Worker (Mis)Classification in the Sharing Economy: Trying to Fit Square Pegs into Round Holes

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by

Robert Sprague*

I. INTRODUCTION

Businesses and courts have long struggled trying to determine whether certain workers are employees or independent contractors. As discussed in this article, the focus was originally on whether the employer should be held liable to third parties for injuries arising from the employer’s workers—it controlled the actions of the workers; it should therefore be responsible for those actions. More recently, however, the focus has been on whether the employer should be responsible to the worker for the types of protections offered by labor and employment laws, such as unemployment insurance, workers’ compensation protection, tax responsibilities and compensation benefits, and other liabilities associated with employees. In this latter analysis, while the focus has been on the economic reality of the employment relationship—i.e., whether the independent contractor is truly economically independent—control is still a critical factor. If the employer controls the worker, how can the worker truly be independent?

This article, in Part II, first provides an overview of an emerging business model, the “sharing economy,” in which individuals are connected through online intermediaries with potential customers needing a task performed, a room to rent, or a ride to the airport. The courts, and the businesses, are currently struggling to determine whether these service providers—these “Taskers” and drivers—should be classified as employees or independent contractors for purposes of labor and employment laws. Part III of this article initially tracks the historical development of the tests used by courts to determine whether a worker should be classified as an employee or independent contractor. Part III then analyzes a series of cases involving FedEx’s ground package delivery service to exemplify the difficulties—and particularly the inconsistencies—the courts have had classifying these drivers. Part III next demonstrates how the classification tests, particularly the economic reality test, are failing when applied to new, sharing economy enterprises—specifically, drivers for Lyft and Uber.

Part IV addresses the shortcomings of the classification tests in light of today’s economy. The control factor in the economic reality test focuses on the extent to which the worker is dependent upon the employer for the worker’s livelihood, under the argument that the more dependent the worker is the less independent the worker actually is. However, with the rise of the sharing economy, workers are much less dependent on the intermediary employer. Part III demonstrates that the tests used to classify the workers—employees or independent contractors—which still fundamentally focus on control, are failing. There is still some control

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1 Paraphrasing District Court Judge Chhabria in Cotter v. Lyft, Inc., 60 F. Supp. 3d 1067, 1081 (N.D. Cal. 2015), referring to the difficulty jurors will face in trying to determine whether Lyft drivers are employees or independent contractors.
II. WORKING IN THE SHARING ECONOMY

In the always connected, app-driven U.S. economy of the early twenty-first century, an online business model has taken root: individuals with underutilized assets—whether they be time, a particular skill, a vehicle, household goods, a spare bedroom, or even home cooked meals—are connected with other individuals or businesses in need of those assets. This has given rise to companies such as Lyft, Uber, TaskRabbit, and Airbnb, just to name a few. The general press has provided a variety of anecdotes describing life as a microentrepreneur in the “sharing economy”—i.e., “an independent contractor who earns money by providing her skills, time or property to consumers in search of a lift, a room to sleep in, a dry-cleaning pickup, a chef, an organizer of closets.”

2 Lyft and Uber provide individual transportation services; TaskRabbit provides “Taskers” to perform household chores; Airbnb arranges short-term rentals of private properties. See Geoffrey A. Fowler, There’s an Uber for Everything Now, WALL ST. J. (May 5, 2015, 1:09 PM), http://www.wsj.com/articles/theres-an-uber-for-everything-now-1430845789 (“Washio is for having someone do your laundry, Sprig and SpoonRocket cook your dinner and Shyp will mail things out so you don’t have to brave the post office. Zeel delivers a massage therapist (complete with table). Heal sends a doctor on a house call, while Saucey will rush over alcohol. . . . Dufl will pack your suitcase and Eaze will reup a medical marijuana supply.”).

