussion are individual meetings between the psychologist and the team leader, who is responsible for a group of about 80 therapists, where difficulties in managing clinical cases are analyzed, and resonances are shared. Intervisions, on the other hand, are group discussions among peers designed as spaces for sharing difficulties related to clinical cases and exchanging professional approaches between different therapeutic methods. This support is made possible by the organization's pyramidal structure, which involves levels of responsibility from the individual therapist to the management, as explained in the opening pages of this chapter. For patients, Unobravo provides support that includes technical assistance in using the platform and resolving IT issues as well as administrative support related to billing and payment management.

4.3.9 Type of Contract Between the Platform and the Psychologist (Collaboration Contracts; Employment Contracts)

Unobravo offers both collaboration contracts and employment contracts. Employment contracts are primarily reserved for professionals who are part of various teams organized departmentally, such as HR, Tech Lead, Product, B2B, Customer Experience, Marketing & Communication, Legal & Finance, and Operations. These professionals, except for some in the HR team, are not psychologists but experts with specific skills in their fields.

For psychologists, who are the focus of this indicator, Unobravo uses collaboration contracts. This type of contract meets the needs of professionals, allowing them to practice psychology in various settings, both online and in person. This is crucial as it enables psychologists and psychotherapists, as freelancers, to carry out their activities autonomously. The collaboration contract ensures the flexibility and freedom typical of the psychological profession, allowing professionals to organize their work independently and in a personalized way. In fact, many psychologists collaborate with Unobravo but also practice in other contexts, such as private practices, cooperatives, and schools.

4.3.10 Users (Public Organizations; Private Organizations; Individual Citizens)

Unobravo offers its services to a variety of users and caters to the needs of different market segments. Specifically, it serves both individual citizens, by offering personalized therapy pathways, and organizations, by addressing the psychological wellbeing of employees. For individual citizens, the platform provides a wide range of therapeutic services designed to address a variety of psychological issues, from common ones such as anxiety and depression to more complex problems. Simultaneously, the platform offers specific services for both public and private organizations, recognizing the importance of psychological wellbeing in the workplace. In this context, it proposes targeted interventions to improve employees' mental health through psychological support programs, wellness workshops, and consultations.

4.3.11 Selection of the Psychologist (Patient Choice—Direct or Mediated by the Platform, Platform Matching—; Algorithmic or Manual)

Unobravo uses an algorithm to match patients with psychotherapists in a process that includes a study and analysis of the initial questionnaires filled out by patients who wish to start online therapy through the platform. The matching system allows for the quick identification of a therapist based on the needs expressed by patients in the initial questionnaire and the specializations and availability of psychologists. Before signing up, patients complete a questionnaire with questions aimed at clarifying their needs, identifying symptoms such as sleep disorders, anxiety, sadness, problems related to physical appearance, working life, or acceptance of events. At the end of the questionnaire, the algorithm matches the user with a psychotherapist, allowing the user the option to accept or decline the proposal. If they accept, a free initial 30-minute introductory meeting is scheduled via video call on the platform. After this meeting, the user can decide whether to start therapy with the same psychologist or request a new match by repeating the questionnaire.

In more critical cases, the company does not leave the management of the matches entirely to the algorithm but takes charge of it by involving the clinical team. For example, if a patient decides to stop therapy with a psychologist and requests reassignment, the situation is analyzed by the therapist, the team leader, and potentially the team leader's manager to carefully handle a possibly delicate situation and prevent the patient from giving up on continuing the therapeutic process. Apart from such circumstances, the platform can be classified in terms of the "psychologist selection" indicator as algorithmic matching by the platform.

4.3.12 Required Qualifications (Registration with the Order of Psychologists; Enrollment in Psychotherapy School; Psychotherapy Specialization Degree)

For a professional's application to be considered, the company requires the minimum criterion of enrollment in the third year of psychotherapy school. Hence, Unobravo does not collaborate with people who have only graduated in psychology and have professional certification; instead, it is necessary to have nearly completed the training process that leads to obtaining the title of psychotherapist.

4.3.13 Service Delivery Method (Online—Synchronous Interaction, Asynchronous Interaction—; In-Person)

Unobravo is the first Italian platform that has fully embraced online psychological practice. Founded in 2019, the company has specialized in providing psychological services exclusively online, initially targeting Italians living abroad. The primary mode of interaction is synchronous: therapeutic sessions are conducted via video calls, allowing direct and immediate contact between patient and psychologist. In addition to video calls, a dedicated chat allows communication for matters such as appointment changes or other urgent needs at the discretion of the therapist and based on the therapeutic relationship established. Although the professional and patient may communicate via the dedicated chat, the service offered by the platform is limited to sessions conducted via video calls. Therefore, Unobravo can be classified as a platform that provides its users with psychological services online in a synchronous mode.

4.3.14 Reputational Mechanisms (Present; Present and Not Visible; Absent)

The reputational mechanism is a system that conveys information to the market about the past behaviors of buyers and sellers. In psychological platforms, for privacy reasons, reputational mechanisms concerning patients cannot be provided. However, for therapists, there are reputational systems that allow a profile to be built based on reviews left by patients. On Unobravo, the psychologists' reputational profile is constructed through these reviews, which can be found on the therapist's personal page on the company's website.

The reviews are considered useful by the management for potential new users, who can read the past experiences of other patients, facilitating the start of a psychological journey. In this sense, Unobravo, like many other platforms, uses a reputational system designed to generate trust in the reliability of both the platform itself and online therapy. During and at the end of the therapeutic process, patients receive a link that allows them to evaluate their assigned psychotherapist by giving star ratings (from 1 to 5) and eventually leaving a descriptive review. These reviews and comments are visible to everyone, including non-registered users, on the therapist's personal page on the platform. Moreover, Unobravo has a page on Trustpilot, a well-known review site where users can read comments on their overall experiences with the platform, from both technical and clinical perspectives and, in some cases, obtain specific information about psychotherapists. However, the considered indicator refers exclusively to the reputational mechanisms present on the platform itself, excluding any reviews left by the patient on other sites.

4.3.15 Exclusivity (Exclusive Relationship; Non-Exclusive Relationship)

As highlighted in the analysis of the indicator dedicated to the type of contract, Unobravo does not require psychologists to work exclusively with the company. Thus, therapists are free to practice their profession through other channels and with other organizations. However, the exclusivity referred to concerns the presence of professionals on other digital platforms offering online psychological services. In other words, a psychologist working with Unobravo cannot simultaneously work for competing platforms. This strategic choice is motivated by several factors. First, preventing therapists from working for other competitors allows Unobravo to carry out in-house training and services exclusively for its professionals. The training and services offered by Unobravo represent a significant investment, and their value could be exploited by other platforms if psychologists were free to work for several companies simultaneously. Furthermore, maintaining an exclusive relationship allows Unobravo to distinguish itself from its competitors by ensuring that therapists working with the platform are dedicated and trained to company-specific standards. This strengthens the platform's identity and reputation in the online therapy market. Therefore, while psychologists can continue to practice outside the context of digital platforms, the exclusivity required by Unobravo in the platform environment ensures that the company can maintain quality and competitive control over the services offered, enhancing the investment made in training and services dedicated to professionals.

4.3.16 Language of Service (Monolingual Content; Multilingual Content; Monolingual Service; Multilingual Service)

The Unobravo platform, originally conceived to offer online psychology services to Italians abroad, initially provided its services exclusively in Italian. However, thanks to its expansion and the leadership it has acquired in the sector in Italy, supported by significant investments and its transformation into a benefit company, Unobravo has expanded the range of languages in which it offers its services. Unobravo's website now features a drop-down menu that allows users to select their preferred language from Italian, French, and Spanish. This change reflects the platform's expansion into French- and Spanish-speaking markets, where it has hired native French- and Spanish-speaking psychologists. In addition, Unobravo asked its psychologists already working in Italian if they were able to conduct therapy sessions in French or Spanish, thus expanding the available language options. This evolution led the platform to present content within its site in different languages and, in parallel, to offer multilingual services, underlining the company's remarkable growth and internationalization.

4.3.17 Extra-Professional Services for Psychologists (Welfare Services; Networking Events; Absent)

In addition to the services supporting the professional in the performance of their work, described in the dedicated indicator section, the Unobravo platform offers a series of extra-professional services aimed at improving the overall wellbeing of the psychologists who collaborate with the company.

First, Unobravo provides its employees with an extensive corporate welfare program aimed at supporting the personal and professional wellbeing of psychologists, principally financial services and consultancy. Unobravo offers customized advice on taxation, invoicing, legal issues, and financial services in cooperation with specialized partner companies. This support allows professionals to better manage the administrative and financial aspects of their business, reducing the stress associated with these tasks. In addition, Unobravo employees can benefit from exclusive discounts on the purchase of products and services dedicated to leisure and everyday life, including travel, technology, fashion, household items, shopping, and restaurants, offering numerous opportunities to enjoy leisure time and improve quality of life. Finally, to promote mental and physical wellbeing, Unobravo offers special promotions on personal care and health products and services. Employees can participate in yoga and fitness classes free of charge, thus helping them to maintain an optimal mental and physical balance. These extra-professional services demonstrate Unobravo's commitment to creating a positive and sustainable working environment where professionals can enjoy broader support for their personal and professional wellbeing.

Alongside this, to create a better organizational environment, Unobravo organizes networking events. One of the main events is Unobravo's birthday, which is celebrated once a year in Naples during the summer months. This event allows professionals from all over Italy to meet in person, creating opportunities to get to know each other better. In particular, psychologists can personally meet their team members and supervisor, with whom they normally only interact via a screen during the rest of the year. Unobravo also organizes retreats for employees of the platform support services teams, team leaders and team leader managers. These retreats are designed to foster networking, improve mutual understanding, and stimulate new ideas for company development. These initiatives are made available to make the working experience at Unobravo more enjoyable and to encourage employees to stay with the company, following a company retention logic.

4.3.18 Gamification Mechanisms (Psychologist-Facing; Patient-Facing; Absent)

Unobravo does not present gamification mechanisms internally.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed presentation of the Unobravo platform, which is necessary to understand the organizational context in which the case study data were collected. The description of Unobravo's core business, history, and organizational structure, coupled with the classification of the platform, were essential to place the collected data within an articulated and specific frame of reference, thus facilitating a deeper understanding of the internal dynamics that may have influenced the processes of construction and development of the professional identity of the psychologists collaborating with the company.

In the next chapter, the results of the case study are presented through the analysis of the professional identity construction processes of psychologists working through the Unobravo platform. The collected data are examined with a particular focus on psychologists' experiences and perceptions of their professional development within this innovative working environment. This allows me to deepen my understanding of the dynamics that characterize professional identity in a digital context and discuss relevant implications for theory and practice in the field of online professional psychology in the final chapter.

Chapter 5. The psychologist's work experience within the Unobravo platform¹²

5.1 Introduction

The first chapters of the work served a fundamental function in preparing the ground for the case study that is explored in more detail in the following pages. Each chapter helped to build the context necessary to fully understand the subsequent analysis.

The first chapter outlined the main characteristics of the platform economy and illustrated how digital platforms, through the use of technology, are transforming traditional business models and creating new forms of work. It discussed how flexibility, global access, and disintermediation are among the salient features of the platform economy. While these elements offer new job opportunities and greater efficiency, they can also introduce insecurity and uncertainty for workers. The lack of protection and difficulty in obtaining traditional rights, such as paid holidays and social security contributions, are critical aspects that significantly impact the work experience of the individuals involved.

The second chapter extended the study by focusing on the impact that these characteristics of the platform economy have on the professional identity of platform workers. The relevant literature was explored to shed light on how the nature of platform work affects the sense of professional identity and belonging. Concepts such as the fragmentation of work identity, the loss of a sense of community and belonging, and the difficulty of maintaining a coherent and recognizable career were discussed. Furthermore, it was highlighted how platform workers often face a tension between apparent flexibility and autonomy and the reality of algorithmic supervision and constant performance-based evaluations.

Subsequently, Chapter III was specifically devoted to the analysis of the psychological platforms operating in the Italian environment. This section provided a detailed overview of the different characteristics and declinations of these platforms, using ad hoc constructed indicators for a possible classification. The analysis concerned the Italian psychological platforms that could be investigated

¹² The findings presented in this section were subsequently used to extend the reflections developed here, further analysed, and incorporated into the publications: Gambirasio, M., Scaratti, G., & Ivaldi, S. (2026). Psychological work in the platform economy: Navigating professional and managerial logics. *Journal of Professions and Organization*, 13, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpo/joag008>; Gambirasio, M., Scaratti, G., & Ivaldi, S. (in press). How the platformization of mental health services influences psychologists' professional identity. *Psicologia Sociale*. Special Issue "Artificial intelligence and technology in the social world: Emerging perspectives on emotions, perceptions, and human connections".

through a desk analysis and examined their different characteristics. Constructing the indicators enabled a clear picture to be given of the Italian psychological platforms, highlighting the impacts that the different characteristics may have on the psychological profession and professionals themselves. The proposed classification aims to facilitate a more structured and systematic understanding of the sector, providing a basis for the case study presented here.

It was then possible to use the constructed indicators to classify the Unobravo platform to analyze various key aspects to fully understand the operational context of the psychologists working with it. First, the chapter traces the history of the Unobravo company, exploring its origins and the mission and vision that have guided its growth. It then analyzes the main stages of its development, from its foundation to its current operations, and the organizational structure of the company, highlighting the key roles and hierarchies that form the company's pyramid.

These sections serve as preliminaries to the analysis of the results collected during this research on the professional identity of the psychologists working on the Unobravo platform. The present chapter explores the perceptions of the psychologists working with the platform under investigation. Qualitative methodologies, such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups, were used to collect the opinions, experiences, and reflections of these professionals, with particular attention paid to their work experience in relation to the platform. In this section, the analysis focused specifically on how psychologists perceive and define their roles within the digital context, the opportunities and challenges that emerge from their collaboration with the platform, and how these dynamics influence the construction and maintenance of their professional identities. Subsequently, the results from the first phase of the qualitative analysis were further investigated by means of a questionnaire distributed to a larger sample of psychologists collaborating with the platform with the aim of understanding whether the knowledge that emerged reflected the experience of the larger group and also resonated with the professionals who participated in the survey.

The integrated analysis of these elements is crucial to delineate how the professional identity construction processes of psychologists working in a digital context, such as that offered by a platform like Unobravo, are oriented and influenced. This study aims to offer insights into the identity processes associated with platform-mediated psychological work while attempting to provide useful insights for further research and applications in the emerging field of platform psychology.

5.2 Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study took a sequential approach. It was structured in three distinct phases, each of which contributed to the generation and analysis of appropriate empirical data. The decision to divide the analysis into three distinct sections met a precise methodological need, that is,

the effective integration of qualitative and quantitative data to take full advantage of the benefits of a mixed method approach.

In the first phase, qualitative data were collected to give an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the professionals involved and the meanings attributed to them. The construction of the interview questions was not random but followed a structured and informed process. This process was initially facilitated by my participation in a previous research project (the Weplat project described in Chapter III), which allowed me to preliminarily explore the study context and access interviews already conducted for that project. Subsequently, interviews with team leaders, outlined in Chapter IV, allowed me to gain a detailed understanding of the company's organizational structure, dynamics, mission, and vision. This, combined with the literature review presented in Chapter II concerning the processes of professional identity construction among digital platform workers, made it possible to formulate the survey questions. From this preliminary work, the questions of the semi-structured interviews, conducted with 10 therapists and 6 platform team leaders, were constructed and are summarized in the table below.

Interview No.	Professional Role	Date
TP 1	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	18/03/2024
TP 2	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	18/03/2024
TP 3	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	18/03/2024
TL 1	Team Leader	20/03/2024
TL 2	Team Leader	20/03/2024
TP 4	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	20/03/2024
TP 5	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	21/03/2024
TL 3	Team Leader	21/03/2024
TP 6	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	21/03/2024
TL 4	Team Leader	25/03/2024
TL 5	Team Leader	25/03/2024
TL 6	Team Leader	25/03/2024
TP 7	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	26/03/2024

TP 8	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	27/03/2024
TP 9	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	28/03/2024
TP 10	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	29/03/2024

Table 5: Summary of semi-structured interviews.

The interviews with the psychologists produced a rich and articulate body of data, which provided the basis for the identification of specific themes. At the (accepted) request of the participants, they were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed in their entirety. The study of the transcribed texts was oriented toward a content analysis using the thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). In particular, an inductive, or data-driven, analysis was chosen where the coding process was guided by the data themselves. The analysis of the interviews was carried out with NVivo software¹³, which is appropriate to support the researcher in organizing and analyzing non-numerical and unstructured data, especially when, as in this work, the material collected is rich and articulated. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It has six phases and is a recursive rather than a linear process, allowing for continuous interaction between the researcher and the data. The first step consists of familiarization with the raw data, which involved repeatedly reading the data and immersing myself in them to understand the context and main contents. During this phase, I started taking notes and making initial reflections on possible codes or themes.

The second step involved the generation of the initial codes. In this step, I organized the data into meaningful groups through the creation of codes. The codes represent interesting features of the data and can be segments of text that seem particularly relevant to the research. Coding was performed on the entire dataset. The third stage, which was necessary to sort themes, involved grouping the generated codes by clustering related codes within emergent meaningful patterns. The fourth phase identified relationships between the codes, aggregated into broader themes, capturing relevant dimensions present in the data: some codes were discarded, while others were combined to form more robust themes. The fifth step involved the refinement of the identified themes through a check of internal and external consistency, including modifying their wording to make it adhere to the representation of the data in them. This step ended with the definition and naming of the final themes. Finally, for step six, a detailed report was written.

¹³ <https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>

This multi-stage methodological approach allowed me to address and mitigate the reliability problems typical of qualitative studies thanks to a recursive process that was not limited to a simple linear transition between the different stages but involved a constant reflexive back-and-forth movement on the data. As emphasized by Braun and Clarke (2006), such a process increases the reliability of the results, as it allows the researcher to continually verify and refine them, ensuring greater robustness and rigor in the final analysis.

Importantly, the themes identified were also seen and analyzed by Unobravo's managers, thus enhancing a process of joint construction and the social validation of the acquired cognitive elements. Subsequently, these topics were deepened through focus groups, which made it possible to observe and analyze how the participants collectively processed certain contents, further enriching the qualitative analysis. I facilitated two focus groups: the first involved the participation of seven team leaders, while the second was organized with six therapists who, unlike the participants in the first group, do not hold positions of responsibility within the company. The decision to subdivide the participants into two distinct groups according to their tasks within the company was the result of a methodological reflection conducted together with the supervisor of the study and the clinical research coordinators of Unobravo's Research Team. This subdivision was aimed at identifying possible differences in perceptions of professional identity between the two groups. However, during the data analysis, it was decided not to follow this route and to avoid direct comparison between the groups. This decision, which was discussed with the supervisors of the study, was motivated by the consideration that it would not have brought any added value to the research and might even have risked over-complicating a study that, operating in a new field, has an exploratory character and addresses a subject that has been little considered to date. For these reasons, it was preferred to postpone any internal distinctions within the group of Unobravo psychologists to future research, which could further explore these aspects.

Below is the table summarizing the composition of the focus groups.

Focus Group No.	Professional role	Date
1	Team Leader	22/04/2024
1	Team Leader	22/04/2024
1	Team Leader	22/04/2024
1	Team Leader	22/04/2024
1	Team Leader	22/04/2024
1	Team Leader	22/04/2024

1	Team Leader	22/04/2024
2	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	24/04/2024
2	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	24/04/2024
2	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	24/04/2024
2	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	24/04/2024
2	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	24/04/2024
2	Psychologist/Psychotherapist	24/04/2024

Table 6: Focus group summary.

Once again, following the (accepted) request for consent from the participants, the focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed, after which I proceeded with a qualitative content analysis.

Finally, the most relevant themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis were selected for further investigation on a quantitative level through the administration of a survey. This phase made it possible to verify whether the insights from the qualitative analysis resonated with the survey participants by observing their spread and distribution within the overall sample. The questionnaire was constructed at the end of the analysis of the interview and focus group data and aimed to identify themes considered relevant so they could be explored in greater depth on a larger sample. The questionnaire was created with LimeSurvey software¹⁴ with a license issued by the University of Bergamo to all lecturers, researchers, and PhD students. The first part of the survey was dedicated to personal data, after which different sections addressed the dimensions that had already emerged from interviews and focus groups and that we wished to investigate in greater depth, namely, personal details, profile, career path, motivations for joining the platform, work experience in Unobravo, professional autonomy, drop-out, relationship with the team leader, relationship with Unobravo colleagues, professional community, professional reputation, and professional future. In total, the questionnaire consisted of 50 questions. The link for participation in the survey was sent on 28 June 2024 to the managers of the Unobravo Research Team, who circulated it by email to all psychologists and psychotherapists working with the platform (around 6000 people) as of 1 July 2024. The time window for completion closed on 1 August 2024.

This survey was completed by 1017 people, with 774 complete and 243 partial completions. The data analyzed in this research work are based exclusively on the complete compilations.

¹⁴ <https://www.limesurvey.org/it>

The multi-stage methodological approach ensured that the research developed on the basis of knowledge that was gradually acquired. In addition, the research constantly considered the social context in which it was conducted, using ad hoc data collection techniques constructed in line with the specificities and availabilities of the participants involved in the study. This methodological process made it possible to construct a study that was deeply integrated and relevant to the specific social context of the research.

5.3 Results

The corpus of data collected through the three phases described above is extremely rich and complex. It is a heterogeneous and profound dataset that could lend itself to numerous in-depth studies, opening the way to different perspectives of analysis. Its relevance goes far beyond the specific subject matter of this study, as it is a veritable “mine” of valuable data. Through different perspectives, these data could provide further insights into aspects related to psychology platforms, particularly with reference to the Unobravo context. Obviously, the focus here is on data relating to the topic of professional identity, the central object of the research. The selection was not simple, as the concept of identity touches upon a multiplicity of dimensions, each with relevant implications. Therefore, this chapter represents the outcome of a well-considered decision, shared with the supervisors of the study, aimed at circumscribing the analysis to those dimensions that, in our opinion, offer a more significant contribution to understanding the phenomenon studied.

