



With the rise of the gig economy: over 50% of the country's workforce are expected to be remote or flexible working by 2020, and the self-employed already form over 15% of the UK's working population (ONS, 2018).

Without proper support, this vast body of people will be disconnected from many aspects of working life: training and development, access to resources, and the emotional support which working in teams often provides.

- No one investing in them whilst junior.
- No one giving them a career map.
- No one chasing them to do training.
- No one covering when they're sick.
- No one making sure folk take their holiday.
- No one listening to a rant over a cuppa.
- No one checking in on how they're getting on.

This is going to lead to both a skills gap and mental health crisis.

I'm a firm believer in modern working, flexible working habits, self employment, better attitudes towards independent teams and portfolio careers - but when many people take the leap into a new way of working, the independents are left on their own to deal with the sudden realisation that they no longer have a support structure.

For starters, let's look at loneliness...

OK, you're sat in a co-working space. You see your clients. You are always having conversations. But how many of those are meaningful connections? When 9 out of 10 people in the workplace say they wouldn't tell people at work if they were struggling with their mental health, what chance does the independant have?

And it isn't just an issue which just affects the independent worker.

It will have impact on the businesses who rely upon this group. The agencies which call upon freelancers. The businesses who rely upon contractors. The consumers who use the services and platforms which mobilise the gig-economy. This is an issue which affects us all.

**It's not okay to just call upon the freelancers who are happy and healthy, and ignore the rest.**

Unfortunately, there is no-one who will fix this for us. The government is doing great work in the space, but hadn't considered the self-employed in their recent plan. Many employers are waking up to the additional support they need to provide their employees, but not considering the responsibility they have to their ad-hoc workforce. Organisations like British Red Cross and Mind are doing amazing work, but miss the specific challenges of independent workers.

We need to start somewhere, and I believe there is already a critical need to address the issue of loneliness and mental health for independent workers.

If you believe that flexible working and access to independent talent is part of our future, we also need to create a support structure which enables it to be sustainable.

I'd like to invite you to lunch, with a small group of people from a range of organisations who have an (as yet unrecognised) vested interest in doing something about this, to hopefully create a plan of small but important actions towards designing a solution.

I don't know what the answer is, I can't do this on my own, I just know its important for all of us, and I'm asking for help.

**Do you think this is important, and are you willing and able to help?**

---

Matthew Knight, November 2018  
matthew@thinkplaymake.co