In a broader sense, the sharing economy is part of a “collaborative consumption”\(^4\) trend, where sharing is viewed as a profitable alternative to owning.\(^5\) Sharing endeavors include services such as Zipcar\(^6\) and Freecycle, the latter a nonprofit that encourages giving away rather than throwing away unwanted items.\(^7\) The philosophical underpinning of the sharing economy is that a sustainable economy cannot grow continuously.\(^8\)

It is suggested technology combined with the severe economic recession in the latter part of the last decade spurred the growth of profit-based, rather than philanthropic, sharing business models—financial stress forced many households to put idle assets to greater use, even if it the asset was a person or spare bedroom.\(^9\)

The internet makes it cheaper and easier than ever to aggregate supply and demand. Smartphones with maps and satellite positioning can find a nearby room

\(^4\) See Marcus Felson & Joe L. Speath, Community Structure and Collaborative Consumption, 41 AM. BEHAV. SCIENTIST 614, 614 (1978) (describing acts of collaborative consumption as “those events in which one or more persons consume economic goods or services in the process of engaging in joint activities with one or more others”).


\(^6\) See Russell Belk, You Are What You Can Access: Sharing and Collaborative Consumption Online, 67 J. BUS. RES. 1595, 1597 (2014) (noting Zipcar as an example of “pseudo-sharing” because it is really more of a short-term car rental company than a car-sharing service).

\(^7\) See FREECYCLE.ORG, https://www.freecycle.org/ (last visited May 1, 2015); see also Jenny Kassan & Janelle Orsi, The Legal Landscape of the Sharing Economy, 27 J. ENVTL. L. & LITIG. 1, 3 (2012) (listing a variety of sharing economy activities).

\(^8\) Kassan & Orsi, supra note 7, at 4; see also Harald Heinrichs, Sharing Economy: A Potential New Pathway to Sustainability, 22 GAIA: ECOLOGICAL PERSP. SCI. & SOC’Y 228, 229 (2013) (“The concept and practice of a ‘sharing economy’ and ‘collaborative consumption’ suggest making use of market intelligence to foster a more collaborative and sustainable society.”; noting as prominent examples “bike- and car-sharing schemes as well as web-based peer-to-peer platforms covering a broad range of activities from renting rooms to sharing gadgets and swapping clothes”).

\(^9\) See Steve Henn, What’s Mine is Yours (for a Price) in the Sharing Economy, NPR (Nov. 13, 2013, 3:16 AM), http://www.npr.org/blogs/alttechconsidered/2013/11/13/244860511/whats-mine-is-yours-for-a-price-in-the-sharing-economy (reporting particularly on the growth of Airbnb, an online company that serves as an exchange for renting out one’s home or spare bedroom to travelers); Raj Kapoor, Lessons From The Sharing Economy, TECHCRUNCH (Aug. 30, 2014), http://techcrunch.com/2014/08/30/critical-lessons-from-the-sharing-economy/ (stating the consumer peer-to-peer rental market is worth $26 billion; noting that companies such as Airbnb, Uber, and Lyft are each valued in the tens of billions of dollars); Pui-Wing Tam & Michael J. de la Merced, Uber Fund-Raising Points to $50 Billion Valuation, N.Y. TIMES, May 9, 2015, at B2.
to rent or car to borrow. Online social networks and recommendation systems help establish trust; internet payment systems can handle the billing. All this lets millions of total strangers rent things to each other. The result is known variously as “collaborative consumption”, the “asset-light lifestyle”, the “collaborative economy”, “peer economy”, “access economy” or “sharing economy”.10

The Internet has become the conduit for large-scale sharing among weakly connected participants in project-specific or ad hoc contexts.11 Quite simply, “[t]hanks to smartphones and cloud computing, it’s easier than ever to connect people who need a job done with people looking to take on some extra work and monetize their spare time.”12

However, the growth of the sharing economy can also be viewed as an expansion of “precarious employment” and the transfer of risk to workers.13 According to one survey, one-third of U.S. workers perform some freelance work.14 This “gig economy” has been described as one in which workers are forced to bid against each other to cut their own wages.15