In particular, this section has been organised as follows:

- A new working context for the psychologist
 - Dimensions related to the digital context
 - Dimensions related to the organisational context
- Professional affiliations and networks
 - Psychologist's loneliness and need for connection
 - Professional networks
 - Reference points and importance of networks
- Professional competences and skills
 - Adaptation of one's work to the new context
 - Professional growth
 - Understanding oneself as a professional

- Representations of platform psychology
 - Perception of representation in the professional community
 - Representation of Unobravo psychologists

5.3.1 A New Working Context for the Psychologist

The present study shows how the Unobravo psychology platform is not limited to serving as a simple technological tool through which the professional can deliver their services but serves as a true new working context. Cross-referencing the data collected from interviews, focus groups, and the questionnaire, a complex picture emerges of the perceptions of Unobravo professionals. On the one hand, the dimensions related to the digital context, which deeply influence the psychologists' work experience on the platform, are highlighted. On the other, the dimensions of the organizational context play an equally crucial role in shaping this experience.

The digital context introduces new ways of interaction and professional practice, creating an innovative and unprecedented working environment for psychologists. This new digital scenario brings challenges and opportunities, from managing technologies to creating new forms of communication and relationships with patients. Psychologists must adapt to these changes, addressing the peculiarities of online therapy and its implications for their daily practice.

In parallel, the organizational context of the Unobravo platform adds further layers of complexity to the work experience. The organizational structures and processes of the company, including the proposed operational methods and guidelines, directly influence how psychologists live and manage their professional practice. The platform not only provides a new space to practice, but also a set of tools, rules, and resources that help define their working environment and how they perceive themselves in relation to work.

In summary, the experience of working on Unobravo is configured as a unique and unprecedented working environment for psychologists, where the dimensions of the digital context and those of the organizational context intertwine, creating a new professional reality that requires an adaptation and modulation of one's work. This integration of technology and organization not only changes the way in which the profession is practiced, but also offers opportunities for a transformation of oneself as a professional.

5.3.1.1. Digital Context Dimensions

A first reflection concerns the importance of the dimensions of the digital context and their significant impact on the work experience of professionals. As analyzed earlier in this study, the shift to digital

is not simply a technological transition; it entails a profound transformation in the everyday work of psychologists. Digital platforms replace the physical space of the practice with a virtual environment, introducing new operational and relational dynamics.

5.3.1.1.1 Flexibility

The digital environment is perceived by the participants as a flexible working environment in which the practitioner has ample room for making decisions about the organization of their work. The psychologist is facilitated in the management of appointments, thanks to the characteristics of platform work. This makes it possible to reorganize one's work according to one's professional and personal needs, which can shift and change over time.

This is something that I have organized for myself. That is, I decided to close in the evenings and work only mornings and afternoons. That's enough. But needs have changed. I mean, first I needed to work in the evenings, and then now I've freed myself and moved everything around. But I decide on the days, I decide on the times, that is, I manage them. That is, if I only wanted to work one day, I could work one day without any problems. (Int. TL 1)

The flexibility you have online in scheduling appointments is spectacular. (Int. TL 6)

The flexibility of platform work is felt, first and foremost, in the organization of one's time, as it allows professionals to manage their schedules according to their professional and personal needs. Psychologists can save time by avoiding the commute from their home to the practice. Conversely, if they are already in their professional practice, they can easily connect to the platform without having to return home. This also accommodates last-minute moves and cancellations of sessions, allowing them to reorganize their work quickly and efficiently.

Also working online, working on Unobravo, gives one a sense of freedom. Just knowing that you have the possibility to choose, to manage certain times, to manage the setting yourself. So, from where you choose to do the session, it really gives you a sense of respite, doesn't it? Of freedom, that's what it is. (F.G. 2 TP5)

I can see patients online even in the office, it's not a problem; otherwise, I also see them at home because if

I want, I don't have to move and can see them at home.
So, oh well, for now it's very simple for me, I have no
difficulty organizing it. (Int. TP 7)

The flexibility of the work space, in addition to the easier management of the dual channel represented by platform work and face-to-face work, which is extremely frequent among the participants in this research, allows professionals to move around more. There are numerous cases in which psychologists at the beginning of their careers had to move to large cities to be able to work: platform work allows them to return to their place of origin, enabling them to support themselves without having to relocate. On the other hand, the security of a remote job allows professionals to consider future paths and routes anywhere in the world, in Italy or abroad, without the constraint of remaining tied to a specific territory.

On this issue, the master data collected through the questionnaire also show how much the platform's flexibility meets the life needs of professionals. In fact, the geographical distribution of survey respondents is remarkably balanced, reflecting the homogeneous presence of Unobravo psychologists throughout the country. Specifically, 33% of respondents reside in the south of Italy, 30% are in the center, and 37% operate in the north. This geographical balance indicates that the Unobravo platform succeeds in involving professionals from all areas of Italy, overcoming the traditional disparities in access to work that sometimes characterize the psychology sector in different regions. The platform's Italy-wide distribution highlights its role as an accessible tool for psychologists from different backgrounds, fostering a working model that is not only concentrated in large cities or the most urbanized areas, but also embraces regions that are less well served in terms of psychological service provision. This aspect is particularly significant considering that many psychologists living in less populated or peripheral areas used to struggle starting or sustaining a private practice due to a more limited catchment area.

Another interesting finding concerns the presence of psychologists working from abroad. At the time the survey was compiled, in July 2024, only three participants declared that they worked outside of Italy. Although this number is small, it is nevertheless a sign that the platform also offers opportunities for those who live or wish to work abroad, maintaining contact with their Italian clientele thanks to the flexibility offered by online therapy. This type of distribution, combined with the possibility of working remotely, suggests that Unobravo favors professional mobility. In fact, the platform model eliminates many of the geographical constraints traditionally associated with the profession, offering greater freedom in the choice of where to practice.

The psychologist's work experience within the Unobravo platform

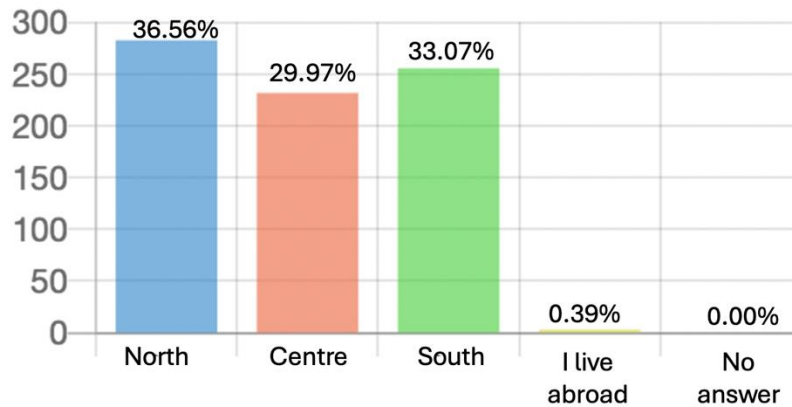


Figure 6: Survey results - Geographical distribution.

This also has repercussions for aspects of managing one's private life, allowing both a better balance and economic savings as fewer expenses are incurred.

You need less time. And for me, I realized that I save on babysitting. Because when I had to go to the practice, I had to pay her (the babysitter) for an extra hour and a half. Now I pay her for half an hour maximum. (Int. TL 5)

I have two children, so I have to manage them too. And this job allows me to do so. (Int. TP 3)

If platform work has allowed some professionals to organize their activities to meet needs related to the private sphere, others have done exactly the opposite. To respond to the needs of the market, that is, the demand from patients, some psychologists have adapted their working hours to further enlarge their catchment area.

I realized that actually, the highest demand was in the evening. So, for example, I was able to organize myself so that I do my last therapy at 11 p.m. And so I have a catchment area that is wider, because people, rightly so, like me, arrive home, organize themselves, settle down, so my time is from 6 p.m. or Saturday morning. (Int. TP 3)

They needed psychologists especially for evening and weekend hours, and so I made myself available. (Int. TP 7)

Hence, the platform's working context influenced the ways in which psychologists carried out their professional activity, giving rise to new ways of experiencing the profession and perceiving themselves as professionals.

5.3.1.1.2 Digital Identity

The issue of the digital identity of the professionals participating in the research can be analysed starting from the two channels through which they present themselves to the public: on the one hand, the personal page within the Unobravo platform site; on the other hand, the social networks used and managed individually by the individual professional.

A first element that emerges from the research is the scant attention that many of the professionals present on Unobravo pay to the information made available by the platform on the individual psychologist, perhaps because the therapists' personal pages are built by a dedicated Unobravo team when the psychologist joins the company. Thus, by delegating the management of their professional page to the company, psychologists can disregard it. The professional is mainly involved in the creation of the page, as he or she is asked to indicate some professional information and hand over a photograph.

They asked me to indicate which areas I wanted to work in, so what were the main skills. The training, what training I had had. And then they wrote down a draft of what the presentation could be. They asked me in my opinion if it was OK (and) I gave the OK. (Int. TP 3)

They had asked me to make a presentation of my own, in which I talked a bit about my field of experience, my training. And then they told me to send the photo. (Int. TP 4)

In general terms, professionals state that they feel represented by their internal pages on the Unobravo website. This is because the profile description, rather than presenting the psychologist, describes the approach taken by the psychologist. Therefore, all professionals who share the same therapeutic orientation will have the same profile. This guarantees that the description of the work performed by the individual is both generic but effective, that is, that it will be understood by the patients. The use of standardized descriptions according to therapeutic approach reflects the need to manage a considerable amount of information and number of profiles, as they relate to nearly 6,000 professionals. In rare cases, psychologists expressed some annoyance at perceiving that their professional identity was managed by the platform.

With regard to the construction of digital identity outside the Unobravo site, some differences emerged among the psychologists who participated in the research. A first group seems to be uninterested in promoting their professional activity through digital channels. Specifically, professionals do not feel the need to advertise themselves through the creation of a personal website or social networks. This group of professionals has social pages because they are required by the platform. More specifically, Unobravo requires psychologists to open their own personal pages on Facebook and LinkedIn. In this case, psychologists completely delegate the activity of promoting their work to the platform, entrusting the construction and development of their digital identity to the company.

Ditto on Instagram, I mean I don't have an account, but to tell you I don't have business cards. I don't even have a plaque outside my practice. It's not really my own. So it's word of mouth on my own. Online, on the other hand, Unobravo was enough for me. (Int. TP 10)

It's something they asked me to add, LinkedIn and Facebook and that's it. (Int. TP 4)

Another group of professionals, in contrast, uses the web as a channel for professional promotion. Specifically, some psychologists have a website or social networking pages, mostly Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, on which they describe themselves in terms of their training and professional activities. However, the use of professional accounts on the web is not always linked and aimed at finding patients. This is because participants recognize that it is difficult to find people who want to start therapy through social media by using traditional word of mouth. Even in cases where self-publicization is considered useful, practitioners mostly focus on promoting their in-person activity and not their online therapy. This is because the online referral of patients is guaranteed by Unobravo, which fulfils this task effectively, ensuring the number of users required by the individual psychologist. Digital promotion channels therefore seem to be more dedicated to raising public awareness of mental wellbeing issues and combating the stigma associated with therapy.

5.3.1.1.3 Algorithmic Matching

In some cases, entering a digital environment, with new and unusual mechanisms, rules, and procedures, created anxiety and skepticism in Unobravo's psychologists. Specifically, the lack of comprehensive and detailed knowledge of how the patient–therapist pairing works triggered concerns regarding the types of patients who would come for the first free interview. However, the lack of

awareness related to the functioning of the matching mechanism waned as time passed and the workers gained experience of working on the platform. The fears and apprehensions dictated by a lack of knowledge disappeared to leave room for reflections, judgments, and opinions derived from direct experience of working with Unobravo.

Hence, in the first place, the usefulness of this mechanism was recognized: the possibility of matching psychologist and patient according to areas of expertise and perceived disorders makes it possible for the company to handle a high number of requests. Therefore, there is an awareness that for a platform offering services to a large number of people, an algorithmic submission is a useful and necessary way of managing the organization. In this sense, the professionals showed awareness of the fact that they have entered a digital context that, as such, needs to be structured in an agile and flexible manner.

It is a necessary thing, I don't see it as a bad thing at all, it seems to me a very clever mechanism both from a practical point of view for us and from a financial-commercial point of view, for the Unobravo company.
(Int. TP 4)

It is obvious that to make such a machine work you need an algorithm that helps you manage the messages. Both for the company and for us. It helps. (Int. TP 9)

The streamlining of work does not only concern the company: psychologists feel that this mode of managing communications also facilitates their own professional activity. On the one hand, they can view the questionnaire filled in by the patient, which formed the data base necessary for the algorithm to perform the matching and thus serves as a very first anamnestic record. On the other hand, professionals recognize a consistency between their areas of expertise and the types of patients sent to them by the algorithmic matching. They believe that the people who are matched to them present difficulties and disorders that they can handle. This is extremely valuable and can simplify the work. Algorithmic management also seems to benefit the patient: first, they can be matched with a professional specialized in the disorders from which they suffer, and second, those patients who find it most difficult to initiate treatment are relieved of the need to make a choice, which enables a larger number of people to access the services.

This discussion about the algorithmic matching mechanism highlights the need for digital work contexts to present characteristics such as agility and flexibility, requiring companies and professionals to adapt their work to these specificities. However, sometimes this speed and the impersonality of the submission are perceived by professionals as problematic, principally because the algorithm uses data from the questionnaire filled in by the patient. The critical issue lies in the

fact that what the person declares does not always correspond to the symptomatological reality but is mostly linked to an individual and subjective perception. Therefore, sometimes patients arrive framed by the algorithm in a way that does not correspond to what the practitioner perceives during the first interview. This has to do with the expertise of the psychologist who, as a professional, can make a more in-depth assessment than allowed by this technological tool.

My concern about this is the fact that one has to assess the patient's self-perception. So maybe a questionnaire that the patient can fill out, even if it is very, very crude, certainly points you in one direction rather than another. However, the fact that there is an algorithm may be useful, but in my opinion, it can also be a little bit counterproductive at times. (Int. TP 8)

In some cases, I see it as very reductive, in the sense that the questionnaire can shoot rubbish. Actually... maybe I think that's the problem, but then I go and do the interview and it turns out that the problem is something else, because it's a kind of self-defence. So, the diagnosis in the end may not always be correct. Exactly, because I may not realise that I carry a whole other discomfort with me. I claim that the problem is that I left my boyfriend. Instead, I experienced abuse in the past. In the questionnaire it's all nice and then in the cognitive session a whole other thing emerges, so I see it as a bit of a critical issue. (Int. TL 1)

It is the professional themselves who must compensate for this and try not to be led astray by what the questionnaire suggests. The psychologist must be able to make a diagnostic assessment regardless of the data collected beforehand, relying on their own skills and professional experience.

However, the algorithmic matching of the Unobravo platform requires the practitioner not only to practice skills typical of the psychological profession, but also new ones. The referral of the patient by a trusted person, such as a friend, relative, or health professional, which contributed to a legitimization, albeit initial, of the psychologist in the eyes of the patient is lacking here. The professional has not been recommended, and the choice is not based on trust or knowledge but on an algorithmic calculation. For some professionals, this leads to the engagement with the patient being more complex and tiring than in traditional practice. Therefore, the platform psychologist is asked to pay more attention to the first phase of engagement, working on their skills and relational abilities that allow the construction of a good therapeutic alliance.

5.3.1.1.4 Workload

A further aspect of the digital environment is related to the amount of work faced by psychologists who have started working with Unobravo. In contrast to their private work, both in-person, mostly carried out within a private practice, and online, practitioners reported a high number of patient referrals through the platform. In Unobravo, the professional does not need to procure patients, as the platform itself ensures patient referrals. Thus, practitioners do not have to worry when a patient terminates or decides to stop therapy, as Unobravo will take care of finding other patients who require psychological help.

If you want, you can work a lot. This is a strength. You don't get 30 patients in the practice quickly; you don't get a knock on the door every day. So patient recruitment is a giant strength of the platform. (Int. TP 10)

So finding patients is no longer your concern. (Int. TP 3)

However, some practitioners found managing the high number of patients sent by Unobravo was stressful. Psychologists tended not to reject any referrals and therefore accepted all patients sent by the platform. This caused great fatigue for the professionals, especially in the first months of working on the platform.

So the strong image, I mean, it gives a good idea of what it feels like at first, maybe a bit overwhelmed, because there are so many of them. [...] Let's say that the waves of the image are associated with the patients. Because when the requests start coming, especially in the beginning, at least when I started, there were so many of them coming at once. So I had a momentary impact of saying, 'OK, I have to manage all these new arrivals'. I mean, in a private practice hardly 10 people arrive in a month. (F.G. 2 TP1)

There is the therapist who knows the limit and therefore respects it, and instead there are those who take everything and perhaps go into overload. And I'm the first to have gone into overload because I took whatever. (Int. TL 1)

For this reason, many psychologists stated that they had to downsize, asking the platform for fewer patients. After a period of fatigue caused by the first experience of working on the platform in which they struggled to reduce the number of patients accepted for therapy, these professionals were able to

adapt their work to what they could manage and had time for. In fact, the responses collected through the survey show that while one of the most common challenges in the first months was managing a high number of assigned patients, with 37% of respondents stating that they faced this difficulty at the beginning of their work on Unobravo, at the time of the compilation only 6% continued to perceive it as a problem. This change suggests an improvement in the ability of professionals to manage their workload that is probably related to greater experience and an increase in perceived self-efficacy. On the other hand, to alleviate psychologists' fatigue related to the high number of patients, the platform changed the referral criteria, limiting the weekly number to a maximum of three patients.

These findings highlight how both Unobravo's psychologists and the platform itself have gradually refined their ways of managing patient numbers. The experience of working on the platform enabled them to understand the strengths and weaknesses that can arise in the digital environment, leading them to adapt their organization to efficiently respond to the demand of the market.

5.3.1.1.5 Pricing

Pricing is a central issue for platforms that decide to adopt a fixed fee for all patients and therefore for all professionals. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the platform offers a fee of €49 for a single session and €59 for a couple's session, withholding a fee on the payment made to the professionals. First, the professionals see this pricing method as increasing the accessibility of the platform, allowing more people to take care of their mental wellbeing, which goes hand in hand with the platform's stated mission of overcoming the stigma associated with psychological therapy and the form of enterprise taken (benefit corporation).

Unobravo gives everyone the opportunity, financially speaking, to have therapy. For the old-timers, who charge exorbitant prices, the patient thinks twice. Because if we think about paying €80 a week to do therapy, I mean... (Int. TP 9)

When were non-wealthy people ever able to one session a week of therapy before Unobravo? (Int. TL 1)

On the professional side, the fee retained by Unobravo is considered justified as the company offers several services to the psychologists, such as, for example, patient referrals, promotion and advertising management, and clinical and technological support. Therefore, participants recognize the work done by the platform and perceive the professional security provided by the organizational structure.

There is the whole machine that is perpetually in motion to ensure not only the wellbeing of the patients, and this is the most important thing, but also the wellbeing of the therapists. (Int. TL 1)

In practice, it is different. If Francesco leaves the therapy, it is not certain that Giovanni will enter. So you have the security of an adequate number of submissions each month. (Int. TP 7)

However, the net gain per session is considered rather low, especially when compared to the price of in-person sessions. For some interviewees, this also has an impact on the way professionals perceive their work, creating the risk of differentiating patients into two categories that are perceived as different. The findings from the interviews are also confirmed by the SWOT analysis conducted during the two focus groups. For practitioners, the low remuneration is seen not only as a significant weakness of the Unobravo platform, which negatively affects the individual practitioner, but also as a risk for the psychological profession practiced through this channel. Indeed, the low remuneration is susceptible to criticism from colleagues and may compromise the professional reputation of psychologists working on the platform.



Figure 7: SWOT Analysis Focus Group 1.



Figure 8: SWOT Analysis Focus Group 2.

Some professionals chose to accept a perceived low income to start their professional activity, aware of the difficulties faced by a professional who has just started practicing. However, after a few years on the platform, some psychologists feel that their professional activity has taken off, leading them to consider leaving the platform environment.

5.3.1.1.6 Reviews

Reviews are a new dimension of the psychologist's work and a typical element of the digital context. For the most part, this causes a break from traditional practice and provoked different reactions within the research participants.

A first group of professionals expressed that they had experienced fear during the first months of working on the platform, principally that patients might evaluate them. This may be part of the fear experienced by psychologists when they encounter a new element of platform psychology, as they are not used to being reviewed by their patients in traditional practice. Furthermore, for some participants the fear related to reviews was determined by the new working context, as the psychologists were not aware of how any patient reviews would be taken into account by the organization and whether they would constitute a criterion for the evaluation of the practitioner.

It was probably a rather frightening idea at the beginning, because obviously it was a new situation, I said, "but who knows if then maybe someone writes

something...who knows then how the service handles it.” (Int. TP 4)

At first, I was a little afraid because clearly the company still didn’t know me as a professional, that is, I was new, right? So let’s say, I was afraid that they could make communications that were, maybe, even, let’s say untruthful, but how to put it? I don’t know, also in the light of their reading of things. So I was a little afraid of that. Maybe if the therapy stops or if they don’t feel welcomed enough and maybe they leave a negative review. At first, I was a little afraid about this. (Int. TP 1)

A further difficulty that platform psychologists encounter in relation to the review mechanism is related to the organization's guidelines. Although the company does not directly ask its psychologists to request reviews from their patients, professionals perceive this practice as an implicit guideline to follow. This perception leads many psychologists to consider asking for reviews as an integral part of internal practices, even though it is not an explicit rule imposed by the organization. However, some practitioners state that they do not follow the company’s instructions and avoid asking their patients for reviews. In fact, some therapists express concern that doing so might influence the course of the therapy. For this reason, professionals stated that they preferred to make a request for feedback to the patient once the course of therapy had been completed so as not to influence the therapeutic relationship.

One group of psychologists perceives this request as a limitation of their professional autonomy. In particular, among the psychologists who declared feeling limited in their professional autonomy (47% of total respondents), 64% of them gave the request to solicit reviews from patients a score of 7 or higher, indicating a rather negative evaluation of this practice. In other cases, psychologists were able to meet the company’s demands by finding a formula for requesting reviews that was more in line with their own way of working, that is, customizing it. This allowed the professionals not to distort their work and to find a balance between what the organization required and their own professional methods.

I was afraid to ask because I felt like I was selling a product in the supermarket. So then over time, after a few months, I started to find a formula that was right for me. (Int. TL 3)

I looked for a way to ask her that was more mine, that did not clash with my professional ethics (Int. TP 2)

Thus, the fears and apprehensions expressed were, in some cases, overcome by the practitioners, highlighting a concern that gradually waned as they gained experience of working on the platform. This seems to be due to the fact that professionals have become accustomed to the new digital environment, that they have understood how this mechanism works, and that they have gained more confidence in their professional abilities, as they have managed to consolidate themselves as professionals within the platform.

In contrast, many of the research participants stated that they never perceived the possibility of receiving a review from their patients as a problem. For some professionals, patient reviews are unavoidable, as they are always present. Even if they are not expressed through the mechanism of reviews, they are part of the relationship between practitioner and patient and therefore inseparable from the process of therapy. Moreover, reviews are perceived as an inevitable mechanism of the digital context and thus recognized as an integral element of platform psychology. In this sense, practitioners avoid excessively questioning the goodness or otherwise of any evaluations made by patients, accepting reviews as a structural part of the digital context.

I had the idea that it was part, however, of a movement related to apps, start-ups, a social movement where reviews are there for everything, and so it was embracing modernity. (Int. TL 2)

It is OK that the online service also includes a review on a type of service like ours. Well, it's not like leaving a review of a hotel, but now we are talking about this subject, no, in the sense that I was not surprised by the fact that they told me "someone could leave you reviews." (Int. TP 4)

Some practitioners stated that they consider the review to be an incentive for future patients. In this sense, reading positive reviews of the practitioner or the service in general could help fearful, skeptical, or undecided people to approach therapy, contributing to the spread of mental wellbeing. On the other hand, reviews, as a new element of the digital world, are perceived by psychologists as a means to gain further feedback from patients. This feedback mechanism can be configured as a kind of fuse, triggered by the patient, that causes the professional to reflect on their work, their working methods, and the resonances that the therapist relationship can activate. Hence, reviews are considered useful feedback for the psychologist not only when they report a positive evaluation, but also when the work carried out together is criticized. This can be used by the practitioner to reflect on their own methods and even to improve some aspects of their work.

At the very beginning, a patient left a review saying I was willing to change the time and day of therapy. It really struck me because in my approach I am, I repeat, very strict about this... But the fact of knowing...that I could possibly put this arrangement in place made her feel welcomed. And this is something I had never thought about. (Int. TP 10)

I think it is a way to get feedback in the sense that in private, basically the greatest feedback, as well as the wellbeing of the patient, everything that is built together, is through word of mouth, that is, with the patient who then recommends you to another person. And that becomes an engine of gratification for oneself. Also because this profession is a bit particular in this sense, from the point of view of personal gratification, because the focus is so much on the other. Sometimes these aspects that in other works are there through compliments, you don't have them in the psychological job. (Int. TP 1)

Finally, reviews can be a useful tool for the organization itself, as a company needs to know the level of satisfaction and enjoyment experienced by its customers.

5.3.1.1.7 Setting

The theme of the setting is closely related to online therapy. The shift from an in-person to a digital setting undoubtedly has important consequences for how the psychologist interacts with the patient. This work does not aim to analyze the transformation of the setting from a clinical perspective. However, it is worth focusing on some elements that inevitably touch on dimensions of the professional identity of platform psychologists.

First, while the setting represented by the office is a neutral space, the digital context nullifies neutrality: the webcam allows the therapist to enter the patient's personal environment, unlike in traditional practice, and thus to gain access to new information and elements. Some professionals think that a non-neutral setting can even help the patient, as they might feel more comfortable doing the session in a familiar environment. Some participants noted that the ability to connect from a personalized space can also help professionals feel more secure in a new context, such as the digital one, as they can create a setting that feels personal to them even in the online world. Many of the psychologists interviewed acknowledged that the transformation of the setting from in-person to online causes the loss of certain elements, such as the ability to see the patient's body in its entirety, but it also introduces new ones. However, other professionals do not seem worried or fearful about

the possibility that patients can connect from any location. They view this specificity of online psychology as a strength, as it allows the patient to choose their setting completely freely.

For me, it's the image of a therapy that is a bit more...
In the office...it's like we have well-defined tracks.
Simply, the structured setting of the office is what we
are there, in the office. Simply, with Unobravo, I enter
people's homes, and they enter mine. And if someone
is unwell, a session on Unobravo can be done, in the
office it can't. So it seems to me that there is a bit of a
sort of track, so to speak. (F.G. 2 TP4)

The patient is also at home, the patient is also in their
space. And therefore a lot of types of resistance can be
a little more smoothed out, because being safe, being in
their own four walls, they manage to establish a more
immediate connection, while in the practice, they come
to you in a more aseptic environment, which they do
not know, which can be useful for many things, but
which increases this type of resistance. (Int. TL 1)

In general, it seems that concerns about the transformation of the setting provoked fears and anxieties, especially at the beginning of the platform work experience. Some patients' constant changes of setting destabilized and discomfited some psychologists. This circumstance also impacted how professionals perceived themselves, as the lack of consistency from patients was interpreted as devaluation of the therapeutic work and the professional's contribution.

To tell you the truth, it wasn't easy at all, in the sense
that it's a completely different mode compared to what
I was used to. (Int. TP 10)

Some people didn't use a PC, they used a cell phone.
So they were on the street or at home in their pajamas.
So anyway, it made me lose the cleanliness of the
setting. It is as if it somehow resonated with my being
a professional, my being a psychotherapist. (Int. TP 5)

Despite the challenges of the new therapy space, as professionals gained professional experience of using the platform they managed to adapt their practice and grew more confident about their abilities. In this sense, the transformation of the setting led professionals to work on themselves and on their capabilities and professional competencies so that psychological practice could adapt and align with the new digital context.

5.3.1.1.8 Patients

One initial consideration regarding patients accessing the Unobravo platform relates to a characteristic derived from the digital context. Some participants observed that the online environment attracts patients with a greater variety of experiences, backgrounds, and needs.

In the sense that the clinical experience, especially on Unobravo, since I've been on it, is definitely very varied like that image there. (F.G. 2 TP1)

The types of patients who have come to me over time, on Unobravo, I have very much compared to the users of a mental health center, to be clear...I have seen many different types of people. (Int. TP 6)

This diversification can be attributed to the very nature of the platform, which makes therapy more accessible to people from very different sociocultural, geographical, and personal backgrounds.

The image of the ocean. This one. Yes, that's the one I chose right away. Because it gives me the feeling that I can go anywhere. [...] I mean, the experience and background that a patient from Northern Italy can bring compared to one from London. And also in terms of histories, cultures and experiences, sometimes related to a significant resistance in the families of certain cultures, of certain geographical locations. It is an enormous richness. [...] It gave me exactly... what Unobravo did for me, the idea of being able to reach across the ocean from the average patient who might come to the office. I immediately felt the richness of the platform's work, not only from a clinical perspective, but also in terms of people's history and background. (F.G. 2 TP2)

The ones you see in the office are different patients. You really have a much broader modality, because the patients I see in person are patients either from my city or the province, so they tend to be patients who are, in quotes socio-culturally speaking, very similar. Clearly, opening up to online, I have a patient who is in Australia, one who is in America, one who is in the United Arab Emirates, and this leads you to have a very different management of the patient from a cultural point of view. So that, yes, helped me explore. For example, very different cultural and religious, political contents. (Int. TP 10)

This specificity of working on the platform is received with great enthusiasm by professionals. They emphasized that the opportunity to interact with patients from different cultural and geographical backgrounds strongly stimulates their curiosity and interest. The variety of experiences and

backgrounds that patients bring enriches the therapeutic process, making it more dynamic and engaging. Psychologists feel a greater sense of commitment and motivation in their work, as the need to adapt to different perspectives and understand new realities pushes them to further develop their skills.

Very nice. I mean, it has made me very curious [...] But it really stimulated my curiosity, going beyond an imaginary, a stereotype. And I realized, for example, what it was like to leave the country and thus find myself in a new dimension, approaching a whole series of dimensions that I don't explore in patients I see in person. That's a lot, and the curiosity part really activated me. (Int. TP 10)

Survey data confirm the value attributed to the possibility of working with different patients. In particular, the question exploring the reasons that psychologists choose to work both in-person and online revealed that the primary motivation is the ability to expand the variety of patients treated: 43% of psychologists indicated that the platform offers the opportunity to reach patients from different sociocultural contexts, allowing for greater diversification than was possible seeing patients in person. These data highlight how important it is for many professionals to enrich their clinical work with different experiences and perspectives.

However, on the theme of patients, the entry of psychological practice into the world of platforms does not have exclusively positive aspects for professionals. Interviews with participants revealed a perception that platform psychological work attracts patients with less motivation for therapy.

In the online context, the patient can come without motivation. Because they might have searched on Google the night before "I didn't sleep a wink" and then two minutes later, they connect on Instagram and there's an ad specifically for insomnia with a free first consultation and contact Unobravo. (Int. TL 5)

And there is perhaps not even much reflection on what it means to carry out a therapy and perhaps not even knowledge of what it means. Yes, there is also that, sometimes. So yes, from my point of view there are more dropouts of people who have expectations and then realize that doing a therapeutic path is a little different from what they expected. (Int. TP 7)

According to some interviewees, this can be partly attributed to the ease with which one can access online therapy. In the traditional context of in-person sessions, the patient is more actively involved,

as they must deal with the logistical commitment of physically going to the psychologist's office. This additional effort, which includes the time spent traveling and the need to plan their day around the session, contributes to a greater sense of responsibility and participation in the therapeutic process. Conversely, the immediate and often more convenient access offered by digital platforms, while making therapy more accessible, can sometimes reduce the perceived level of commitment from the patient, influencing their motivation and involvement in the therapeutic process. The ability to quickly sign up for the platform and, with the same speed, cancel an appointment seems to absolve the patient of responsibility, and they may feel less involved in the process. Moreover, the online platform context presents a different dynamic than the traditional one, where patients are often referred by a colleague, friend, or acquaintance. This lack of personal referral can reduce the patient's incentive to maintain a long-term therapeutic commitment. Without the support or direct recommendation of a trusted person, the patient might feel less motivated to continue therapy, perceiving it as a more easily abandoned commitment.

Consistent with the perception of low motivation, the data reveal that many professionals experience a high dropout rate from patients. This suggests that, according to participants, Unobravo patients seem more inclined to interrupt therapy.

The biggest thing for me is that those who are not motivated tend to give up more easily, because it's easier not to write anymore, not to respond, to delete the profile. And maybe you don't have the connection that you were sent by a friend of a friend, someone else, the doctor... you make a good impression. (Int. TP 3)

Being online, if I no longer want to be present, I may no longer be present. It can also happen clearly in the office, because a person may no longer show up, they can block the number; in short, we certainly do not go to pick them up at home, but online it is much easier because it is enough to simply stop accessing the platform or have the account deleted. So, you might say, it's maybe a little easier to walk away. (Int. TP 7)

Examining the dropout phenomenon in more detail, the survey results show that 54% of participants believe that therapy dropout is quite frequent on the platform, while 42% do not perceive that it happens with significant frequency. Analyzing the responses of those who perceive a high frequency of dropout on Unobravo, the participants clearly attribute this tendency to the digital context of the platform. Specifically, 40% of the respondents believe that the online environment makes it easier to interrupt therapy, as patients can simply stop attending sessions and easily cancel their account.

Another 40% highlight that many people approach online psychotherapy out of curiosity, taking advantage of the greater accessibility offered by the platform but without having a sufficiently solid motivation to continue the therapeutic process. This factor, related to the very nature of the digital medium, seems to favor a higher incidence of dropout than traditional therapeutic contexts.

As a result, the psychologists believe that, in the context of platform work, it is essential and a priority to focus on patient engagement. For interviewees, it is crucial that the therapist pays particular attention to creating a solid therapeutic relationship, actively working to engage the patient from the early stages of the process. This process involves helping the patient develop a genuine and conscious motivation toward therapy, building a clear understanding of therapeutic goals and potential challenges that might arise along the way.

And instead, there, we have to build motivation together, the engagement is all to be built, because there are those who say, “Well, the first session is free, I’ll do it and then see what happens.” (Int. TL 1)

At the level of relationships, the relationship is somehow different. It is a relationship in which you have to be either more directive or, I don’t want to use the term directive, but perhaps one that orients the other because, exactly, the fluidity of being online can lead others to be more predisposed to tell you “I change. I’m coming this time 10 minutes earlier or 5 minutes earlier,” as if those hours were less important, I don’t know. So the management of the relationship with the patient matters a lot. (Int. TP 5)

The perception of lower motivation and frequent drop-outs has a significant impact on the professionals involved. In particular, some of the psychologists pointed out that this can affect their professional wellbeing. When a therapist perceives that the patient is not fully motivated or involved in the therapeutic process, a sense of frustration and dissatisfaction may arise. This, in turn, may negatively affect the gratification the psychologist derives from their work, raising doubts about their effectiveness and the value of their professional contribution. This peculiar characteristic of platform patients, initially perceived by psychologists as problematic, was found to be particularly difficult during the first periods of work at Unobravo. At this stage, many of the professionals reported experiencing frustration, blaming themselves for the problem and seeing it as a reflection of their professional competence.

At the beginning, the first year was frustrating because it’s a bit...well, having many initial interviews, many introductory ones, the percentage increases. So, I found myself more often saying: “OK, yes, we’ve met, I thought everything went well, and then they

disappeared.” It happened 2, 3, 4, 5 times; somehow it resonated with me as an identity, as a role, because I kept thinking: “What’s going on? Maybe I’m not doing well online because I still don’t feel fully comfortable.” So yes, it frustrated me at the beginning. (Int. TP 5)

So I don't deny that there is a certain frustration with certain cases, because there really are those who...I have to say there are a few, but there are those that maybe then disappear and waste my time, because we also work with time, don't we? That this time is literally work. But anyway, especially in the beginning, I really felt a lot of frustration, I mean ‘now I've wasted time, I've wasted time for a therapy that will never be done, for something that will never be realised’. So definitely a bit frustrating from that point of view. (Int. TL 1)

Focusing specifically on the phenomenon of drop-outs, the results of the questionnaire show that this was particularly critical for the professionals in the initial period of working with Unobravo. Specifically, 45% reported not feeling suited to the online setting, 44% questioned their professional abilities, and 52% felt frustrated. However, over time and as they gained experience of online therapies, the psychologists gradually understood that frequent abandonment of therapy and failure to continue after the initial introductory session were structural aspects of the platform’s work context. As work experience on the platform progressed, the percentages related to the impact on perceived self-efficacy decreased drastically. The feeling of not being suited to the online setting and questioning professional abilities both dropped to 9%, showing a 35% decrease. This suggests that, over time, the psychologists develop greater confidence in their role and the dynamics of online therapy. Concurrently, responses indicating a rationalization of the drop-out phenomenon increased. The percentage of those reflecting on patients’ motivations for starting therapy on Unobravo grew from 50% to 54%, while those who believe that the high frequency of drop-outs is an intrinsic characteristic of the platform context increased from 26% to 42%, indicating growing awareness and acceptance of the phenomenon. Similarly, frustration related to therapy abandonment significantly decreased, dropping from 52% to 17% as the psychologists gained experience.

By now, I don’t pay much attention to it anymore because I’ve adopted the perspective that it’s a match, a bit like dating apps, it almost seems like you match, and you can leave more easily. Some come in more out of curiosity than anything else, so it doesn’t affect me much professionally anymore. (Int. TP 5)

If at the beginning it made me panic, now it doesn’t anymore. I realized that it’s not to do with me, but it’s part of being online. (Int. TP 2)

In some cases, the professionals have experienced these dynamics as opportunities to deepen their work and reflect on the meanings that therapy abandonment can generate for both the patient and themselves. This process of reflection and adaptation allows them to gain greater awareness of their role and therapeutic dynamics, improving their understanding of their own skills and limits. In this way, these experiences turn into moments of continuous learning, enabling the psychologists to refine their skills and become more adept at handling the complexities of clinical work, especially in the digital context. In this sense, drop-outs represent an opportunity for professional reflection: although the percentage of those who view this phenomenon as a cue to reconsider their approach decreased from 48% to 39%, it still seems to be an important component of professional growth even after they have worked on the platform for months.

But, as I mentioned before, I also find it very stimulating because it allows you to reflect on your own experiences, including on omnipotence. (Int. TL 1)

At the beginning it was not easy, but I learned, it was challenging, and it was also beautiful. (Int. TL 4)

5.3.1.2 Organizational Context Dimensions

Professionals working on platforms such as Unobravo are immersed in an organizational context that is innovative in several ways, not only because its digital nature introduces new operational dynamics, but also because of the particular business structure in which they work. Unlike traditional psychotherapeutic practice, where psychologists are usually accustomed to managing their own work independently, without direct monitoring or structural interventions from third parties, in this new model, they are integrated into a more supervised system. In a traditional setting, psychologists generally work independently, with complete freedom in managing patients, therapeutic methods, and work schedules without constant monitoring or organized support from an external entity. In contrast, within platforms like Unobravo, the organization introduces continuous supervision and support mechanisms that regulate the professional's work. The organizational elements, which are new to many psychologists accustomed to traditional free practice, create a more structured work environment. On the one hand, this can offer support and additional resources, providing a network of references that helps the psychologist improve their clinical practice and manage any difficulties. On the other hand, the presence of monitoring or protocols may require adaptation from the professional, who must become used to operating within a system with more defined rules and

guidelines, which may constrain some of the operational freedoms they were used to. The introduction of forms of supervision and control could thus represent a significant novelty, transforming the way the psychologist approaches their work, redefining the boundary between professional autonomy and belonging to a larger and more organized structure.

5.3.1.2.1 Support

In this context, the psychologists recognize that they operate within a well-defined organizational structure and clearly perceive themselves as part of a structured company. This organization provides them with fundamental professional and organizational references, which are particularly valuable. Such references not only provide a clear understanding of current organizational processes but also offer a view of their future path within the company. This involves transparency regarding processes, roles, and professional pathways within the company. This clarity allows psychologists to feel supported and guided by the organizational structure. With a well-defined view of responsibilities and growth opportunities, professionals can orient themselves more securely and plan their professional development more strategically.

The word I associate with Unobravo, both as a therapist and as a team leader, is that I can be guided. I've never felt alone, even though there's a person alone in that image. I've always been clear from the beginning that a path, a project awaited me, that there was a vision, a planning of something, so it's the image that best represents how I feel. The others seem too confused, and I don't relate to confusion or chaos. Instead, I see this guidance; I feel perpetually guided, directed, and even accompanied at certain moments, so I would say that one. (F.G.1 TL6)

When I entered, I realized that there was already an organization of work, that is, techniques, accompaniment. So I had a team leader, so I was assigned to a group. There was a team leader who followed me step by step. (Int. TL 4)

The hierarchy on which the company is based features a departmental structure that operates like a machine and has different levels of roles and responsibilities. This organization is distinctly perceived by psychologists, who have clear and precise references in performing their work.

What I found with Unobravo was really a hierarchical mode, if you will, where you had references. [...] Fundamentally, as much as online can give you the

The psychologist's work experience within the Unobravo platform

impression of being alone, in reality, the organization of the service was...from the very beginning, I found it to be super valid. (Int. TP 10)

That is, there are periodic meetings not only with the team but also with the Marketing Group, the group, I don't know, Communications. All these things that make you understand a little bit how the mechanism behind it works and what the goals are that you want to achieve. (Int. TL 1)

The feeling of having an organization supporting one's work is perceived through multiple channels. A very practical aspect for which the professionals feel they have corporate support is the security of having patients. The psychologists feel secure in their work thanks to the referrals managed by the platform. This represents a novelty in the field of psychological work and is perceived as a valuable element.

I truly believe that the most important part is the organization. So coming into contact with this made me feel, in some way, protected, even at the work level. And the fact that there is an algorithm that ensures you are never left uncovered. (Int. TP 5)

Another thing that made me feel safe was precisely the question of willingness to receive patients. So I felt comfortable, I knew that I was getting requests. (Int. TL 6)

Through a matrix question asking participants to rate from 1 to 10 how different elements of Unobravo contributed to their feeling of being part of the organization, it emerged that among the most relevant factors are the billing mandate, clinical discussion, peer intervention, technical support, and company rules. Specifically, 81% of participants rated the billing mandate as 7 or higher, recognizing it as one of the key elements that makes them feel integrated and supported. Technical support, considered crucial by 72% of participants, and company rules, rated highly by 71%, also play important roles in making professionals feel part of a well-organized and well-managed structure that provides a secure and stable work environment. In an intermediate position are company benefits, internal training, and the onboarding process, which received scores of 7 or higher from 52%, 54%, and 59% of participants, respectively. These elements are recognized as useful for the sense of belonging but are not as fundamental as other factors more directly related to daily work and organizational support. These results suggest that feeling part of Unobravo is linked to the practical tools and services the company provides, as these facilitate the professionals' daily work and make

them feel protected and supported. The company's support is therefore primarily perceived in the services that Unobravo offers to psychologists working with the platform.