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10 All Eyes on the Sharing Economy, supra note 3 (noting also “many peer-to-peer rental firms were founded between 2008 and 2010, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis”); see also Denise Cheng, Is Sharing Really Caring? A Nuanced Introduction to the Peer Economy 2 (2014), available at http://static.opensocietyfondations.org/misc/future-of-work/the-sharing-economy.pdf (describing peer-to-peer marketplaces and the “peer economy” as online marketplaces that enable people to monetize skills and assets within their possession, catalyzed by ever-increasing internet access and falling equipment costs); Adam Davidson, What Hollywood Can Teach Us About the Future of Work, N.Y. TIMES MAG., May, 10, 2015, at MM18 (referring to this trend as the “gig economy,” described as “designed to take care of extremely short-term tasks, manageable by one person, typically in less than a day”).

11 Yochai Benkler, Essay, Sharing Nicely: On Shareable Goods and the Emergence of Sharing as a Modality of Economic Production, 114 YALE L.J. 273, 278 (2004); see also Belk, supra note 6, at 1595 (noting that while “[s]haring is a phenomenon as old as humankind, . . . collaborative consumption and the ‘sharing economy’ are phenomena born of the Internet age”).


13 See Edward T. Walker, Beyond the Rhetoric of the “Sharing Economy,” 14 CONTEXTS, no. 1, 2015, at 15, 16 (noting the sharing economy label elides the distinction between paid work and uncompensated volunteering); Wertz, supra note 12 (mentioning the fear that the “Uberification” of our economy will turn every good full-time job into a “flex-time gig”).

In fact, “sharing” companies such as Uber insist they are merely intermediaries, and disclaim any liability associated with the services they facilitate.

Some commentators have noted concerns over the lack of consumer protection in this sharing economy; for example, “outrageous” Uber charges.

Wisconsin recently enacted legislation regulating ridesharing services, imposing minimum requirements across the state for licensure, fare disclosure, nondiscrimination, driver background checks, and insurance coverage.

But what protections are there for the microentrepreneurs? While the sharing economy provides workers opportunities to take their economic fates into their own hands, the service providers/intermediaries are also shifting risks to those workers—in the form of income growth). Hall and Krueger note that claims that contingent workers represent a much larger share of the workforce generally count part-time workers as contingent workers, even though they typically are employed in a traditional employment relationship. Id. at 4. They also note that workers in the sharing economy are predominately independent contractors and that independent contractors represented 7.4 percent of the workforce in 2005. Id. at 5. Hall and Krueger conclude: “The size of the sharing economy, which is undoubtedly growing as a result of technological advances, is too new to be precisely measured. But workers in the sharing economy are largely a subset of those who are independent contractors and the self-employed.” Id. at 6.


16 See, e.g., User Terms, UBER (Dec. 8, 2014), https://www.uber.com/legal/ind/terms (“For the avoidance of doubt: Uber itself does not provide transportation services, and Uber is not a transportation carrier.”).

17 Id. (“Uber under no circumstance accepts liability in connection with and/or arising from the transportation services provided by the Transportation Provider or any acts, actions, behaviour, conduct, and/or negligence on the part of the Transportation Provider.”). TaskRabbit similarly disclaims any responsibility towards the services provided by “Taskers” (sometimes referred to as “Users”) and the company’s own service—a communications platform which enables the connection between Clients and Taskers. See TaskRabbit Terms of Service, TASKRABBIT, https://www.taskrabbit.com/terms (last updated Apr. 28, 2015).

18 See, e.g., Lieber, supra note 3 (describing how an Airbnb customer was bitten by the host’s dog); Rocha, supra note 3 (reporting an Uber driver accused of kidnapping and taking a passenger to a motel).