Alongside the more practical aspects, the feeling of being supported by the organization is also given by the opportunity to build relationships and have professional exchanges with other psychologists. In this sense, collegiality becomes a dimension of support and help for the professional, who thus does not feel alone in carrying out their activities. The questionnaire shows that clinical discussion, considered fundamental by 79% of participants, and peer intervention, valued by 75%, are highly relevant factors, as they provide spaces for discussion and professional growth, reinforcing the sense of being embedded in an organization. The support from the organization for the individual is mainly perceived through the figure of the team leader. The relationship that is created, both professionally and more personally, positively influences the psychologist's work, making them feel protected and supported in their activities.

However, in the survey, when exploring the perception of oneself as a professional in terms of the working relationship with the platform, more than half of the psychologists claimed to feel like collaborators of Unobravo, highlighting a working relationship where the person is neither part of the company nor completely detached from it. In fact, just over 28% saw themselves as self-employed and 13% as employees.

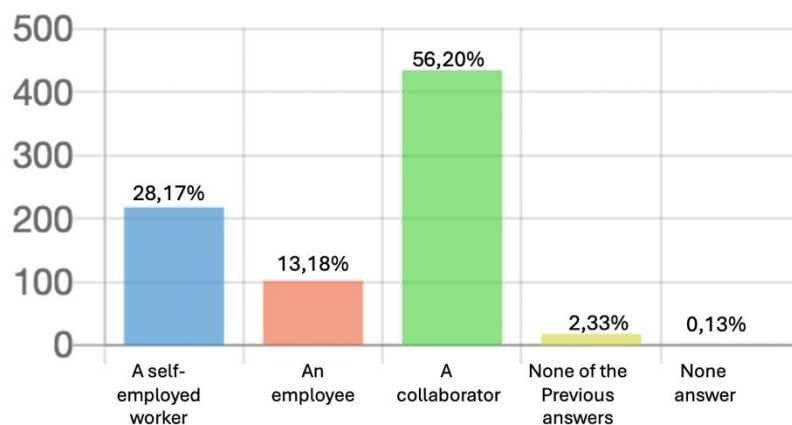


Figure 9: Survey Results – Perception of the Relationship with the Organization.

In this sense, the predominant perception of the psychologists, that is, as external or autonomous collaborators rather than as employees of Unobravo, could be influenced by their traditional professional autonomy but also by the characteristics of the employment contract stipulated with the platform (collaboration contract). These factors contribute to a view of their role as somewhere between professional independence and structured collaboration with the organization. These data,

regardless of the prevalence of one perception over the other, highlight the variety of the psychologists' experiences and experiences, which influence the way they perceive themselves and their professional relationship with the organization.

5.3.1.2.2 Monitoring

Another concrete aspect that allows professionals to understand that they are immersed in an organizational context is the presence of rules, guidelines, and working practices shared by all the psychologists working for the platform. Some interviewees expressed the feeling of having to submit to rules imposed by the company and feeling limited in their professional autonomy. However, investigating this issue on a broader sample through the survey, it emerges that more than half of the respondents (52%) do not feel restricted at all in their work, while 39% feel a little restricted, 8% a little, and only 1% perceive themselves as very restricted.

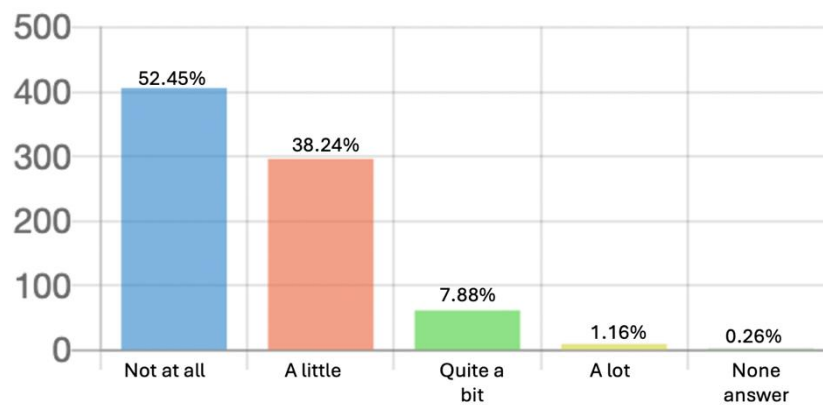


Figure 10: Survey results - Limitation of professional autonomy.

Exploring the reasons behind this perception, those who feel somewhat, fairly, or very restricted were asked about the specific factors influencing their sense of reduced autonomy. Among the most frequently mentioned factors, the session pricing set by the company was perceived as the main limiting factor, with 73% of respondents giving it a score higher than 7 (on a scale from 1 to 10). This was followed by Unobravo's request to ask patients to leave reviews, considered a limitation by about 64% of the respondents. Additionally, the guidelines for managing dropout, which involve contacting the patient if a session is missed, were perceived as a constraint by a smaller, but still significant, percentage of 46%.

Unobravo has indeed established guidelines regarding the management of the therapeutic relationship, suggesting to its psychologists methods related to engagement, communication, and

dropout management. The need to adapt one's working style to what is required by the company created, especially in the initial period of working with Unobravo, caused concern among the professionals who felt they had to adhere rigidly to the guidelines.

I see a lot of corporate dynamics here, namely not to lose the patient and therefore also the money, because in this case for the company, but also for all of us, it's about work. So, I disagree and I see a corporate dynamic. (Int. TP 2)

There used to be a rule. In the e-mail, you were told to reply within two hours to patients who wrote to you for the first time. And so then, all the more so with all those communications like that, that flow so abundantly, let's say that the first, the first period, at least the first weeks were a bit tiring, because there were all these things to be careful about. (Int. TP 7)

As shown by the findings presented above, the greatest resistance or concerns emerge when the interference touches the sphere of patient management. This phenomenon is largely explained by the nature of the psychological profession itself, which traditionally sees the psychologist working autonomously in the dyadic therapeutic relationship with the patient. The profession is based on strong decision-making autonomy in clinical treatment, and any perceived intrusion into this sphere is experienced as a potential obstacle to freedom and personalization of the therapeutic approach. However, with increased experience of working within Unobravo, the therapists started to understand that the company is not maniacal in its oversight of the professionals' work. In fact, the survey results highlight that while in the first few months of work, 25% of participants experienced discomfort from the feeling of being monitored and having to account for their actions, at the time of the survey, this percentage had dropped to 12%, with only 8% continuing to experience difficulties in adapting their work method to the rules of the digital organization. In this sense, as more time is spent on the platform, the guidelines are increasingly interpreted as suggestions for patient management rather than stringent rules that must be strictly adhered to.

After this first period, then I realised that there is no control from above, where if you do something different from what they expect then someone comes along and says 'no, you can't do that'. This already allows you to find your own dimension, your own way of being in things. And so the fact that there's not someone standing there looking at everything you do to say 'okay, it's not okay' is already a huge, huge freedom. (Int. TP 7)

A bit of surprise and also of oh my God, now these, I mean, what should I tell them? A little also in feeling observed. But then I realized that it wasn't a question of control so much as accompaniment. (Int. TL 4)

Thus, the participants seemed to become more aware that the need to adopt predetermined working methods concerns the management and organization of their daily work rather than direct clinical intervention with the patient. The professionals understand they need to integrate new operational procedures, such as completing reports, managing the online appointment calendar, and communicating their periods of absence. However, these organizational practices do not seem to be perceived as a significant limitation to professional autonomy.

5.3.2 Professional Affiliations and Networks

In addition to adapting to the new organizational and digital context, the professionals entered new professional networks. This did not mean abandoning pre-existing networks but rather integrating them with new relationships and connections. This aspect was crucial for the professional experience of the psychologists, both in terms of support and professional comparison opportunities and in the sense of belonging to a community. The results clearly show that Unobravo professionals feel a strong and shared need to be part of solid and well-structured professional networks. In fact, mutual sharing and support not only alleviate psychological burden but also enrich professional practice through the exchange of ideas, techniques, and diverse perspectives. Professionals greatly benefit from dialogue and interaction with other experts, further emphasizing the importance of professional networks. The following sections present findings about the sense of loneliness that psychologists may experience, the need to build supportive relationships, and the main professional networks as places of belonging.

5.3.2.1 Loneliness of the Psychologist and Need for Collegiality

This profession is characterized by individual work conducted directly with the patient, where a dyadic relationship is established between the therapist and the client. In this context, the psychologist must often manage various aspects of the clinical case in solitude, making crucial decisions and facing therapeutic challenges independently. These working conditions, where responsibility entirely falls on the individual professional, can easily lead to a feeling of isolation.

At first, I had the feeling of loneliness, especially with the first patients in the practice. (F.G. 2 TP3)

It's a very lonely job, I don't know how to explain that to you. [...] You are always alone...So yes, it is a very lonely profession. (Int. TL 3)

The sense of loneliness experienced by professionals is perceived as burdensome: it not only generates fatigue, but also represents a potential risk for their mental health and the quality of their work.

There's a famous book, "The Pain of Therapy," that says we psychotherapists work in solitude. And I think that's what can lead psychotherapists to burnout. (Int. TP 5)

I agree with the idea that it is a work in solitude. Because then in the room with the patient, whether face to face or online, you are alone. So in that 50 minutes of an hour, so to speak, you have to fend for yourself, with your own energy. And that can also have an impact in terms of well-being. (Int. TP 2)

Although the collective imagination perceives the work of a psychotherapist as a solitary activity confined to the private office, the interviewed professionals strongly expressed the importance of overcoming this loneliness. Indeed, the psychologists feel the need to create moments of professional exchange where they can talk with colleagues and other professionals in the field. Being part of a professional network is not seen merely as an additional option or an accessory advantage but an essential element of practicing the therapeutic profession.

Even though I mainly practice alone, I like to have comparison. I've always said, "Is life in the office just doing psychotherapy alone?" No, in my opinion. After a while, it becomes alienating. (Int. TP 1)

It is always a breath of fresh air when we see each other, you feel the need to want to see each other, because at least you feel you belong and contribute. (Int. TP 8)

This need for collegiality, with the consequent desire for comparison and support, is particularly felt by younger professionals. Many of them, once they finish their psychotherapy training, find themselves suddenly without stable references and significant professional relationships. This transition can create a strong sense of disorientation, as the support structure provided by the educational and training environment diminishes. Faced with this uncertainty, they urgently need to

build professional networks that can offer a reliable point of reference, where consultancy and support can be found in case of difficulties.

Before joining Unobravo, we all had, well, the group from the specialization school. I found myself at the time that the specialization school ended...yes, the group remains, but then you are really alone, meaning that in the end, we almost become competitors with other colleagues. (F.G.2 TP3)

I went from having... an environment where I could bring cases, where there was always continuous training, because every week, for better or worse, there is a lecture, to no longer having this. It's quite a change because you go right into freelancing, where you have to create your own network, and so there's this whole dimension of solitude. (Int. TP 7)

5.3.2.2 Professional Networks

Regarding the professional relationships in which the interviewees stated they are involved, two main types can be distinguished: the internal network within Unobravo and external networks. The latter include the group of colleagues with whom one shared university studies; the relationships established between colleagues working together in the same private practice; and the network of contacts developed with colleagues who attended or are currently attending the psychotherapy specialization school.

In the first case, relationships with former university classmates were rarely mentioned by the interviewees. When such relationships were cited, it was highlighted that they had been maintained sporadically and did not constitute a regular source of professional support. In contrast, a significant number of the interviewees described in detail the connections they had developed with colleagues within the practice where they worked in person. These professional relationships were often perceived as fundamental, not only for the technical and practical support they offer but also for the emotional support and sense of community they create.

We also meet with the colleagues with whom I share the practice. For example, we try to catch up for a coffee break together. Or we discuss some books, some texts. To tell the truth? Fortunately, I feel I have a good network of colleagues, meaning we do reciprocal referrals. (Int. TL 6)

Here in my practice, I have two colleagues in the other rooms. Once a week, we sometimes tell each other about cases. It's not structured supervision and more over a beer, but in the sense, yes, weekly. (Int. TP 10)

Finally, a predominant role in the narratives of the interviewees regarding external professional networks is attributed to the group of peers and former peers from the psychotherapy specialization school. For many psychologists, this group represents the only external professional network to which they feel they belong. For some, this group remains the only point of reference outside their immediate work environment, and it provides support that goes beyond academic training.

There's a continuous exchange even with my school colleagues. From my cohort, we continue to stay in touch. Daily, we always ask each other for advice on that. (Int. TP 10)

Currently only colleagues from psychotherapy schools. Fortunately, we can also meet in spaces other than the intervention in Unobravo. (Int. TP 1)

Regarding the internal network within the digital organization, the findings show significant enthusiasm among professionals about the opportunities for comparison and support offered by the platform. In fact, Unobravo stands out for its organizational structure, which promotes two main modes of interaction among professionals: interventions and individual meetings with the supervisor. In the first case, the psychologists expressed considerable appreciation of the structured peer meeting sessions organized by the platform. In particular, peer meetings were recognized as a useful and significant tool. The professionals emphasized how these peer exchange sessions, organized regularly and systematically by the company, represent a valuable opportunity for reflection on and improvement of their clinical practices.

Very much for me. Since every therapist can use it daily or weekly, it's really a way to manage cases, in my opinion, meaning I participate a lot. Participation is optional, I believe I've skipped very few, if not for work, for urgent matters, like holding other sessions. And it's very helpful. (Int. TP 10)

I feel it very much as a container. That there can be opportunities for exchange, discussion, and also growth among colleagues and that it is a little different from when you are freelance, that is, there are colleagues, but maybe you have commitments, and you don't meet.

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Whereas within Unobravo I see that there are more opportunities to meet, and so this thing pleases me. I like this. (Int. TP 2)

More specifically, the interviewees highlight the great value of exchanging ideas with colleagues who have different therapeutic orientations. This comparison is often considered a valuable resource, as it allows them to step out of their specific theoretical approach and explore a variety of perspectives in clinical reflection.

Yes, yes, I like it a lot because, in my opinion, it also helps to not only become curious but also to change perspective a bit. How can I put it? I mean, sometimes even the intuition of a colleague with a different orientation [...] can also help with one's own patients. (Int. TP 1)

When you do the group ones it's very interesting because actually, they all tend to take different approaches and that's very nice because if you as a therapist are not closed only in your type of approach, but you are open, you understand that there are so many points of view. For example, a cognitive-behavioral one, which I would never think of, but also from the point of view of intervention, then clearly I would find it difficult to put it into practice because it's not mine, but it's a way of looking at an aspect that for me maybe if I'm in an impasse with the patient in the management, it helps you a lot because it gives you a range of different possibilities. (Int. TP 10)

The survey data show that interventions, both at the beginning of the experience with the platform and at the time the questionnaire was completed, were perceived by a significant percentage of professionals as an opportunity to understand different professional perspectives (54% in the first months, 55% currently), as a valuable support in managing clinical cases (47% at both times), and as a tool for feeling part of a professional network (48% at both times), thus helping to reduce the sense of professional loneliness (43% at both times). These responses suggest that intraprofessional comparison is useful both for professional growth and for creating a sense of belonging to the organization. Additionally, there is a significant change for two items: the perception of difficulty in participating in interventions drops from 23% to 3%, while the feeling of participating only to comply with company rules decreases from 18% to 6%. This change suggests that while adapting to the new work context may have created some difficulties initially, over time the psychologists feel more comfortable, adapting their work to their professional needs rather than the organization's demands. Moreover, encountering the perspectives and viewpoints of new colleagues also has a direct operational impact on clinical practice. Some of the professionals, in fact, stated that they have

integrated techniques learned from colleagues during intervisions into their own practices. These psychologists have recognized the concrete value of the suggestions and strategies shared during these discussions, applying them effectively in managing their clinical cases. This exchange process not only enriches their therapeutic practice but also fosters the real acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Intervisions groups thus become genuine opportunities for continuous professional development, where colleague comparison is not only a moment of reflection but also an opportunity to learn and implement new techniques.

Well, first of all, different approaches. [...] It enriches you, from a professional point of view, because you learn new techniques, and that's extremely important to me. I don't know all the techniques, all the techniques from all approaches, but I've had the opportunity to experiment with techniques from others and try to make them my own, discussing them with colleagues. It has led to some therapies unlocking in a positive way. (Int. TP 9)

I am very open from that point of view. Comparing yourself with a cognitive, rather a slightly different, approach is always helpful. Those things that maybe I couldn't see until now. (Int. TP 6)

The second opportunity for comparison within Unobravo is represented by clinical discussion, that is, the meetings between the psychologists and their team leaders. From the interviews and focus groups, it clearly emerged how central this relationship is in the professional life of Unobravo psychologists.

I often have contact with the team leader regarding supervision. And I think it's a fundamental point of reference, even knowing it's there. [...] And this has been fundamental for me. So, a resource, a huge resource. (F.G.2 TP1)

I asked myself a lot of questions, thanks also to my team leader, who I must say was really good, she helped me a lot. I was able to edit a bit or find things I could improve. (Int. TP 5)

The professionals highlighted that the team leader was particularly present during the initial period of work at Unobravo. This proximity was perceived as extremely helpful, as it allowed the psychologist to receive constant support in adapting to the work on the platform. At the same time,

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the company was able to monitor how the professional was experiencing the transition to this new operational context. However, as they gained experience and familiarity with the platform, the respondents told that the relationship with the team leader became, in some cases, progressively less intense. The frequency of meetings decreased, giving way to more targeted support available on request and based on the specific needs of the professional. From a matrix question present in the questionnaire, which aimed to analyze changes in the frequency with which the psychologists request clinical discussion meetings with their team leader, a variation can be inferred. The data show that this need tends to decrease as work experience on the platform increases. The table below compares the first months of work at Unobravo with more recent months and shows the percentages related to the frequency of requesting clinical discussion, thus highlighting the change in the need for professional support over time.

	First Months of Work at Unobravo	Recent Months of Work at Unobravo
Once a Week	65%	12%
Once Every 2 Weeks	47%	14%
Once a Month	35%	40%
Once Every 2 Months	15%	36%
Once Every 4 Months	6%	25%
Once Every 6 Months	5%	21%
Once a Year	3%	16%

Table 7: Survey Results – Frequency of request for clinical discussion.

The table suggests that during the first period of working with Unobravo, most of the psychologists sought frequent clinical discussion sessions with their team leader, often weekly or biweekly, reflecting a strong need for support. However, as their experience of the platform grew, the frequency of their clinical discussion requests decreased. The higher percentages shift toward monthly or bimonthly meetings, indicating that the need for feedback and support diminishes over time as the professionals gained greater confidence and autonomy in their work.

It can be inferred that clinical discussions and interventions influence the sense of belonging to the organization studied here. Data from the survey show that most respondents (68%) feel like an integral part of the company, reflecting an integration with Unobravo's organizational structure.

These data highlight how many of the professionals perceive their role as members of a structured organization with shared values, goals, and vision. For an additional 23%, this sense of belonging goes beyond the mere professional aspect: they describe Unobravo as a “big family,” suggesting an emotional connection with the company that extends beyond the work sphere to involve a deeper emotional and relational involvement.

However, a significant portion of respondents (25%) primarily identify as independent professionals who use the platform as a tool for their activity, maintaining a certain distance from the company structure. These professionals see Unobravo more as a means that allows them to work than a community or organization to which they feel attached. This distinction reflects a more independent approach, typical of those who view the platform as a resource for their own autonomous practice without feeling integrally part of the corporate culture.

This diversity of perceptions highlights the variety of experiences and professional identities within Unobravo. On the one hand, some feel deeply connected to the company, considering it a work environment that fosters a sense of community and cohesion. On the other, some have a more detached view, preferring to maintain an identity as an independent freelancer while still benefiting from the services and opportunities provided by the platform.

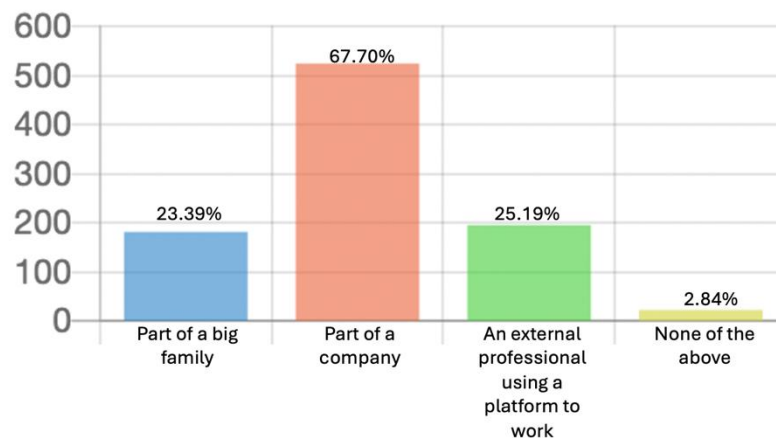


Figure 11: Survey Results – Sense of Organizational Belonging.

5.3.2.3 Reference Points and the Importance of Networks

The participants reported having perceived a significant change in their professional reference points following their entry into the platform. In other words, they felt they could turn to more people for support or professional consultation. In addition to pre-existing contacts, such as colleagues, former classmates, instructors, and tutors from psychotherapy school, the respondents noted a considerable increase in opportunities for professional exchange and support.