20 2015 Wis. Act 16 (2015-2016 Wis. Legis.).
instability (traditionally protected by unemployment insurance and minimum wage laws), capital expenditures (for example, Lyft drivers must use a 2000-year-model or newer car\textsuperscript{21}), as well as protections provided by workers’ compensation and general labor laws.\textsuperscript{22}

III. “Traditional” and Modern Independent Contractor (Mis)Classifications

Labor law in the United States focuses on the worker as employee. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII),\textsuperscript{23} the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA),\textsuperscript{24} the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA),\textsuperscript{25} the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA),\textsuperscript{26} the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA),\textsuperscript{27} and state unemployment and workers’ compensation acts all limit their respective applications to employees.\textsuperscript{28} The statutes, however, generally define “employee” in a circular fashion—as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} See Cotter v. Lyft, Inc., 60 F. Supp. 3d 1067, 1080 (N.D. Cal. 2015).
\item \textsuperscript{22} Cf. Catherine Rampell, The Dark Side of a “Sharing Economy,” WASH. POST, Jan. 27, 2015, at A17.
someone employed by the employer—leaving it to the courts (and sometimes state commissions) to determine whether a worker is an employee eligible for protection or an ineligible independent contractor. “The result has been continued wasteful litigation of the employee status issue, manipulation of working relations by employers seeking to avoid employment regulations, and never-ending uncertainty about the status of the growing number of workers who toil in the gray area between ‘employee’ and ‘independent contractor.’”

Courts have a long history of analyzing the employee/independent contractor dichotomy from the perspective of the common law of agency, which focuses on the employer’s/principal’s potential vicarious liability to third parties arising from the acts of its “servant” through the doctrine of respondeat superior. The common law multi-factor test for determining whether a worker (servant) is an employee or independent contractor is reflected in § 220(2) of the Restatement (Second) of Agency, which focuses, first, on the extent of control the employer

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30 See, e.g., infra note 145 and accompanying text.

31 See Carlson, supra note 29, at 298 (“The real work of identifying ‘employees’ and their employment relationships has always been in the courts.”).

32 Id. at 301.

33 See generally RESTATEMENT (THIRD) OF EMPLOYMENT LAW § 1.01, Reporter’s Notes, at 11-12 (Council Draft No. 10, 2013).

34 In determining whether one acting for another is a servant or an independent contractor, the following matters of fact, among others, are considered:
   (a) the extent of control which, by the agreement, the master may exercise over the details of the work;
   (b) whether or not the one employed is engaged in a distinct occupation or business;
   (c) the kind of occupation, with reference to whether, in the locality, the work is usually done under the direction of the employer or by a specialist without supervision;
   (d) the skill required in the particular occupation;
   (e) whether the employer or the workman supplies the instrumentalities, tools, and the place of work for the person doing the work;
   (f) the length of time for which the person is employed;
   (g) the method of payment, whether by the time or by the job;
   (h) whether or not the work is a part of the regular business of the employer;}
exercises over the details of the work.\textsuperscript{35} The “right of control” emphasis predates modern labor law, serving as the foundation for whether an injured third party could hold the employer liable for a tort committed by its worker. Liability rested on the employer for actually controlling the act that caused the injury or from failing to properly supervise the work.\textsuperscript{36}

Carlson argues that “[c]ourts were frequently inclined to give added weight to factors other than control when the effect was to extend protection to needy workers rather than to impose tort liability on employers.”\textsuperscript{37} For example, the multi-factor test also considers whether the services were delivered as part of an independent business or were integrated into the principal’s business.\textsuperscript{38} In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court considered whether Los Angeles-area “newsboys” were employees for purposes of the NLRA.\textsuperscript{39} The newsboys had attempted to organize but the various newspapers for which they worked refused to bargain collectively, arguing the newsboys were independent contractors, not employees.\textsuperscript{40} The Court expressly recognized the difficulty in determining whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor: “Few problems in the law have given greater variety of application and conflict in results than the cases arising in the borderland between what is clearly an employer-employee relationship and what is clearly one of independent entrepreneurial dealing.”\textsuperscript{41} Relying upon the “facts involved in the economic relationship” between the workers and the employers,\textsuperscript{42} the Supreme Court deferred to the National Labor Relations Board’s (Board) determination that the newsboys were employees subject to protection under the NLRA\textsuperscript{43}

\begin{itemize}
  \item [(i)] whether or not the parties believe they are creating the relation of master and servant; and
  \item [(j)] whether the principal is or is not in business.
\end{itemize}

\textbf{Restatement (Second) of Agency § 220(2) (1958).}

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{See generally id.}, cmt. e., at 487-88. \textit{See also Restatement (Third) of Agency § 1.01, cmt. f.(1).}, at 26 (2006) (“An essential element of agency is the principal’s right to control the agent’s actions.”).