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New ones have been added. Yes, in some ways, they have provided an upgrade. Having previous reference points, and therefore the possibility of greater exchange, a broader comparison, also based on access to a wider therapeutic work. [...] And for now, I have made a huge leap from before to after. (F.G.2 TP1)

And also the comparison, the comparison with other colleagues after I joined Unobravo, increased exponentially. [...] So I would say, yes, it's Unobravo that has let me make a sprint from a professional point of view, always related to unity, to confrontation. (F.G.1 TL2)

To assess the importance attributed to professional networks by the psychologists working on Unobravo, the survey included a matrix question allowing respondents to score various options from 1 to 10. The results indicate that Unobravo team leaders are considered by most respondents to be the most significant professional relationship, with 82% giving them a score of 7 or higher. Next in importance are the psychotherapy school classmates, or former classmates of those who have completed the psychotherapy course, with 75% rating them 7 or higher. In-person colleagues are also positively evaluated, with 71% awarding them a score of 7 or higher. Conversely, the professional network perceived as least relevant is that of colleagues who are members of the professional order, with 35% of respondents giving them a score of 3 or less. For a more detailed overview, please refer to the following table, which provides a graphical representation of the importance of various professional networks for Unobravo psychologists.

	≤3	≥4 e ≤6	≥7
Unobravo Team Leader	4%	13%	82%
Unobravo Team Members	12%	29%	58%
External Unobravo Colleagues	28%	27%	33%
Unobravo Colleagues in the Same Geographical Area	34%	23%	39%
Former University Classmates	29%	24%	43%

(Former) Specialization School Classmates	9%	12%	75%
Specialization School Tutors/Professors	17%	15%	63%
In-Person Colleagues	10%	10%	72%
Members of Professional Association (Ordine degli Psicologi)	35%	31%	28%
Colleagues from the Same Association	26%	17%	36%

Table 8: Survey Results – Importance of professional networks.

In terms of which professional figure is considered a reference for support and discussion by Unobravo psychologists in the event of work-related difficulties, the results clearly highlight the importance attributed to different professional networks. In line with this trend, Unobravo team leaders, in-person colleagues, and (former) specialization school classmates emerge as significant reference figures. Specifically, 55% of the psychologists stated that they “always” or “often” turn to the team leader in case of difficulties, 48% turn to in-person colleagues, and 54% turn to classmates from the specialization school. In contrast, colleagues from the professional association are considered a much less frequent reference point: 75% of the psychologists reported they “never” or “rarely” seek support or discussion from them.

Additionally, as regards the perception of the solidity of the external professional network outside Unobravo, 47% of the participants rated this network “solid/strong,” reflecting a positive perception of relationships with colleagues and professors from the specialization school, who are seen as crucial reference points in case of work-related difficulties. However, there is also some disillusionment, with 27% considering the network “fragmented,” 8% “temporary,” and 16% “weak.” These data suggest a lack of cohesion and unity in external professional networks, which could contribute to the sense of isolation among professionals, who do not feel fully supported in their activities. This perception of fragility in the external network might explain why Unobravo professionals place great value on the role of the team leader and peer discussions within the platform, making these relationships particularly central to their professional lives.

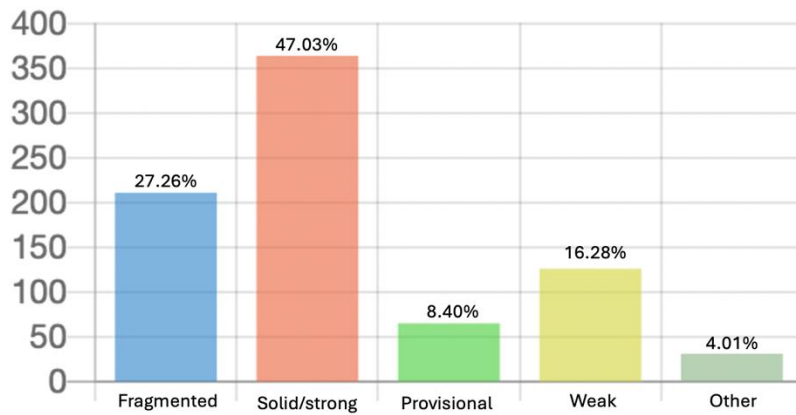


Figure 12: Survey Results – Perception of External Professional Network.

5.3.3 Skills and Professional Capabilities

As described, the dimensions of Unobravo’s digital and organizational context introduce significant new elements into therapists’ work experiences, transforming the role of psychologists. Professionals placed in this new context find themselves needing to adapt their practices to meet the demands not only of patients but also of the company and the specific dynamics of the digital environment. This adaptation requires a certain flexibility and the ability to navigate structural and technological demands that differ from traditional ways of practicing the profession. The research participants emphasized that this change has impacted their professional experience. Working in a digitalized and organized environment like Unobravo has led to a revision of their practices, forcing them to take on new ways of working. However, this change has not been perceived solely as a challenge but also as an opportunity for personal and professional growth.

5.3.3.1 Adapting One’s Work to the New Context

First, responses to the questionnaire reveal that only 13% of participants reported making no changes to their ways of working. In fact, the majority stated that the experience of working on the platform has influenced and transformed their professional practice both in terms of operational management and specific clinical aspects of therapy. Some of the professionals highlighted how adapting their working methods to the new digital context was challenging, especially in the initial period of joining the platform. This primarily meant adjusting their therapeutic approach to the changed setting, transitioning from in-person therapy to online therapy. The professionals had to find new strategies, adapting to the digital context in working with patients.

I have to tell the truth, it wasn't easy at all, in the sense that it's a completely different mode compared to what I was used to. But now it's been a good two years that I've been doing it and it's different, but it has its strengths and weaknesses, as everything does, I believe. (Int. TP 10)

And from a clinical point of view, without the presence of the body one can still find other strategies to work with the patient. (Int. TP 2)

Another professional adjustment to the platform context is represented by changes in working hours. The psychologists reported that in some cases, they have accommodated the company's requests and in others, the needs of patients to be able to work.

I noticed over time that there were people who asked me to do therapy until 10 pm. That's why I increased it or on Saturday mornings. So what happens? Now I travel. (Int. TP 3)

Unobravo was looking for people who were available in the evenings, and I made sure I was. (Int. TP 4)

However, adapting one's work also involves organizationally shared practices. In this sense, the psychologists need to adjust to the company's guidelines and requests as concerns patient management. Despite this, the difficulty in adapting to the guidelines suggested by the company gradually diminishes as the professionals understand the need to balance the organization's demands with their own professional style.

After that, I have to say that things have changed because I have created some boundaries for myself. (Int. TP 7)

So it helped me a lot to train and also to, how can I put it, create. In my opinion, this too, creating my own way of working, because sometimes when you come out of the school you have the imprint of that specialization school. And so there I had to reposition myself. And it was a bit difficult at the beginning, because I was finishing school anyway, I was being told a few things here, I wasn't sure I could move...to do well. (Int. TL 4)

The research indicates that adapting to the new work context also involves the ability to integrate professional practice through the new channel offered by the Unobravo platform with clinical work

performed outside it. Indeed, from a multiple-choice question in the questionnaire, it emerges that of the 653 participants working through both channels, 22% stated that they need to review and adapt their approach depending on the channel used, demonstrating sensitivity to the peculiarities of the two modalities. These data suggest that some of the professionals consider it important to reshape their strategies and techniques based on the context, whether virtual or physical. On the other hand, 36% of the respondents stated that working with two different channels does not entail significant changes in their operational style. For this group, adapting from online to in-person does not represent a significant challenge, which may highlight a flexibility in applying psychological skills that fit both settings.

Interestingly, over half of the participants (52%) find it stimulating to be able to practice the profession both in-person and through the online platform. This reflects a positive perception regarding the versatility that comes from using both channels, which may be seen as an opportunity to expand their skills and reach a broader audience. Only a very small minority (6 professionals, about 1% of the total) reported difficulties in managing both modalities. This figure, though small, highlights that for some, managing two channels may present specific challenges, such as the need to balance the flexibility required by online work with the stability of the traditional in-person approach.

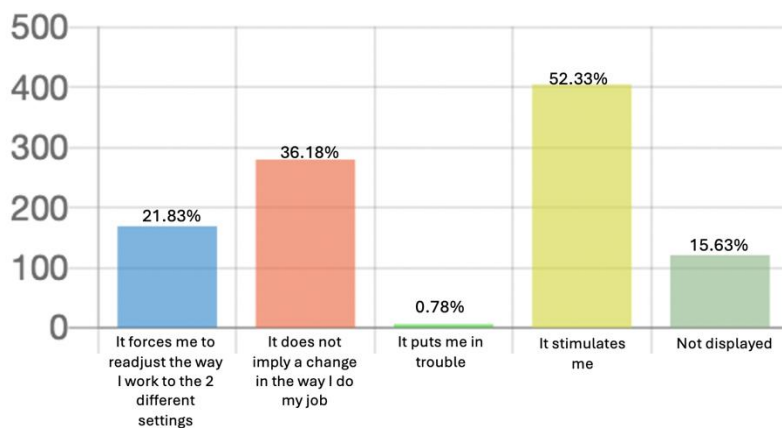


Figure 13: Survey Results – Use of Different Professional Channels.

5.3.3.2 Professional Growth

The experience of working within Unobravo is perceived by most of the research participants as a period of professional growth. For these psychologists, working on the platform represents a concrete opportunity for training, consolidation and development of professional knowledge and skills.

From my own point of view as a psychotherapist, let's say, I certainly grew a lot compared to before, that is, now thinking about how I used to conduct therapy, I would say "with that patient I could have done this, I could have done it differently." If it had happened today, I would have handled it differently. (Int. TP 1)

In my opinion, this role trains you a lot in critical reasoning, because you are always reasoning about other people's patients, about your own and other people's patients, that is, you do clinical in the morning, in the evening. And so there is a clinical training that I think has made me grow so much. (F.G.1 TL6)

Deepening the perception of identity strengthening and professional growth through the survey, it emerges that the vast majority of the participants felt their professional experience had increased. Specifically, 34% stated that they perceived an increase in their professional experience "quite a bit," while 62% perceived it "a lot."

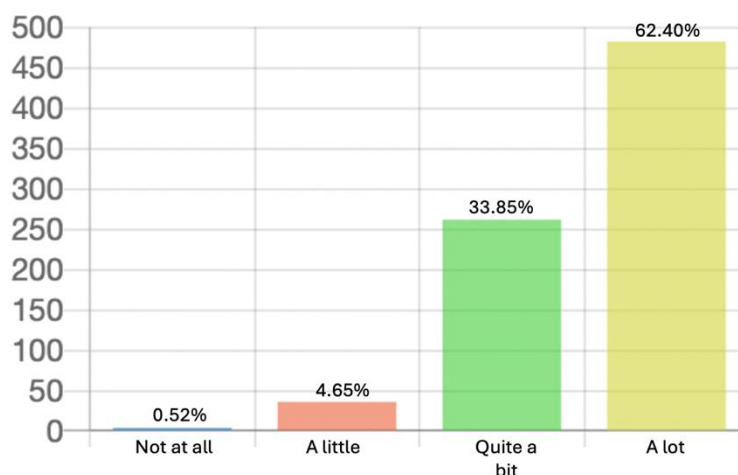


Figure 14: Survey Results - Professional growth.

Those who reported experiencing professional growth noted significant improvements both personally and in their clinical skills. On a personal level, 74% of the participants stated that they have gained greater confidence in their professional abilities, reflecting a growth in self-assurance and mastery of their role. A relevant aspect also concerns emotion management: 24% can better handle emotional resonances, which is crucial in psychological work for maintaining balance. Additionally, 39% reported improved frustration management, demonstrating growth in personal resilience and the ability to tackle challenging situations without being overwhelmed.

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Regarding clinical skills, the progress is equally notable: 77% of the professionals reported an increase in experience managing the online setting, a skill that is increasingly crucial today. Moreover, 23% indicated that they have acquired new therapeutic techniques, thus expanding their professional toolkit. An interesting finding is that 45% of the psychologists have integrated their therapeutic approach with other perspectives, suggesting an openness to different orientations. Finally, 25% have improved their ability to manage new psychopathologies, showing greater versatility in addressing a wider range of clinical issues.

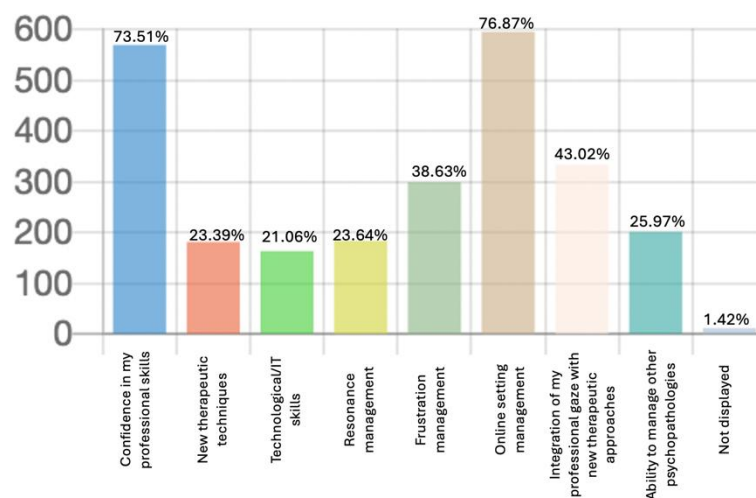


Figure 15: Survey Results - Dimensions of professional growth.

The psychologists interviewed emphasized that professional growth did not occur immediately after they joined the platform but was possible after an initial phase of difficulty and adaptation to the new working environment. The professionals were able to understand the elements of the organizational environment that allowed them to experience professional growth and gain more experience. Specifically, exploring the elements of Unobravo that, in the therapists' perceptions, contributed to their professional growth, the main factor (79%) is the opportunity to undertake a lot of practice due to having a large number of patients.

The image of that lake with that big rock and the little tree growing on the rock moved me a lot because it represents Unobravo for me. I feel it had a very positive impact on me as a therapist, in terms of professional growth, meaning that I really feel I have blossomed as a therapist here on this platform. Because in Unobravo we are given a lot of trust, so we are entrusted with many people, and this was the first time something like this happened in my professional experience, so I really

felt I blossomed professionally. I feel that my self-esteem has been nurtured in this sense by my team leader and by the service itself, so I kind of feel like that little tree that... let's say I found my place to blossom. (F.G.1 TL6)

The fact that I have to interface with so many different people from so many different contexts, even people who live abroad or simply in very different realities. And this has definitely allowed me to be more flexible, to be able to interact precisely with people who are in different contexts, are different. (Int. TP 4)

Unobravo provided key tools that contributed to this growth, among which clinical discussion by the team leader (66%) stands out. This figure was often central in illuminating professional strengths and weaknesses, guiding the psychologists in the new digital context and supporting the enhancement of their skills. Additionally, the opportunity to engage with colleagues through team interventions (51%) and, more specifically, with professionals of different therapeutic orientations (42%) was appreciated, broadening the respondents' professional horizons.

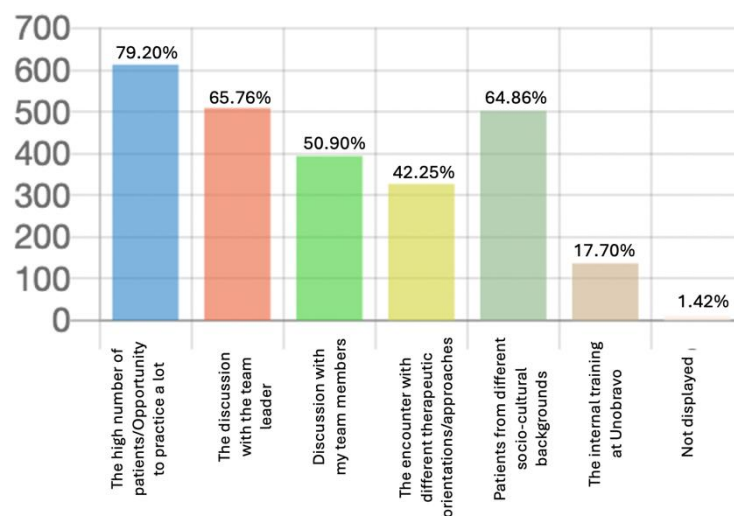


Figure 16: Survey Results – Elements Contributing to Professional Growth.

The work experience on the Unobravo platform is thus perceived by the interviewed professionals as an opportunity to integrate their professional approach with new perspectives. In particular, the way the organization is structured facilitates professional meetings and exchanges, allowing the psychologists to interact with a large number of colleagues. The interaction with colleagues within the platform is seen as a source of professional enrichment, presenting the psychologists with different methods, techniques, orientations, and working approaches.

This is extremely important to me. Being influenced by other thoughts and perspectives. It really gives you a chance to open your mind and solve a specific situation that maybe you weren't able to unlock. (Int. TP 9)

An enrichment yes, especially also of the techniques they use, because, for example, there are many patients with symptom problems that I am seeing at the moment. As far as my systemic training is concerned, there is none, that is, I realize that the cognitivist approach is perhaps more appropriate. So I have often asked colleagues with this approach what they would do. They pointed me to techniques that also worked. (Int. TP 3)

Interactions with colleagues, especially those with different therapeutic approaches, are perceived as opportunities to view patients' issues from a different perspective, enriching one's own perspective with new insights. Intervisions are considered the main moments of professional exchange, as they allow individual psychologists to engage with different therapeutic orientations. What is learned through interactions within Unobravo is also applied to other professional groups, such as those formed by colleagues from psychotherapy schools. In this sense, there is a professional exchange that transcends the boundaries of the company.

5.3.3.3 Understanding Oneself as a Professional

The work experience within Unobravo is seen by the interviewees as a valuable means of gaining professional awareness. Specifically, emphasis is placed on the ability to understand oneself as a psychologist in terms of skills, competencies, and emotional responses.

I learned a lot about my professional role. First of all, managing frustration, you come into full contact with your feelings, your emotions, with what you want to be good at. Even there I had hands-on experience with the highest level of frustration. So I learned to connect more with this. (Int. TP 5)

And joining Unobravo really gave me the chance to feel comfortable and to discover that the resources I had were better than I thought. So it really gave me the possibility to be able to see my resources, to enhance them together with the patients. (F.G.2 TP1)

In this sense, Unobravo allows professionals to understand their strengths and weaknesses, for example, by recognizing the types of patients that are most compatible with them. Beyond specific areas of expertise, psychologists seem to become aware of how patients resonate with them. An important space for self-reflection as a professional is represented by interventions, moments when psychologists can interface with different colleagues and benefit from continuous feedback. Similarly, clinical discussions are considered valuable for working with one's team leader on personal emotional responses, allowing psychologists to work on themselves and contribute to professional maturation.

Unobravo has given me a lot of arrows in my quiver, especially in being a therapist. I also see it when we do interventions, right? With our therapists, we all have different specializations and interacting with different specializations makes me grow a lot professionally. (F.G.1 TL4)

Confidence in myself, which grew a lot, and I owe this especially to my supervisor, who in many situations responded to me therapeutically, in the sense that he then read the subtext of what I was communicating with respect to therapy with patients. [...] Those moments of confrontation for me were really precious. (Int. TP 1)

The interviewed psychologists repeatedly highlighted how clinical discussion and intervention work increased their confidence in their professional abilities. In this sense, the platform experience not only allowed the psychologists to learn new clinical skills but also to develop greater perceived self-efficacy.

Increased confidence in my abilities has been useful in this sense. So to be more confident in saying, "OK, but I can do these things, so I can push myself further, try, don't get stuck." (Int. TP 3)

In the use of techniques, I also learnt to dare more. To try, that is, to really believe more in what I have studied. (Int. TL 6)

Increased self-confidence does not seem to occur in the initial phase of joining the platform. On the contrary, the psychologists who start working with Unobravo experience difficulties, tension, and stress, especially due to the large number of patients assigned. However, as the work on the platform continues, Unobravo's organizational structure, which includes various roles and responsibilities,

makes professionals feel supported, fostering increased self-confidence. Having a company backing them makes the psychologists feel more secure and serves as a support in their professional activities. This allows Unobravo psychologists to experiment with their work, gaining greater self-efficacy as they continue their experience on the platform.

Probably the support and the working environment made me believe in myself a lot, for sure. I would say this for me. [...] Besides the meetings, you have feedback with your team leader, who gets to know you based on how you work, etc. That made me feel very supported. I had feedback and input. So you felt you belonged to something. (Int. TL 3)

I always say that if that case had happened to me in the presence maybe I would have rejected it immediately saying that I don't have the skills. I mean maybe in my private activity in presence I would have felt more alone. (Int. TL 5)

This increased confidence in their abilities also affects clinical practice, as the professionals felt more self-efficacious and tended to experiment more and take risks, distancing themselves from the way they worked before joining Unobravo. Additionally, the opportunity to have a large number of patients and thus gain extensive clinical practice allows the psychologists to feel more secure in their work and professional abilities.

5.3.4 Representations of Platform Psychology

The research conducted has provided insights into the main representations through the perceptions expressed by Unobravo psychologists regarding the role of psychologists working on digital platforms and, more broadly, online therapy. This has allowed for the development of a picture that reflects various perspectives, not only related to those actually operating within the platform context but also concerning the broader professional community of psychologists. Indeed, the dominant representations within the professional community of platform psychology seem to influence the psychologists working in this context. If the community of colleagues views online therapy as a less authentic or effective mode than traditional face-to-face therapy, this can foster doubts and insecurities among the psychologists working through digital platforms. Such perceptions can affect how they view themselves and their profession. On the other hand, when digital and platform therapy is seen as a natural and innovative evolution of psychological practice, psychologists' sense of legitimacy increases, encouraging them to embrace new technologies with greater confidence.

However, the results do not provide a static and uniform picture but highlight a diversity of viewpoints and representations from both Unobravo psychologists and the broader professional community. This variety reflects the different experiences and perceptions of professionals regarding online and platform psychology. Moreover, a process of change is clearly underway, and perceptions of digital psychology are evolving. Psychologists are gradually revising their initial ideas, adapting to new dynamics, and recognizing the potential offered by this new work context, suggesting a transition toward greater acceptance and integration of technology into clinical practice.