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{See Carlson, supra} note 29, at 304.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Id.} at 311.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Restatement (Third) of Employment Law} § 1.01, Reporter’s Notes, at 12 (Council Draft No. 10, 2013).

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{NLRB v. Hearst Publ’ns}, 322 U.S. 111 (1944).

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Id.} at 114, 120.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Id.} at 121.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{See id.} at 129.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Id.} at 131 (noting factors such as the publisher: controlling price and hence influencing newsboy earnings, establishing hours and supervision of newsboy work, and providing sales equipment and advertising materials). In response to the \textit{Hearst} decision, Congress amended the NLRA to expressly exclude independent contractors from the definition of employee under the Act, requiring the Board and the courts to apply general agency principles in distinguishing between employees and independent contractors (at least insofar as applying the NLRA). \textit{NLRB v. United Ins. Co. of Am.}, 390 U.S. 254, 256 (1968).
As courts repeatedly note when applying multi-factor tests to determine whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor, no one of the factors is dispositive; rather the court must consider the totality of circumstances.\footnote{44 See, e.g., Brock v. Superior Care, Inc., 840 F.2d 1054, 1059 (2d Cir. 1988); In re FedEx Ground Package Sys., 734 F. Supp. 2d 557, 588 (N.D. Ind. 2010); Cotter v. Lyft, Inc., 60 F. Supp. 3d 1067, 1076 (N.D. Cal. 2015); O’Connor v. Uber Technologies, Inc., No. C–13–3826 EMC, 2015 WL 1069092, at *5-6 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 11, 2015).}

Due to the costs and risks associated with hiring employees, businesses have sought to instead employ independent contractors.\footnote{45 See Anna Deknatel & Lauren Hoff-Downing, ABC on the Books and in the Courts: An Analysis of Recent Independent Contractor and Misclassification Statutes, 18 U. PA. J.L. & SOC. CHANGE 53, (2015) (noting that by misclassifying employees as independent contractors employers can avoid employee-related liabilities and tax and benefit contribution requirements); Richard J. Reibstein et al., The 2015 White Paper on Independent Contractor Misclassification: How Companies Can Minimize the Risks 1 (2015), available at http://www.pepperlaw.com/pdfs/ICMisclassification_MinimizeRisk_04_2015.pdf (asserting “[t]he use and misuse of independent contractors has increased dramatically over the last two decades”).} In response, through 2014, twenty-three states have considered and eleven states have enacted “misclassification” statutes to statutorily determine whether an employee is misclassified as an independent contractor, though many of the laws are specific to an industry, such as health care, or a particular labor concern, such as workers’ or unemployment compensation.\footnote{46 Massachusetts provides a good example of a comprehensive misclassification statute, focusing on the level of control exercised by the employer, whether the work performed is outside the employer’s normal business, and whether the worker is customarily engaged in an independently established trade or occupation.\footnote{47 Mass. Gen. Laws Ann. ch. 149, § 148B(a)(1) – (3) (West 2014).} Fundamentally, it provides that a person performing any service is \textit{presumed to be an employee unless} three factors are met: (1) the individual is free from control and direction in connection with the performance of the service; (2) the service is performed outside the usual course of the business of the employer; and, (3) the individual is customarily engaged in an independently established trade, occupation, profession or business of the same nature as that involved in the service performed.\footnote{48 Id. (emphasis added); see also Cotter, 60 F. Supp. 3d at 1077 (noting the presumption in favor of employee status under California law). This basic three-step formulation is sometimes referred to as the “ABC test.” Deknatel & Hoff-Downing, supra note 45, at 65.}

In addition, as discussed below, most states have also created multi-factor tests to determine whether a worker is an employee protected by the state’s various labor laws.\footnote{49 The Internal Revenue Service also uses its own test to determine whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor that focuses on right to control and the working relationship, including its financial aspects. See Internal Revenue Serv., Pub. 15-A, Employer’s}
depending on which test a court uses, there may be an additional emphasis on the entrepreneurial control the worker exercises over his or her work.\textsuperscript{50} Ultimately, individuals who lack entrepreneurial control normally are employees, even if their work is not physically controlled by their employers.\textsuperscript{51}

\section*{A. The FedEx Misclassification Cases}

Recent misclassification cases involving drivers for FedEx’s ground package delivery service exemplify the complexity and inconsistency of worker classification for an interstate enterprise. In the mid-2000s, drivers for FedEx’s ground package delivery service began filing lawsuits against FedEx claiming they were employees misclassified as independent contractors. All of the drivers had entered into an Operating Agreement that classified them as independent contractors, and that further stated, “\textit{[n]o officer, agent or employee of FedEx Ground has the authority to direct the contractor as to the manner or means employed to achieve such objectives and results.}”\textsuperscript{52} Applying Kansas law, the District Court for the Northern District for Indiana ruled the drivers were properly classified as independent contractors, noting “that no single factor is dispositive when determining employment status.”\textsuperscript{53} It ruled “the totality of circumstances requires a finding of independent contractor status.”\textsuperscript{54} Particularly persuasive were the facts that the Operating Agreement did not provide FedEx with the right to control the drivers’ means and methods of work or the manner in which they complete their contractual obligations, nor could FedEx drivers be terminated without cause before the expiration of their contract term.\textsuperscript{55} The court noted also the drivers’ “entrepreneurial opportunities” in that they could buy multiple routes and hire their own drivers as well as sell their routes to other qualified drivers.\textsuperscript{56}

A large number of the misclassification actions were then consolidated in the Northern Indiana District Court,\textsuperscript{57} which held that FedEx drivers were independent contractors in twenty-

\textsuperscript{50} “An individual renders services as an independent businessperson when the individual in his or her own interest exercises entrepreneurial control over important business decisions, including whether to hire and where to assign assistants, whether to purchase and where to deploy equipment, and whether and when to service other customers.” \textit{Restatement (Third) of Employment Law \S 1.01(2)} (Council Draft No. 10, 2013).

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Id.}, cmt. e., at 5.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{In re FedEx Ground Package Sys.}, 734 F. Supp. 2d 557, 561-62 (N.D. Ind. 2010) (emphasis in original) (internal quotation marks omitted).

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Id.} at 588.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Id.} (“FedEx’s retained control is limited to the results of the drivers’ work, not how the drivers’ achieve those results.”).

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Id.} at 601.

three states\textsuperscript{58} and employees in three states.\textsuperscript{59} Throughout its state-by-state analysis, the court incorporated its “Kansas Decision” reasoning that “the right to control factor is considered as just one among the other factors.”\textsuperscript{60} In the three states the court determined drivers were employees, the conclusions rested on specific state statutes: in Kentucky, its wage payment statute that reshapes the control question;\textsuperscript{61} in Nevada, its worker’s compensation statute, which provides that an independent contractor is a statutory employee if the worker is in the same business as the employer;\textsuperscript{62} and in New Hampshire, its statute that essentially requires that workers classified as independent contractors must hold themselves out as in business for themselves.\textsuperscript{63}