5.3.4.1 Perception of Representation in the Professional Community

The most negative representation of this new professional role seems to come from within the psychologist community itself. Interviewees have noted that colleagues who do not work through technological platforms often have a critical view of psychologists who choose to work with these tools. Specifically, various features of the model proposed by Unobravo are contested by the professional community. These criticisms are not limited to the platform itself but extend to the psychologists who adhere to the guidelines and operational methods promoted by the company, who are often perceived as less competent than those practicing in more traditional ways.

Perhaps the fact that we are, let's say, a company that clearly has a business mindset, also geared toward marketing, as it should be. So maybe this isn't well-regarded. I mean, given that our profession is somewhat particular, perhaps some disagree with...for example, sending a pre-written welcome message. Something like that or using informal language. Or the first free session, that too, once, I found that it wasn't well-regarded by colleagues. (Int. TP 1)

I think that to this day I am still seen as a second-class psychologist. Many, many use online but there is the idea that the real psychologist works face to face, so there is no symmetrical dimension. (Int. TL 2)

However, narratives from interviewees reveal that the professional community outside the platform does not consist solely of skeptics or opponents of online and platform psychology but also includes colleagues who are more open and favorable to the adoption of this digital tool. These professionals recognize and appreciate the potential offered by online therapy and see platform therapy as an opportunity to expand access to mental health services, reach a broader audience, and leverage technological innovations to enhance the effectiveness of psychological support.

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These two opposing views highlight the ongoing debate within the professional community reflecting the different perspectives on the evolution of therapeutic practice in the digital age.

I think the professional community is somewhat divided between those who see the advantage and those who don't. So, those who see it as an opportunity. I'm not saying this in a negative sense, but perhaps one is also motivated by this opportunity. And those who view it in a negative light, as something degrading. (Int. TP 6)

In my opinion, some are definitely against online therapy, many others are very conflicted, because it is a modality that if you don't try it, you don't understand. (Int. TP 3)

In accordance with what was gathered in the qualitative survey, in exploring the representation of the professional community of psychologists on the platform through the Unobravo survey, a non-uniform picture emerged. Furthermore, the percentages of those who neither support nor oppose are relatively high, suggesting a possible lack of awareness on the subject or a reluctance to express an opinion. When asked whether external colleagues consider platform psychologists and online therapy to be a “second-class” form of psychology, more than half of the respondents disagreed, while nearly 30% agreed with this statement. However, when asked if they perceive a change in the representation of online psychology by the professional community, over 70% of the respondents confirmed noticing this evolution. This suggests that, until recently, a negative view of online psychology was indeed present within the professional community.

In general, these results indicate an ongoing transformation in how online and platform therapy is perceived, consistent with the findings of the interviews and focus groups. The respondents reported noticing a growing recognition of the validity of online therapy within the psychological community.

I believe that almost three years after COVID, online therapy is now considered a legitimate therapeutic mode. (Int. TP 10)

For many others, however, it is in the making, because they are realizing that it is the new frontier. (Int. TP 3)

Despite this ongoing change, about 45% of respondents agreed that colleagues still differentiate between in-person therapy and online therapy, indicating that the change is still evolving. As often happens with changes, the equivalence between the two channels for practicing the profession is more

evident among younger professionals, who tend to embrace new technologies, compared to older professionals, who are perceived as more skeptical by 59% of respondents. In this sense, some psychologists link opinions about online therapy, which range from skepticism to acceptance, to the age of individuals, believing that younger people are more inclined to positively embrace online therapy. In contrast, those who have been in the profession longer often show greater resistance, probably due to a lack of familiarity with digital tools and a more conservative attitude towards change.

In my opinion, there is a disparity between the younger group and the older group. I have heard this myself. [...] I think that young people are a bit more open to everything related to online therapy and its effectiveness. And then I think there is a segment, which is maybe older and more skeptical, who view it as if we are those who manage to reach patients we couldn't reach before. So a bit of a cold war, so to speak, regarding all of this. (Int. TP 9)

But I think it's more an internal rigidity of the old-style professionals, because then among us "new" ones we say that by now it's "cleared customs." (Int. TL 1)

The perception that platform psychology is less prestigious is not without impact on the psychologists working within Unobravo. Although they view this negative perception as an unfounded prejudice, it has led them, especially in the early period of working on the platform, to feel that their professionalism and the value of their work have been called into question. In some cases, this representation has not only contributed to a sense of devaluation and lack of recognition for the contribution they offer, making them feel belittled, but it has also undermined their self-confidence as professionals.

Actually, it was very, very belittling at first, as if it could be the only way to do this job. I experienced it badly. (Int. TL 5)

Sometimes there are critical posts on our groups of psychologists, and I feel hurt. Because they say that Unobravo, like other platforms, is exploitative. They are a money machine, full stop. They pay you very little and then you have to, you know, keep patients. (Int. TL 4)

Examining the impact of the perception of the psychologists working on the Unobravo platform of the professional community on a larger scale, the results suggest a process of rationalization and reassessment over time. Initially, about a third (35%) of the involved psychologists felt diminished by their colleagues' judgments, revealing that these judgments had a negative effect on their self-esteem and sense of professional value. However, over time, this perception seems to have changed: currently, only 9% of the psychologists continue to feel devalued. Instead of doubting their competencies, the psychologists now express increasing rage with the lack of understanding from the professional community regarding the value of online therapy. Specifically, 32% of the respondents are irritated that Unobravo's role in reducing stigma associated with psychotherapy is not recognized. Additionally, 35% of the respondents were angry that the platform is not recognised for its role in creating new job opportunities for many professionals. In this context, 55% of the survey participants consider the belittling of online psychotherapy to be foolish, as digital therapy represents a natural evolution of the field in line with unstoppable technological progress. This view seems to reflect a paradigm shift among the psychologists from an initial sense of insecurity and devaluation to a more assertive defense of their role, emphasizing the importance of greater awareness and acceptance of the innovative value of online therapy within the professional community.

5.3.4.2 Representation of Unobravo Psychologists

Consistent with what was previously expressed, several Unobravo psychologists shared that initially, they harbored some skepticism about the idea of practicing through an online platform. Many were initially doubtful about the effectiveness of remote therapy and concerned about the possible limitations compared to traditional in-person therapeutic settings. This initial reluctance was often linked to fears about the quality of interaction with patients, the perception of greater emotional distance, and uncertainty about how to best manage therapeutic dynamics in a virtual context.

I was also a bit skeptical before joining. And I joined with curiosity. If there hadn't been a pandemic, would I have joined? I don't know; the right situation arose. (Int. TL 4)

I struggled a bit at first, because I felt like it was a short cut, you know? That with the fact that you have patients, with the fact that you work from home and so on and so forth, I used to experience it a bit like that too. (Int. TL 1)

Indeed, analyzing the reasons that prompted psychologists to start working on the platform through survey data reveals that many of these reasons are practical and instrumental in nature, suggesting a choice driven by necessity rather than a desire to work in such a context. For example, significant motivations included the possibility of expanding their client base, chosen by 56% of participants (433 out of 774), and the opportunity to leave jobs not related to clinical practice or therapy, indicated by 236 professionals (30%).

Many Unobravo psychologists did not initially see entering the platform as a long-term career solution, but rather as a valid option in the present. The survey question exploring participants' expectations about the duration of their work on the platform shows that most of them began this career without a defined long-term vision (57%). Only 16% considered platform work a permanent choice from the beginning, while 27% viewed it as a temporary option.

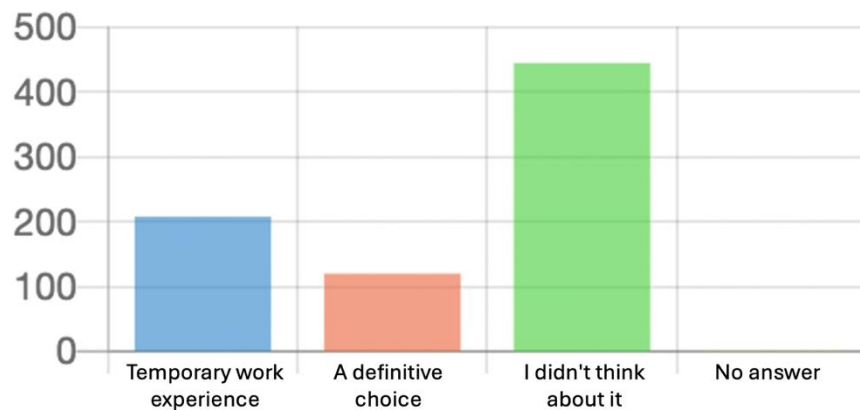


Figure 17: Survey Results – Expectations on Duration of Platform Work.

Accordingly, some psychologists reported that they initially faced difficulties working through the platform, partly due to the widespread perception that this channel represented a sort of shortcut in professional practice. This belief led them to feel insecure about the legitimacy of their work, fearing that using an online platform might be seen as a way to overly simplify the therapeutic process, reducing the complexity and depth of psychological work. For some, this perception created a certain internal resistance, fueled by the fear that adopting a technological method could somehow undermine their professionalism or compromise the quality of care provided to patients.

Some of the interviewed professionals shared that they had to undertake a process of reflection and deconstruction of their negative beliefs about psychological work conducted on the platform. This internal work was approached in various ways: some chose to explore and reframe their negative

beliefs during sessions with their analyst, while others decided to discuss it with their team leader, finding support and guidance within the company.

To tell you the truth, initially we did a lot of work on this with my team leader and then with my analyst, because at first, I didn't believe in it and was really conflicted. On the one hand, there was the financial dimension that you want and need to pursue, and on the other hand, there was the thought, "If I say I work online, I'm not a good analyst because analysts don't work online." (Int. TP 10)

I had my own resistance, as if working on the platform would de-qualify me. I had to deconstruct it, and today I am proud of that. (Int. TP 8)

In general, increased experience of working on the platform led many professionals to positively reassess the concept of digital psychology. Over time, and thanks to the concrete results achieved in online therapies, many psychologists have started to recognize the value and effectiveness of this approach. The success of therapies and the significant progress achieved by patients during psychological treatment on the platform have contributed to reinforcing confidence in this intervention model. This evolution has led many professionals to reconsider the potential of online psychology, seeing it not only as a valid alternative to in-person therapy but also as a tool capable of delivering comparable results in terms of therapeutic impact and achievement of patient goals.

But then, being involved and understanding how it works, especially being on the other side. This also became part of shaping my professional identity, right? I mean, why should it be any less? Also seeing the results in the patients I follow, I mean, it doesn't change anything if it's online. They've had amazing results, so. (Int. TL 1)

If everything is online now, let's do it well and try to understand it as much as possible. Then to see that anyway I have patients that I've been following for a long time, I see that they're doing well, some are doing better, so I say "whatever, then maybe online therapy is not so useless." (Int. TP 4)

In line with the qualitative results, data collected through the questionnaire confirm a significant reassessment by psychologists of their experiences of working on the platform. Initially, while many did not consider in detail what to expect from this experience or viewed it as a temporary solution,

over time they recognized the platform's value as a useful and relevant channel for practicing their profession. Indeed, most responding psychologists (49%) wish to continue collaborating with Unobravo while also maintaining in-person work. This suggests that a hybrid model, combining platform work with face-to-face sessions, represents the ideal solution for many. The second most common preference (38%) concerns those who opt for a mixed practice that includes collaboration with Unobravo and a combination of private work, both online and in-person. In this sense, the data highlight the central role that Unobravo continues to play in the psychologists' professional lives. Only a small minority of the professionals envisions their professional future completely outside the platform, indicating that most consider Unobravo a stable and relevant pillar for their career. Over time, Unobravo has indeed established itself as a significant channel for a substantial portion of the professionals, becoming an indispensable component of their future activities. This shift in perception indicates that the platform not only meets immediate needs but also offers a perspective of stability and long-term growth.

In addition to an individual perspective, the professionals working within the platform have recognized Unobravo's significant role within the psychological sector, extending their considerations to the professional category. The participants highlighted how the company has managed to address some existing gaps in the market dedicated to this profession, effectively responding to the needs and demands felt by psychologists.

The educational and professional journey, because for us, objectively, it's difficult...it's difficult to get there. Unobravo has been a facilitator for us. The opportunity to see many different issues, disorders, many patients. I mean, it's almost impossible, I would say, I don't know if before Unobravo it could happen, that it could be so easy, so to speak, for a psychologist to start clinical work so quickly. (F.G. 2 TP5)

So in the meantime, thanks to Unobravo, I always say it, for me, Unobravo was the turning point, really, in Italy. For psychologists there is very little, very little and poorly paid work. That is, in Italy...before Unobravo there was the idea that psychologists always had to be between 45 and 50 to start working. [...] There is little around for us, the online platforms... Unobravo is a platform that gives you a crazy opportunity. (Int. TL 6)

More specifically, the data collected through the questionnaire allowed for an analysis of Unobravo's role as a possible solution to the increasing demand for work among Italian psychologists. The aim was to understand whether the platform could represent a real employment opportunity in the clinical

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field, allowing professionals to avoid taking jobs not strictly related to their psychological training and clinical practice. Specifically, in Italy, it is known that many psychologists, despite being qualified for the profession, are often forced to work as educators due to limited job opportunities in the psychological field. Before joining Unobravo, 280 psychologists out of the 774 surveyed, or more than a third of the sample (36%), reported having worked in the educational sector. After starting their collaboration with the platform, only 49 of the psychologists continued to work as educators, representing a significant reduction that brought the percentage down to 6%. These data indicate that 231 professionals were able to leave the role of educator to fully dedicate themselves to psychological practice on Unobravo. These results suggest that the platform has had a positive impact on improving job stability for these psychologists, reducing the need to resort to non-psychological occupations to support themselves financially. As highlighted in the images below, a similar, albeit lower, trend is observed for the teaching profession, which decreased from 13% to 6%, and for the research profession, where the percentage decreased from 3% to 1%.

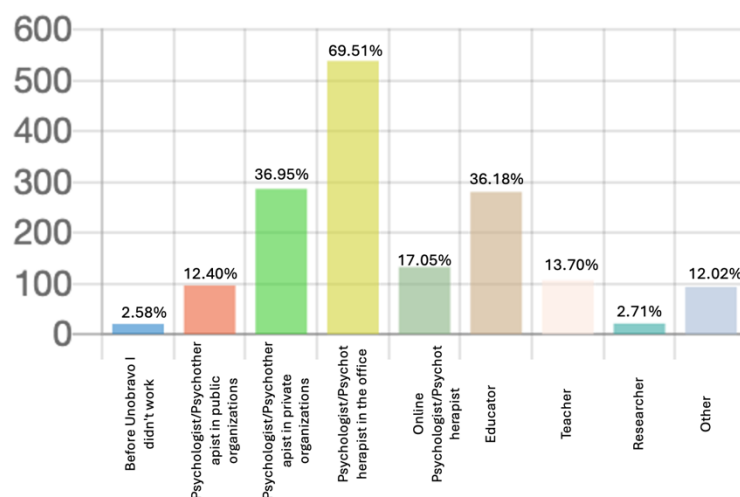


Figure 18: Survey Results – Jobs Held Before Unobravo.

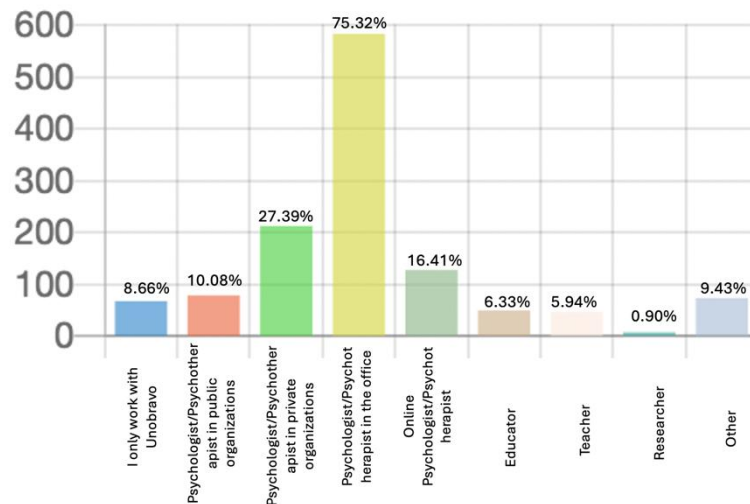


Figure 19: Survey results - Work done after joining Unobravo.

In addition to enabling psychologists to devote themselves solely to clinical practice, selected by 70% of the respondents, 63% of the participants recognize that the platform allows them to earn a sufficient salary to support themselves, although in both responses, 19% declared themselves neutral, expressing neither agreement nor disagreement. A smaller percentage of professionals disagreed with these statements, signaling a diversity of experiences among platform users.

A particularly appreciated aspect is that they do not need to market themselves. Eighty per cent of the psychologists recognize that Unobravo relieves them of the need to advertise to attract new patients, a challenge often experienced in the world of private psychology. This figure is closely linked to the recognition of the platform's active role in managing patient flow: 86% of the respondents agreed that Unobravo facilitates the finding of patients by sending them directly to practitioners, thus freeing them from the burden of finding them independently.

Furthermore, a distinctive feature of the platform, defined by the participants in the semi-structured interviews as the “privilege of choice,” was shared by 70% of the psychologists interviewed. This privilege allows practitioners to decide whether to accept a patient or refer them to a colleague deemed more suitable.

What is the privilege of choice? I can choose. As a public sector, we don't really talk about that. I mean there you get someone who tells you...that he confessed that...or that they sent you on purpose, that he raped a child. You have to treat him because he has come. So much for choice. (Int. TL 1)

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The work is there and if you want, just as one patient leaves, another one comes in. So you may as well not keep patients you don't feel are suitable for you necessarily. (Int. TP 10)

In addition, the research shows that Unobravo played a key role in overcoming the isolation that often characterizes the psychologist's work. As highlighted above, the platform recognized and responded to psychologists' need to feel part of a professional community, offering them the opportunity to connect and collaborate with colleagues through a dedicated internal network.

This whole dimension of loneliness as you said, of not having so much the, how should I put it, the feeling of connectedness. Unless you are looking for it. So this move, in a certain sense, helped me, because knowing instead that I had a structure where there was a team leader, where there were colleagues, where there were discussions, because that's also what the interviews were for, helped me. (Int. TP 7)

That's why today there is also this leadership of Unobravo as a platform a bit nationally and internationally. Precisely because maybe the patient feels welcomed, but also the therapist feels welcomed by the same app, i.e. having a colleague always available, a group of colleagues available, because if there is no team leader, there is the group, so there is shared communication. (Int. TP 9)

Through a well-defined organizational structure, characterized by a pyramid hierarchy and the division into teams led by managers, the platform has created an environment in which professionals feel accompanied and supported in their work. This organization has enabled psychologists to become part of a dynamic professional network, focused on constructive discussion and the exchange of ideas and experiences.

This feature is felt to be particularly relevant for psychologists coming into the profession. Unobravo is perceived as being able to respond to the needs of young professionals, who often face considerable difficulties in the early stages of their careers due to the challenge of finding patients.

The company solves this problem, allowing recent graduates and novice practitioners to start their therapeutic practice without the anxiety of having to source patients themselves. Unobravo offers immediate access to a constant flow of patients, allowing young psychologists to fully concentrate on clinical practice and developing their skills. For those interviewed, this support removes one of the

main obstacles at the beginning of their career, facilitating a smoother and safer transition into the world of therapeutic work.

A few years ago, I was in a phase where I was building myself professionally anyway, so having someone to bring you patients. It's one thing to look for people, for clients. It's one thing to say, "we give you clients, it's up to you to play the game." And so for me it was worth the candle. (Int. TL 2)

When you come out of graduate school, you want to do clinical work, because you may not have seen many patients. A solution like this, where you don't have to think about making a name for yourself, but you can start getting your hands dirty, working, that's a whole other thing. (F.G. 2 TP6)

Unobravo has demonstrated that it can not only understand the needs of the professional community of psychologists but also respond effectively to an emerging need in contemporary society: to make it easier for patients to access therapy. The research participants credit the company with understanding and responding to these needs, making psychological therapy more accessible and attractive to an ever-widening public. The prevailing opinion is that Unobravo has been able to answer the growing awareness of the importance of mental health, offering a solution that responds to the needs of professionals as well as patients, creating a bridge between supply and demand in a context where the need for psychological support is constantly increasing. In this way, according to the professionals interviewed, the company has not only strengthened the profession of psychologists but has also contributed to a cultural change, promoting the acceptance and dissemination of therapy as an essential tool for individual and collective wellbeing.

Accessibility, which, in my opinion, is the fundamental key to all this, has made people curious about this whole world and really begin to ask questions, including about themselves. (Int. TP 9)

It seems to me, however, that the online platform is more usable and reaches many people, many more people, precisely because there is a way in which you can fill in a questionnaire, then there is an interview, which is free of charge, it brings many people to approach and be intrigued. (Int. TP 7)

Due to the increased accessibility discussed above, Unobravo is recognized for its significant contribution to overcoming the stigma traditionally associated with psychology and mental health.

According to the interviewees, the platform has played a crucial role in eliminating stereotypes and prejudices that have long surrounded the figure of the psychologist and access to therapy. The opinion is that Unobravo has made psychology more approachable and understandable to the general public, normalizing the use of therapy as an integral part of personal wellbeing. The platform has made it easier and more acceptable for people to seek psychological support, helping to change the social perception of mental health.

It makes the figure of the psychologist more accessible, thus less full of prejudices and stereotypes, that is, it also makes it possible to go through other channels. That it can be done. Here, and you are not crazy or wrong, it is a bit demonizing. Here's sometimes the figure of the psychologist, who is always an ambiguous profession, let's say, perceived well, perceived badly, so there's still a lot of work, there's still a lot of work to be done. (Int. TP 2)

In my opinion, we are working very well in the direction I was talking about earlier of this stigma abatement. There is therefore a large segment of the Italian population that is considering psychotherapy. (Int. TL 3)

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview, albeit partial and summarized, of the findings of the research, highlighting how psychologists' entry into the Unobravo platform has transformed their professional experience, both in operational terms and in self-perception.