The Northern Indiana consolidated cases were not the last word on the subject however. The original “Kansas Decision” was appealed to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, which certified the issue of whether the FedEx drivers were employees or independent contractors under Kansas’s Wage Payment Act (KWPA)\textsuperscript{64} to the Kansas Supreme Court, concluding the Kansas court was in a far better position to settle the issue.\textsuperscript{65} And the Kansas Supreme Court did settle the issue, holding the drivers are employees rather than independent contractors,\textsuperscript{66} noting that while the question of whether FedEx’s delivery drivers are employees for purposes of the KWPA is simple, the “answer defies such simplicity.”\textsuperscript{67}

As noted by the Kansas Supreme Court, a goal of the KWPA “was to protect Kansas employees who were not then covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) minimum wage requirements, or the National Labor Relations Board.”\textsuperscript{68} While noting that Kansas courts have “long emphasized the right to control test when determining a worker’s status,”\textsuperscript{69} the court noted

\textsuperscript{58} Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, Wisconsin. See id., Appendix: Summary of Dispositions. There were multiple actions in many of the states. While the court made a definitive ruling that the drivers were independent contractors under state statute or common law in the states listed above, it also remanded many individual actions for further consideration or for removal from the centralized docket.

\textsuperscript{59} Kentucky, Nevada, and New Hampshire. See id., Appendix: Summary of Dispositions.

\textsuperscript{60} Id. at 653.

\textsuperscript{61} Id. at 685 (citing 803 KY. ADMIN. REGS. 1:005 (2007), implementing KY. REV. STAT. ANN. ch. 337 (West 2012)).

\textsuperscript{62} Id. at 694 (citing NEV. REV. STAT. ANN. § 616B.603(1)(b) (West 2009)).

\textsuperscript{63} Id. at 698-99 (citing N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 275:4(II)(e) (2012)).

\textsuperscript{64} KAN. STAT. ANN. §§ 44-312 – 327 (West 2004).

\textsuperscript{65} Craig v. FedEx Ground Package System, Inc., 686 F.3d 423, 429 (7th Cir. 2012).


\textsuperscript{67} Id. at 72.

\textsuperscript{68} Id. at 73.

\textsuperscript{69} Id. at 74.
also that in promulgating regulations to enforce the KWPA, the Kansas Secretary of Labor
deferred to the U.S. Department of Labor’s definition of independent contractor for purposes of
the FSLA.70 However, the Kansas Supreme Court found no relevant federal regulations defining
independent contractor for purposes of the FLSA; instead courts have considered the economic
realities of the employment relationship when determining whether the individual is an employee
or independent contractor under the FLSA.71 “The ‘economic realities’ test seeks to look past
technical, common-law concepts of the master and servant relationship to determine whether, as
a matter of economic reality, a worker is dependent on a given employer.”72 In other words, is
the worker economically dependent on the employer’s business or is the worker truly in business
for him or herself?73 In applying the economic reality test, courts consider:

(1) the degree of control exerted by the alleged employer over the worker;
(2) the worker’s opportunity for profit or loss; (3) the worker’s investment in the
business; (4) the permanence of the working relationship; (5) the degree of skill
required to perform the work; and (6) the extent to which the work is an integral
part of the alleged employer’s business.74

The Kansas Supreme Court noted that several of the economic reality factors are also
considered under Kansas’s common law right to control test for determining a worker’s status.75
It ultimately concluded that Kansas’s twenty-factor common law test was the appropriate test to
determine whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor for purposes of the
KWPA.76 Although other courts have emphasized entrepreneurialism,77 the Kansas Supreme
Court placed particular emphasis on a company’s right to control the worker.78