The body of data collected shows that the Unobravo platform represents not only a technological tool for delivering psychological services but also a completely new work context for psychologists. This context operates on two main levels: on the one hand, the digital level, which requires professionals to deal with the specifics of online therapy and the platform tool, and on the other, the organizational level, which includes the structure, rules, and operational practices imposed by the company. From a digital perspective, the psychologists face new and unique challenges, including the use of new digital procedures, managing the therapeutic relationship remotely with patients, and adapting traditional therapeutic techniques to the peculiarities of a virtual environment. This implies the need to develop technological and relational skills that are not always part of traditional psychological training.

At the same time, the organizational aspect of the platform provides strongly recommended guidelines and operational practices that shape the psychologists' work experience. The hierarchical

structure, company guidelines, and standardized procedures define how the professionals must manage their cases, interact with colleagues, and respond to the platform's needs. This organizational level introduces a new way of working, which can sometimes conflict with the professional autonomy that many psychologists are accustomed to managing in a traditional context.

This new work environment therefore not only requires practical and technical adjustments but also a reorganization of how psychologists perceive and perform their professional role. The psychologists operating on the platform must balance the demands of the organization with their professional methods, facing a continuous negotiation between being part of a business structure and maintaining the professional autonomy typical of psychologists.

A second aspect emerging from this study concerns the possibility that the psychologists starting to work with Unobravo can integrate into new professional networks without necessarily abandoning pre-existing ones. These networks, centered around the structural moments of clinical discussion and interventions offered by the platform, play a fundamental role in the psychologists' work experience, becoming a privileged space for professional exchange and growth. Clinical discussions and interventions are valuable opportunities to share work experiences and difficulties, creating a context where the exchange of ideas and interaction among professionals enrich each participant's knowledge and skills. Beyond the technical and professional aspects, clinical discussions and interventions also provide a space for personal reflection for psychologists. On these occasions, professionals not only reprocess the content and dynamics emerging during patient therapies but also reflect on their way of perceiving themselves and living their professional roles. Interaction with colleagues thus becomes a moment of introspection and personal growth, allowing psychologists to redefine their professional identity in relation to the new challenges and opportunities presented by the platform context.

In this sense, the results have shown how entering the Unobravo platform, which combines digital and organizational aspects with integration into new professional networks, has fostered professional growth for the psychologists involved. The chapter has highlighted how, although the adoption of new technologies and management of organizational dynamics have presented challenges, Unobravo professionals have responded positively. In particular, the work experience on the platform has allowed them to develop both technical and relational skills, leading to a redefinition of self-perception. The support offered by Unobravo's network has created a safe space to address challenges, fostering greater awareness of the practitioners' capabilities and perceived self-efficacy. Finally, the last key point of the platform work experience concerns the representation of psychology and platform psychologists. Initially, both the professional community of psychologists and Unobravo professionals themselves expressed some skepticism about working in this new digital context. On the one hand, the skepticism stemmed from the perception that online therapy might be

less effective or less authentic than traditional in-person practice. However, over time, this skepticism seems to be gradually decreasing, as platform psychology is gaining increasing importance in the therapeutic field. On the other hand, the psychologists operating on Unobravo have had the opportunity to directly experience therapy in a digital context, and this experience has contributed to changing their initial perceptions. This shift in perspective has led to a reevaluation of the value of platform work, contributing to a general evolution in the representation of online psychology. As a result, what was initially often experienced with discomfort is now becoming a point of pride. This is partly due to the growing recognition of Unobravo's role in the field of psychology, not only for its positive impact on the professional category in terms of job opportunities but also for the contribution the platform is making to society. Unobravo is recognized by the research participants as playing an important role in making psychological therapy more accessible, removing economic and geographical barriers, and overcoming the stigma associated with psychotherapy. This dual impact—on the profession and on society—is transforming the image of platform psychology from an initially marginal practice to a form of therapy that is increasingly respected and valued.

Reading the research results, it is possible to begin to understand how the work experience of Unobravo psychologists inevitably intertwines with issues related to professional identity, profoundly influencing how the professionals perceive and experience their work role. The specific context of the platform not only introduces new operational dynamics but also contributes to the redefinition of self-perception as psychologists. This process of identity construction occurs gradually and continuously, stimulated both by the new challenges and opportunities offered by online therapy and by interactions with colleagues and professional networks.

In the next chapter, which discusses the findings of this research, I reflect on how entry into the platform helps orient and shape the development of the psychologist's professional identity. This reflection is enriched by comparing it with what has already emerged in the scientific literature review on platform workers' identity, discussed in the Chapter II. This review provided a theoretical basis useful for understanding identity dynamics in digital contexts, which may have analogies with the experience of psychologists on a platform such as Unobravo. The analysis will explore potential similarities between the identity processes described in the literature and those observed in the case of Unobravo psychologists. It will also be interesting to observe specific aspects in which platform psychology differs from other digitized professions, providing a basis for broader reflections on the peculiarities of professional identity in an evolving context such as online psychology.

Chapter 6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the results that emerged from the research project, with particular attention to the professional identity of psychologists working in digital contexts, such as those offered by online platforms. An in-depth examination of the data collected allows us to compare the elements of knowledge with the theoretical models presented in the first part of the work, highlighting continuities and divergences with respect to the identity processes traditionally associated with platform workers.

Although Unobravo's psychologists are placed within the macro-scenario of the gig economy, operating through a digital platform, the analysis of Unobravo's classification, discussed in chapter four, reveals that this reality differs considerably from what is described in the academic literature. Despite the digital context, the platform under scrutiny displays many characteristics typical of a traditional organisation, distancing itself from the claims of Conde et al. (2023) that platform workers tend to become “organisational orphans”. Indeed, instead of experiencing professional isolation, psychologists find in Unobravo a tendentially stable collective environment that supports and promotes the construction of their professional identity.

The organisation studied here thus seems to go in a different direction than that described by Hondros et al. (2023), who point out the lack of stable structures in platforms, hindering the construction of solid work identities. On the contrary, the presence of established professional networks and ongoing support in Unobravo strengthen organisational and professional relationships, creating an environment that facilitates connection between professionals. In such an environment, psychologists can draw on traditional organisational and relational references, fostering cohesion and supporting the weight of ‘identity work’ described by Petriglieri et al. (2019). In sum, psychologists working in Unobravo benefit from an organisational structure that facilitates the construction and consolidation of their professional identity, distinguishing them from the typical experiences of other gig economy workers.

Despite the empirical findings mentioned above, the acquisition of the professional identity of platform psychologist is in any case a complex identity process, as we will see in the following paragraphs. The initially difficult work experience, characterised by a self-perception as professionally fragile and provisional, opens the way to a possible professional growth supported by organisational resources.

By embracing new dimensions offered by the digital and organisational context, professionals are able to construct and develop their identity as platform psychologists, thus experiencing a significant identity transformation.

6.2 Entering the platform: between instability and provisional identity

Many professionals have approached the platform context as a direct response to the challenges presented by the psychology labour market. In particular, the difficulty of finding patients within one's own territory has limited earning opportunities, preventing many from earning enough income to support themselves. This situation has led many professionals, despite the professional qualifications they have obtained, to seek alternative employment, frequently in education and teaching. In many cases, they found themselves juggling several jobs, accumulating hours of work in different contexts in order to achieve an adequate income.

These challenges are particularly pronounced in the early years of psychologists' careers, creating a context in which young professionals struggle to establish a stable and satisfying career.

In the face of such scenarios, the data collected confirms that the job opportunities offered by psychology platforms have proven to be an indispensable solution for many professionals to face the challenges of the labour market.

Moreover, further evidence emerged that the need to earn a living was not always accompanied by a strong conviction that working in the platform environment was adequate for therapeutic practice.

The main concerns concerned, first and foremost, the online setting. In relation to this, with the advent of new technologies and the Internet, the psychological profession began to expand its practice also in the multifaceted digital setting, generating a lively debate within the scientific community. Professionals were divided between those who welcomed these technological innovations, believing that online therapy was substantially similar to traditional therapy, and those who were very sceptical. The latter argued that the absence of the physical dimension in the therapeutic relationship could negatively influence the psychological process, thus reducing its effectiveness.

Within the scientific literature, numerous studies have accumulated both for and against the use of online therapy¹⁵. Psychotherapy schools have also played an active role in this debate, with many of them taking sides in favour of traditional practice at the beginning of the spread of digital therapy, fearing that digital could compromise the quality of therapy.

¹⁵ For a summary of the main arguments for and against online therapy see: Stoll, J., Müller, J. A., & Trachsel, M. (2020). Ethical issues in online psychotherapy: A narrative review. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 10, 498439.

This division quickly took hold within the professional community, generating tensions and lively discussions. However, following the pandemic of COVID-19, online therapy gained significant ground. Many professionals were forced to experiment with it due to the restrictions required to contain the spread of the virus. The experience of working in a digital context led to a change of perspective for many of them, discovering that although the setting was undoubtedly different, it could be no less effective than face-to-face therapy. This process stimulated a profound reflection on the nature of therapy itself and how it could adapt to the new demands of contemporary society, while still maintaining in the various positions a not complete equation between online and face-to-face therapy.

A second aspect of scepticism concerned the organisational implications of entering a corporate setting to practice, with the concern that entering a corporate setting might limit the therapist's professional autonomy, considered a fundamental value for the practice. The introduction of corporate rules, guidelines and operating procedures generated anxiety about the possibility of having to adapt one's way of working to external requirements, feeling bound by a system that could undermine freedom of choice. Traditionally, psychologists work in a context in which they are exempt from direct forms of external monitoring or supervision. Most psychotherapists practice in private practices, enjoying complete autonomy in the management of their therapeutic practices. Even in organisational contexts, as in the case of school, hospital or company psychologists, although there are constraints and rules to be followed, these do not affect the content and substance of the clinical work.

Insofar as a strong professional autonomy is considered a fundamental and indissoluble feature of a psychologist's identity, joining Unobravo and especially the adaptation of one's clinical approach to the platform's clinical model could not fail to raise questions and fears. When speaking of the 'Unobravo method', one refers to a set of guidelines and ways of handling patients that the company proposes. In a previous contribution¹⁶, the characteristics of this model were explored, revealing also the concerns and difficulties it has raised among professionals. In this sense, the presence of an organisational model guiding the clinical approach of professionals was perceived as a possible intrusion into their work. This gave rise to a marked fear of loss of independence, as therapists feared that, by joining the platform, corporate directives might compromise their ability to exercise professional judgement autonomously.

¹⁶ Gambirasio, M., Ivaldi, S., Mainieri, M., Manzo, C., Negri, A., Scaratti, G., ... & Zampino, L. (2024). Unobravo. In *Il welfare alla prova delle piattaforme. Lavoro e servizi di cura nella transizione digitale* (pp. 171-202). Fondazione Feltrinelli.

The dynamics analysed so far generated mistrust among professionals, even before they began their experience with psychological platforms. Although these platforms were perceived as a promising job opportunity, many psychologists came to terms with their reservations and uncertainties. This sentiment of caution had a significant impact on their entry into the world of platform psychology, creating a sense of ambivalence that characterised the beginning of their professional journey in this new context. Consequently, for those who decided to embark on this career adventure, the initial phase on the platform proved to be anything but easy. In terms of identity work, many professionals were confronted with widespread prejudices and representations that influenced perceptions, expectations and consequent meanings.

In addition to the difficulties encountered on a personal level, in the face of the doubts and reservations just mentioned, elements related to the new working environment also proved complex and challenging to manage. Once in the context of the psychological platforms, the transition entailed a number of complications. Psychologists found themselves having to navigate an environment characterised by novel rules and procedures, which increased pressure and forced professionals to review and, in some cases, modify their working approach. Uncertainty about business practices, coupled with the need to understand and adapt to new working methodologies, made settling into the platform a complex and sometimes stressful process. For example, concern about the functioning of elements such as algorithmic matching, which determines the assignment of patients to professionals in place of traditional word-of-mouth, generated anxiety about the type of patients they would receive, as well as a sense of alienation.

A further element of great apprehension was the reviews given by patients: the possibility of being evaluated by their own patients caused anxiety among psychologists, both because of the uncertainty about the outcome and the associated ethical dilemma: many professionals did not consider it fair to be evaluated by patients. Finally, the lack of information on how the company would use these evaluations added a further layer of concern, further complicating their experience.

Alongside these issues, which stem from a lack of familiarity with the operation and context of the platforms, there are also inherently problematic elements.

In particular, the unexpected amount of work presented a significant challenge. Many psychologists found themselves managing a much higher number of assignments than they had expected, causing overload and difficulties in managing their work. This new work reality required management skills that many professionals had not previously developed.

In addition, psychologists had to take charge of patients who, in some cases, presented a generally low motivation to continue with therapy, often creating drop-out situations. Like the high number of patients, this aspect was also a specificity of the platform context. Consequently, some therapists

found themselves in difficulty, experiencing moments of crisis and blaming themselves for the discontinuation of therapy.

All the aspects examined so far have contributed to delineating a period of entry into platform work as particularly difficult for the psychologists involved. Entering a career in this new digital environment has meant an experience full of anxieties and concerns for professionals. Entry into a new job, in itself, is characterised by uncertainty, as individuals have to deal with tasks, roles and organisational dynamics they have never experienced before (Blaising & Dabbish, 2022). However, in the case of psychological platforms, this uncertainty is even more pronounced. In this sense, the Unobravo psychologists were faced with significant identity instability. This instability stemmed from the lack of in-depth knowledge of the dynamics of the new work context, together with the absence of specific skills required to operate effectively in such a different environment. Many professionals reported experiencing a period of profound insecurity about their professional selves, constantly questioning whether they had the requisites and skills necessary to assert themselves in such a work context.

This identity instability represents a complex phenomenon that profoundly involves the work of constructing one's professional identity. With the entry into the digital market, psychologists find themselves, willingly or unwillingly, part of a new category: that of platform psychologists, a role that, initially, is surrounded by an aura of mystery. Professionals have to operate in a context they are not fully familiar with, without having clarity as to what the operating environment and organisation expect of them. In this context, the professional identity of the platform neo-psychologist appears fragile and ill-defined. It is not yet fully consolidated, being shaky and insecure, due to the lack of recognised anchors in the new working environment.

Coinciding with identity instability, the Unobravo psychologists, during their first period of activity on the platform, manifested a provisional identity linked to their work experience in this new context. This experience, in fact, was not perceived as a definitive or long-term choice; rather, the difficulties of the psychological labour market, combined with scepticism towards platform psychology, led professionals to embark on this path more out of necessity than desire. At this juncture, they initially did not identify themselves as platform psychologists, but rather as psychologists using the platform in an instrumental way, indicating a lack of integration of the new digital professional identity within their working self. Central to the development of a temporary and provisional self is the perception of the organisation as a threat to one's professional autonomy. In particular, moments of clinical discussion, conceived as opportunities for confrontation with the team leader, were experienced with distrust and fear, as it was feared that they might represent forms of corporate monitoring and control.

The concern about the evaluation of one's own work was accentuated by the awareness that, in traditional psychological work contexts, there are no managers specifically dedicated to clinical discussion, except in cases of training and qualification to the profession, or of professionalising investments required by the therapist himself. Consequently, these moments of discussion were perceived as unusual and, therefore, difficult to understand and accept.

Similarly, the interventions also caused perplexity among professionals, who did not fully understand the importance of peer-to-peer confrontation and the sharing of professional difficulties. Most of them were unfamiliar with such moments, with the exception of training during graduate school, where such experiences took place in a supervised learning context, but never with colleagues from different therapeutic approaches. Therefore, interventions, as new moments in the professional life of Unobravo psychologists, were initially perceived with some fear.

In short, having to account for one's work was experienced with suspicion and apprehension, in stark contrast to the professional autonomy generally experienced in the psychologist's usual working contexts. This fuelled a sense of fear towards the guidelines, practices and operational procedures imposed by the company, generating the feeling that the new environment could deprive them of more than it had to offer. This situation meant giving up the traditional identity of the psychologist, characterised by established practices and total autonomy, in favour of a professional model viewed with distrust. Consequently, many professionals maintained a precarious identity, accepting to operate in a context perceived as constraining, as long as it was necessary for their career development. Others entered the world of platform psychology without setting themselves any career-related expectations, putting a distance between their self and their new working context. In both cases, the identity/mask of platform psychologists was symbolically worn, but without fully internalising it. It was therefore a temporary identity, aimed at exploring new opportunities without completely anchoring oneself to the new professional environment. In this sense, as highlighted in the literature review and emphasised by several authors for platform workers (Bucher et al., 2021; Newlands et al., 2022; Weidenstedt et al., 2023), Unobravo's psychologists also adopted a temporary identity as a necessary coping strategy to navigate the emerging reality of digital work.

Thus, instability and precariousness of professional identity marked the early periods of work experience, reflecting a reaction to a professional environment that was new and unusual for many psychologists. The environment of psychological platforms, with its rules and practices that differed from the traditional context, pushed professionals to maintain a certain distance from their own experiences and their role.

This form of psychological protection made it possible to cope with the uncertainty of the new context without feeling completely overwhelmed. Ultimately, instability and identity precariousness emerge

as complex responses to the challenges of an unfamiliar working environment for the psychologist, where practices, tools and expectations are often unclear and perceived as a threat to professional autonomy.

6.3 Identity ambivalence between professional autonomy and organisational belonging

What has been said above has shown how the psychological profession is characterised by a high degree of working autonomy, which one tries to maintain regardless of the various contexts in which psychologists practice. Taking into consideration the prevailing context in which the psychologist operates, namely the private practice, it is evident that in this situation professional autonomy is almost absolute, art the existing socio-cultural and contextual constraints. The professional behaves as an independent worker, benefiting from the advantages and facing the peculiar challenges associated with this mode of professional practice.

However, it also seems important to recognise the difficulties associated with self-employment in the psychological field. First of all, the psychologist working in private practice must actively procure patients and invest time and energy in promoting his or her profession. In this context, word of mouth plays a crucial role, as many patients choose to consult a psychologist on the basis of recommendations from acquaintances or other professionals. Yet, for newcomers, this promotional mechanism can be complex. Young professionals, lacking an established name and network, may find it difficult to build their clientele, making word of mouth less effective as a marketing strategy. In addition, running the profession also entails the burden of administrative and bureaucratic chores. Psychologists have to take care of bookkeeping, issue invoices and monitor monthly income and expenditure to ensure the economic sustainability of their activity. These aspects also include the payment of expenses related to the rent of the practice and the costs of freelance practice.

Finally, it is essential that the practitioner engages in a continuous process of training and updating in order to remain compliant with the regulations and standards required by the professional association of psychologists.

These examples illustrate how, in the context of private practice, psychologists have to develop and integrate skills typical of the self-employed, a challenge that can be complex and demanding, especially at the beginning of a career.

On the other hand, freelancing offers significant advantages in terms of autonomy and working independence. In this context, the psychologist is not subject to a supervisor who controls and monitors his or her activities. This freedom translates into the possibility of autonomously

determining working hours, setting one's own fees, and independently managing the entire professional activity. Moreover, the practitioner has the full right to choose the therapeutic approach to be adopted, the techniques to be employed and the clinical dimensions to be explored. This freedom allows one to direct one's work according to the specific needs of patients, drawing exclusively on one's own professional decisions and skills.

Here again, it is necessary to emphasise the burdens and fatigue associated with this clinical autonomy, especially in the absence of reference points. The results of the case study highlighted how the psychological profession is often associated with a sense of loneliness, with professionals feeling isolated in the exercise of their functions. This feeling is particularly pronounced among young professionals at the beginning of their careers. The lack of a supervisor or mentor implies that there is no constant guidance along the professional path. When the psychologist encounters difficulties in the management of a clinical case or has doubts about his or her own decisions, professional autonomy becomes a challenge, especially in the absence of confrontation and support, to the extent of generating situations of vulnerability.

The results that emerged from the study on the professional experience of the psychologists who collaborate with Unobravo, therefore, show us how insertion in an organisational context challenges professional identity, generating solicitations of particular relevance and delicacy, in the face of representations of psychological activity characterised by marked autonomy and independence. The latter are threatened, as we have seen, by organisational situations initially perceived as a submission to controlling dynamics on one's professional activities.

However, as experience accumulated within the platform, professionals began to recognise positive aspects that contradicted their initial concerns. In particular, they discovered significant support in managing bureaucratic and administrative tasks, elements that often constitute a burden for the self-employed. In this sense, Unobravo was able to respond to a fundamental need of the profession, relieving psychologists from tasks that were perceived as burdensome and sometimes inappropriate to their training and professional competence. This new context has allowed psychologists to focus their energies and resources on clinical work, reducing the stress associated with managing administrative paperwork.

Secondly, the platform addressed another critical issue that is significant for the professional category of psychologists: it restored a sense of belonging to a professional network, thus helping to reduce the feeling of loneliness that often characterises their activity. The implementation of formal moments of professional confrontation and exchange, such as interviews and clinical discussions, represented a privileged channel for integration into the professional community within Unobravo. These spaces of interaction not only satisfied the professionals' need to belong to a community of colleagues, but

also provided practical support in the practice of the profession. Through the sharing of experiences and confrontation with other professionals, Unobravo psychologists were able to feel part of a collaborative context, thus mitigating professional isolation. In this scenario, the burden of individual responsibility was lightened, as professionals had access to resources and organisational support in difficult situations.

The considerations expressed so far are not limited to a mere practical aspect of organisational support for professionals, but also exert a significant influence on the psychologist's professional identity. Upon entering the platform, the professional brings with him or her a self-perception that is intimately linked to the traditional image of the psychologist, characterised by the distinctive traits of the self-employed. With the accumulation of experience within the platform and the feeling of becoming part of a professional network, supported by an organisation that accompanies the exercise of one's profession, psychologists begin to perceive themselves in a different light. In contrast to what is suggested in the scientific literature concerning the professional identity of platform workers (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2022; Mieruch & McFarlane, 2023; Parth et al., 2023; Schou & Bucher, 2023), there is no predominance of the dimension of dependence and submission to the company in this context. Professionals do not primarily develop an identity as employees, abandoning their self-perception as self-employed. The latter, in fact, remains crucial in the way psychologists perceive and define themselves, demonstrating that the identity of the autonomous psychologist has always been, and continues to be, fundamental.

However, professionals also begin to recognise that their work is shared and supported by supervisors and colleagues. Therefore, professional identity, while maintaining the focus on the individual, is reinforced by the presence of significant others in their work journey. This suggests that the identity work that each individual must undertake to configure/review/reorient their identity following entry into the platform context is not without organisational anchors, as suggested by the literature concerning gig workers (Petriglieri et al., 2019). Here, the process of identity construction combines the inevitable individual dimension with the presence of reference points within the organisational reality. Personal and collective dynamics intertwine, releasing relational trajectories that are as necessary as they are structuring any identity construction process, developing thoughts, emotions, motivations, investments and actions underlying a progressive awareness of organisational belonging. While the literature suggests that platforms often fail to create cognitive, behavioural, emotional and social boundaries due to the lack of stable relationships and clear professional roles (Hondros et al., 2023), Unobravo's experience suggests a different approach. In this environment, identity work is perceived as less burdensome, as psychologists, while shaping their professional identity, do not

operate in isolation, but are embedded in a context that acts as a network of belonging, thus facilitating a more fluid adaptation and a construction of an identity that, as the platform work experience increases, becomes more stable.

6.4 Shaping identity: the platform psychologist in a new work paradigm

The reflections carried out in relation to the beginning of the work experience in the platform and the insertion within a new professional and organisational network serve as a preamble to the discussion on the stabilisation of identity experienced by professionals. Specifically, as shown by the research results, psychologists after an initial phase of difficulty in the work experience in Unobravo, characterised by instability and identity precariousness, seem to experience a change of course. In fact, the work experience within Unobravo was perceived by the participants as a significant period of professional growth. Professionals recognised that working on a digital platform offered them a concrete opportunity for training, consolidation and development of their knowledge and skills.

In particular, Unobravo's organisational structure promoted moments of professional comparison and exchange through interventions and clinical discussion, creating opportunities for inclusion in a professional network. This interaction facilitated the satisfaction of the need to belong, helping to mitigate the sense of isolation that often accompanies the profession. Dialogue with colleagues from different therapeutic approaches provided an enriching perspective, allowing psychologists to explore new working modalities and techniques, as well as stimulating critical reflection on their practices.

The experience of working in Unobravo also had a significant impact on the psychologists' professional awareness. They reported an increase in their confidence in their professional abilities, a change that, although not immediate, manifested itself progressively as their experience on the platform increased. Indeed, as the activity continued, the structured support offered by the organisation contributed to an increase in confidence and perceived self-efficacy.

In summary, the Unobravo experience played a crucial role not only in the expansion of skills, but also in the transformation of self-perception as professionals, thus contributing to a more integrated and satisfying professional growth. In this sense, the professionals, if in the first period of working on the platform they experienced a fragility and instability of identity, with the increasing experience of working in the new context, they were able to strengthen their professional identity. The possibility of relying on organisational anchors (infrastructures, working groups, stable references, operational support, ...) enabled the development of a coherent sense of self. What the Unobravo platform offered was configured as a set of organisational resources capable of giving workers a recognisable collective environment within which to collectively create identity and meaning in interaction. The platform, in this respect, was able to act as a traditional organisation by providing individuals with

information, feedback, resources and social support. By reducing feelings of isolation and insecurity, bonds with colleagues and supervisors were sources of self-definition in the workplace. Hence, the social and organisational support that psychologists found in the platform enabled the development of an increasingly stable identity.

The professional identity of the platform psychologist is thus configured as a dynamic process of integration of multiple dimensions, influenced by both the innovative digital and organisational context. Thanks to the organisational anchors provided by Unobravo, psychologists begin to develop a greater familiarity with the new work context. This support allows them not only to adapt their professional practices, but also to redefine their self-perception in relation to work. This identity transformation is facilitated by the collaborative and supportive context in which they work, which allows them to engage with colleagues and supervisors, exchange experiences and learn new ways of working.

In this scenario, the ability to cope with uncertainty and challenges arising from the unprecedented dimensions of work is enriched by the link with the organisation. This bond acts as a catalyst for change, allowing psychologists to build a new professional identity that incorporates elements of flexibility, adaptation and collaboration. Over time, this evolution leads to greater confidence in their abilities and competencies, as well as a revisiting of their professional identity, which now includes more complex and nuanced aspects.

In sum, the platform work experience represents an opportunity for a profound restructuring of professional identity, which evolves in response to the challenges and opportunities offered by a new work context.

6.5 Conclusion

The elements discussed, against the background of the knowledge evidence gathered in the present study, made it possible to analyse the process of construction of the platform psychologist's professional identity. Insertion in a digital work context does not entail a simple assumption of a new role or adherence to a pre-established job description, but rather takes the form of a complex and multidimensional dynamic of identity transformation.

The psychologist who engages in the construction of his or her own identity as a platform worker does not limit himself or herself to wearing an identity garment exclusively referable to technical-informatic-digital specificities, however relevant and unavoidable, given the peculiarities of the operational context. The case analysis suggests how the new competences, knowledge and skills

acquired in the field of platform psychology are perceived as relevant and transversal in every professional context, not only in the online one.

The platform experience, in its originality and distinctiveness, solicits and challenges typical and unavoidable components of identity work, asking professionals to reflect on the constituent aspects of their work, from the setting, to the tools, to the work processes, to the support conditions, to their own recognition in a system of activities of which they progressively understand the rules, divisions of work, languages, devices, giving meaning and significance to a belonging that is no longer suffered but intentionally acted upon.

The experience of working on the platform induced the professionals encountered to reconsider their way of seeing and living their profession. This is a significant change in the relationship with technology, working tools and operational practices. This new approach has also transformed the way they handle clinical difficulties, interact with patients, collaborate with colleagues and deal with supervisors, as well as the way they relate to the dimensions of space and time in the work context. An evolution that not only affects the present, but also embraces the future projections of the professional. The newly acquired identity brings with it an expanded view of the professional possibilities and challenges that psychology workers may face. This implies an increased awareness of development opportunities and preparation to adapt to changes in an ever-changing professional environment.

The analysed experience of platform work returns us, in conclusion, not only an unprecedented (but increasingly widespread) space in which the professional identity of psychologists is solicited and challenged, but also a stimulus to reflect, critically analyse and rearticulate our way of conceiving the psychology profession, contributing to a more integrated and multidimensional vision of it in the panorama of contemporary professional work scenarios.

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Writing this contribution was a significant challenge for me, not only because of the workload and commitment required, but also because of the process of reworking and overcoming preconceptions ingrained in me. When I started to delve into the phenomenon of psychological platforms, my initial approach was characterised by a rather sceptical outlook. I was used to conceiving of the psychological profession in traditional, perhaps even stereotypical terms, and this led me to view the new technologies with a certain diffidence.

Later, the comparison with the scientific literature, which analyses platform work in a broader context and is not limited exclusively to the psychology profession, broadened my knowledge, but also consolidated my initial mistrust. Despite the different positions that emerged within the scientific community, divided between the so-called techno-optimists and techno-sceptics, what predominated in my mind were the risks and the possible ethical and professional drifts associated with the practice of therapy through digital platforms.

To be honest, the analysis of the various contributions on the topic helped to shape a view of the platform labour market in which workers appeared to be in a remarkably fragile position. I found myself reflecting on how digital organisations, operating from a position of strength, could exploit this vulnerability, often without any regard for the well-being of the professionals involved. This representation raised profound questions about the sustainability and ethics of working practices in this new context, leading me to consider the implications of such a dynamic not only for individual practitioners, but also for the psychological profession as a whole.

With these preconceptions, I undertook the investigation into the work experience of psychologists working through digital platforms, approaching the research with a certain confidence, or rather, with the profound conviction that I would find confirmation of my scepticism in this specific professional context. I was convinced that the analysis would reveal a reality consistent with my initial expectations, highlighting fragilities and problems associated with platform work.

However, once I started the case study of the Unobravo organisation, I was confronted with a radically different and in many ways surprising scenario. Dialogue with the people who work with this platform on a daily basis revealed unexpected dimensions of Unobravo's organisational structure and culture that challenged my previous beliefs. Contrary to my expectations of an environment characterised by isolation and precariousness, I discovered a reality in which psychologists find support and integration in a solid professional network. This shift in perspective revealed that, far from being

exploited or challenged, Unobravo psychologists are able to experience meaningful professional growth, supported by collaborative practices and development opportunities.

This new reality has broadened my understanding of how digital platforms can not only coexist with, but also enrich the psychology profession, offering professionals resources and anchors that foster professional identity development. Consequently, my initial wariness gave way to a more nuanced and critical reflection on the potential of platforms, revealing the complexity and variety of work experiences in this context.

Although the research results, presented in the previous chapter, offer a substantially positive picture of the new working model that has developed for psychologists, it is essential to highlight a few important considerations. Firstly, as pointed out earlier, it is essential to recognise that the results obtained are intrinsically linked to the specific context in which the study was conducted. This circumstance implies that observations and conclusions derived from research cannot be generalised or interpreted as universal truths when discussing psychological platforms. It is important to realise that what emerges from the analysis is only an opportunity to formulate insights that contribute to a broader understanding of the phenomenon in question. Indeed, each psychological platform operates in a unique context, characterised by specific organisational, cultural and social dynamics. Therefore, the experiences of psychologists within Unobravo cannot be automatically extended to other contexts or platforms. The diversity between the various digital platforms can greatly influence the working methods, professional interactions and identity construction of the professionals involved. The data obtained should be viewed as a window through which to observe the broader reality of psychological platforms, rather than as a definitive and immutable picture. It is essential to recognise the inherent limitations of any research, particularly when dealing with complex and evolving phenomena such as those related to the use of digital technologies in the psychological profession.

In addition to what has already been discussed, it is crucial to draw attention to what has been said in Chapter III, which highlights the wide heterogeneity of the phenomenon of psychological platforms. It is evident that these digital mediators are characterised by a variety of legal forms, organisational structures and modes of operation that may differ significantly from one another. These differences not only influence the nature of the services offered, but also lead to substantial divergences in the way psychologists practise their profession and construct their professional identity. This heterogeneity should act as a wake-up call, drawing attention to the need to avoid hasty generalisations. Indeed, the results obtained from the research are closely related to the specific context of Unobravo, which has adopted a particular organisational structure, a defined corporate form and a specific internal hierarchy. These elements, by influencing the organisational

supports and anchors provided, played a crucial role in shaping the psychologists' work and identity experiences.

This observation highlights the need not to assume that all platforms orient the work experience in an inherently positive way. On the contrary, it is crucial to recognise, especially in light of the findings of the gig economy study and the literature review, that strategic choices regarding the structure and management of the digital organisation have a significant impact on the identity development processes of the professionals involved. In this context, it becomes crucial to consider the link between organisation and professional identity, a theme that was explored within this study and which highlights how organisational dynamics profoundly influence workers' self-perception. Consequently, it is essential to maintain a balanced view that takes into account both the strengths and the criticalities that emerged from this research. This vision should serve as a useful map to guide researchers in the study of psychological platforms, facilitating a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in this new work model.

With this in mind, I feel it is not only opportune, but also ethically responsible, in my role as a researcher, to initiate a reflection, albeit partial and limited, on the potential drifts to which platform psychology could be subjected, if not approached with adequate attention and planning. It is crucial that scholars and practitioners consider the long-term implications of this working model, not only in terms of current opportunities, but also with reference to future risks. Opening this debate highlights the importance of a critical and reflective approach that can guide the development of guidelines and best practices to ensure that platform psychology promotes innovation and access to services while respecting fundamental ethical principles and the professional needs of psychologists.

For these reasons, following the identification of several risks, I would like to advance some reflections regarding the role of organisations operating in the context of platforms, addressing these issues through the micro, meso and macro dimensions. This multidimensional analysis will allow us to examine not only some of the immediate effects on the work of psychologists, but also several broader implications that such organisations may have on the mental health system and collective well-being.

A first issue that is, in my view, necessary to dwell on is the uncertainty inherent in the platform work model. In the context of gig economy workers, work experiences characterised by peaks of activity alternating with periods of inactivity can generate a constant state of concern regarding the stability and continuity of employment. In this context, collaboration contracts, although offering a certain flexibility and autonomy - qualities strongly desired by psychologists - can also lead to a precarious condition. These contracts do not strictly bind professionals to platforms, which means that

psychologists may be faced with a working reality characterised by continuous unpredictability. This uncertainty may affect not only their economic situation, but also their professional identity, making it difficult to build a coherent and solid self-image in the work context. In this sense, the issue of professional stability is not only limited to tangible aspects, such as the management of working hours and the regularity of monthly income, but is deeply intertwined with identity-type dimensions. Platforms in this sense play a valuable role in balancing the uncertainty inherent in the platform economy model. They must be able to provide organisational anchors and structural supports, which are necessary in the construction and development of a stable professional identity. It is vitally important that platforms not only recognise the importance of this, but also actively take on the task of creating a working environment that promotes autonomy and offers resources, support and opportunities for professional growth, so that psychologists can develop a solid and resilient self-view.

From a macro point of view, the profound uncertainty that characterises this working model entails a further risk: the feeling of substitutability. This leads to a condition of instability and insecurity in the career path. It is likely that, as has already happened in other areas of the gig economy, those working in this context are mainly more vulnerable professionals, such as young novices, who approach these platforms in the hope of launching their careers in an environment that may not guarantee the desired stability. A possible consequence of this phenomenon could be the transformation of working on platforms into a kind of professional gymnasium. If psychology platforms do not take charge of the training and development of young professionals, supporting them in their career path, the risk is that patients seeking psychological assistance receive a service that does not always live up to the desired quality standards. Moreover, as these platforms widen the accessibility of psychological services, particularly attracting those who could not afford a traditional therapeutic pathway, a significant potential risk emerges. We could witness a real health differentiation in the field of mental well-being, where access to high-quality psychological care would remain reserved for those with greater financial resources, while those with lesser financial means would be confined to services of lower quality. This scenario could accentuate inequalities in access to mental health services, exacerbating existing social inequalities. In this context, the flattening of psychology, combined with the dynamics already taking place in the health sector, would contribute to a widening health gap between different socio-economic groups, with negative repercussions on quality of life and health equity within society.

A second topic on which I would like to open a reflection is monitoring.

Monitoring in the context of psychological work is a topic of considerable relevance, since it introduces dynamics that are alien to traditional professional practice. In conventional psychology,

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the evaluation of the quality of work and the effectiveness of therapeutic pathways are not subject to external monitoring, unless it is a traineeship/supervision, during which tutors/supervisors provide support and guidance. Once training is completed, psychologists operate in total autonomy, carrying the burden of responsibility for clinical outcomes. In this scenario, the patient becomes the sole referent for the evaluation of the practitioner's work.

The emergence of psychological platforms leads to a significant shift in this paradigm, activating the monitoring of the practitioner's work. With regard to this aspect, a worrying drift to beware of is related to the possibility of professional quality being measured exclusively through quantitative parameters. This implies that psychologists may be evaluated according to the number of patients followed, pushing professionals to accept an excessive patient load and leading them to work overload. This could compromise the quality of the sessions, causing professionals to neglect their own personal well-being and that of their patients in an attempt to meet business demands.

Furthermore, another quantitative evaluation criterion could concern the drop-out rate. This risk might induce practitioners to try to keep patients in therapy at all costs, even resorting to repeated contact with drop-outs.

The duration of therapies could constitute a further parameter for assessing the quality of the work performed in psychological platforms. However, such an approach would risk ignoring the needs of the patient, favouring instead metrics reflecting business objectives.

As a consequence, professionals might find themselves constructing a professional identity based not on the real quality of their performance, but rather on quantitative data aimed exclusively at profit. This shift would represent a profound distortion of the essence of therapeutic work, distancing psychologists from the original meaning and mission of their profession. Adopting a performance-based professional identity implies a significant risk: psychologists might develop a vision of their profession focused on success metrics, rather than on meaningful relationships and the positive impact they can have on their patients. Such an approach could not only lead to a disregard for patient well-being, but could also push professionals to experience continuous performance anxiety, creating a conflict between the authenticity of their work and the demands imposed by platforms.

Moreover, there would be a risk of an identity fracture, in which psychologists would have to deal with two distinct identities: one related to the work done outside the platforms, where quality is assessed on the basis of direct and deep interactions with patients, and the other related to a business model that rewards quantity and speed. This division could generate not only an identity fragmentation of professionals, but the creation of two therapeutic contexts with different levels of quality of the pathway. Such a world of work, characterised by platforms that impose work quality

criteria oriented exclusively to profit and not to the well-being of therapists and patients, could represent a dystopian scenario from which it is necessary to distance oneself. This could lead to only inexperienced, novice professionals with few economic resources or professionals who have no alternative but to submit to the platforms' directives working in the world of platforms.

To try to steer away from these possible drifts, platforms that aim to create a positive working environment for psychologists are required to perform a difficult balancing act between monitoring and support. On the one hand, platforms must design an organisation capable of effectively linking supply and demand, while ensuring that psychologists' professional autonomy is not compromised. It is crucial, in fact, that an excess of control over professional activities does not disincentivise therapists, as this could make them feel threatened in their working independence. On the other hand, platforms must work to build a stable collective environment, filling a gap felt in particular by younger professionals. This would make the platform an attractive working environment, as psychologists show a marked desire for interaction and connection with colleagues. In this sense, platforms are required to create an organisational structure that is able to move well within the specificities of the gig world, simultaneously responding to the need for autonomy and belonging. However, autonomy and belonging do not simply reflect practical needs but, once again, bring with them identity needs. The results of this study indicate that the traditional identity of the psychologist, characterised by the perception of self as an autonomous and independent professional in the management of work, is not completely abandoned with entry into the platform context. On the contrary, this identity must find a place in the new working model, avoiding being suffocated by excessive corporate monitoring.

At the same time, the practice of the profession through digital platforms offers the opportunity to develop an identity that integrates with the organisational context. Working in this new environment, psychologists shape their professional identity based on supportive relationships and interactions with colleagues and supervisors. It is therefore crucial that platforms create a collective environment that fulfils identity needs already present prior to entering the digital context. Psychologists reported a lack of opportunities for confrontation and a feeling of professional loneliness, which the platform helped to mitigate. Thus, belonging to an organisational network facilitated the transition from an identity perceived as isolated to a vision of oneself as a professional supported in one's work.

The above underlines the delicate but necessary active role that platforms need to adopt in the context of gig psychology, implementing constructive monitoring, offering useful feedback and opportunities for growth, could help to improve professional practices without challenging the therapist's autonomous identity.

Conclusions

However, I believe that platforms offering psychological services are not the only ones called upon to reflect on the monitoring of psychological work. From my point of view, it is worth questioning whether, within a professional training system that seems to be in danger of not maintaining the high standards of the past, we should not build a framework that leaves neither professionals nor patients alone. From this perspective, work evaluation should not be conceived as a mere instrument of control or as an invasion of professional autonomy. Rather, it should be seen as a quality assurance measure of the therapeutic pathway.

Firstly, the creation of a broad professional network involving universities, specialisation schools and professional associations could play a crucial role in this process. Such a network would not only accompany professionals in their daily work, but also provide institutionalised points of reference to which professionals themselves could turn in case of need. This approach would not only reduce the risk of low-quality therapies, but also contribute to a more collaborative and supportive working environment in which the mental well-being of all involved is at the centre of attention. It is about empowering the professional community dealing with mental well-being. This implies a reconsideration of current practices, integrating the accompaniment and support of work as an integral part of continuing professional development. In this sense, it could contribute to the transformation of the psychological profession from individual and solitary to supported and sustained. Such empowerment, combined with a focus on professional networks, could transform the way professionals live and face the challenges of their work, creating a more robust and resilient context.

The above considerations represent the contribution of a critical reflection on some possible risks related to the exercise of the profession by means of this digital medium.

Imagining the diffusion of low-level platforms evokes the concern of a reductive platformisation of mental well-being that could generate significant damage, both for the professionals involved and for the patients who turn to such services.

There is a need, on the one hand, to be aware that the advent of platforms in psychological practice is now underway: hence the need to monitor and study it, so that its declinations achieve a constructive and collaborative approach, recognising the relevance of this evolution in the emerging professional digitalisation process. It is also important for the professional community to be actively mobilised to accompany this process of reconfiguration of professional practice and its impact at various levels.

On the other hand, it is essential that platforms commit themselves to developing organisational models that integrate the needs of professionals and society as a whole, in order to avoid dangerous drifts and ensure equitable access to quality care.

In this perspective, it is important to emphasise how the specific case analysed in this research represents an interesting and stimulating reference in the light of a fundamental assumption: the positivity highlighted within the experience under study is structurally linked to the presence of socio-material conditions that characterised the approach, style and entrepreneurial strategy of the platform analysed. As if to say that without a significant investment in the quality of the service offered (the therapeutic activity) and in the professional skills of the operators involved, the risk of an exclusively speculative and commercial operation is always lurking. This means, as in the case studied, allocating economic, strategic, technological, organisational, material and immaterial resources to activate spaces, times, and operational configurations dedicated both to the patients and to the operators who must take care of them, interpreting innovative management logics and promoting the weaving of entrepreneurial, organisational, professional and work cultures authentically oriented towards the generation of collective value. Investing in a psychological platform means taking responsibility for translating the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development into practice in terms of decent work, reducing inequalities, developing health and well-being for all, sustainable cities and communities, and responsible production and consumption.

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