70 Id. at 74-75.
71 Id. at 75 (citing Lumry v. State, 307 P.3d 232, 240 (Kan. Ct. App. 2013)).
72 Id. (quoting Barlow v. C.R. England, Inc., 703 F.3d 497, 506 (10th Cir. 2012)) (internal
quotation marks omitted).
73 Id. (citing Baker v. Flint Eng’g & Const. Co., 137 F.3d 1436, 1440 (10th Cir. 1998); Doty v.
Elias, 733 F.2d 720, 722-23 (10th Cir. 1984)).
74 Id. (quoting Barlow, 703 F.3d at 506) (internal quotation marks omitted).
75 See id. at 75-76 (listing twenty factors, the first of which is degree of control exercised by the
employer).
76 Id. at 76 (“This test includes economic reality considerations, while maintaining the primary
focus on an employer’s right to control.”).
77 Id. at 80 (referencing FedEx Home Delivery v. NLRB, 563 F.3d 492 (D.C. Cir. 2009) (holding
drivers are independent contractors)).
78 Id. The Kansas Supreme Court was asked to also consider whether multiple-route drivers were
employees or independent contractors. The court concluded the result is the same whether a
driver is responsible for one route or multiple routes with other drivers. Id. at 93 (“[T]he
employer/employee relationship between FedEx and a full-time delivery driver with respect to
the assigned service area is not terminated or altered when the driver acquires an additional route
for which he or she is not the driver.”). In one other of the multidistrict cases, Carlson v. FedEx
Ground Package Systems, Inc., the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals reversed summary
At least one other court has found the FedEx drivers to be independent contractors rather than employees. In *FedEx Home Delivery v. NLRB*, FedEx appealed the National Labor Relations Board’s determination that FedEx committed an unfair labor practice in violation of the NLRA by refusing to recognize a union organized by drivers. The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals held that the NLRA was not applicable because FedEx drivers were independent contractors pursuant to common law agency, emphasizing, in particular, opportunities for entrepreneurialism. The Board, however, subsequently rejected the D.C. Circuit’s analysis, stating that no one factor is decisive and noting particularly that *Restatement (Second) of Agency* § 220(2) does not mention entrepreneurial opportunity.

Additional courts have ruled the FedEx drivers are employees. In *Wells v. FedEx Ground Package System, Inc.*, the District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri concluded “FedEx had the right to control and did control the means and manner of Plaintiff’s work to such an extent that they were employees of FedEx and not independent contractors.” Similarly, in *Estrada v. FedEx Ground Package System, Inc.*, based primarily on the right to control, a California Court of Appeal held drivers were employees rather than independent contractors. In 2014, the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled FedEx drivers are employees in two separate cases: *Alexander v. FedEx Ground Packages System, Inc.*, and *Slayman v. FedEx Ground Package System, Inc.* To complicate the analysis, the District Court for the District of judgment in favor of FedEx, holding the drivers’ employment status raised a genuine issue of material fact. No. 13–14979, 2015 WL 3405994, at *14 (11th Cir. May 28, 2015). The Carlson court noted that the Florida Supreme Court has adopted *Restatement (Second) of Agency* § 220(2) to determine employee/independent contractor status. *Id.* at *3; see supra note 34.

*FedEx v. NLRB*, 563 F.3d 492 (D.C. Cir. 2009) (applying the common law agency factors expressed in *Restatement (Second) of Agency* § 220(2) (1958)); see supra note 34.

*Id.* at 497 (“Thus, while all the considerations at common law remain in play, an important animating principle by which to evaluate those factors in cases where some factors cut one way and some the other is whether the position presents the opportunities and risks inherent in entrepreneurialism.”)


979 F. Supp. 2d 1006, 1024 (E.D. Mo. 2013).

154 Cal. App. 4th 1, 64 Cal. Rptr. 3d 327 (2007) (applying *Cal. Labor Code* § 2802 (West 2011) (requiring employers to reimburse employees for work-related expenses)).


765 F.3d 1033 (9th Cir. 2014) (applying Oregon’s right-to-control and economic reality tests).
Massachusetts initially ruled that FedEx drivers were employees under Massachusetts’s independent contractor classification statute.\(^87\) The court later reversed itself,\(^88\) however, concluding the Federal Aviation Administration Authorization Act preempts Massachusetts’s independent contractor classification statute.\(^89\) And in Anfinson v. FedEx Ground Package System,\(^90\) FedEx drivers brought suit under the Washington Minimum Wage Act\(^91\) claiming a right to overtime pay. A jury concluded the drivers were independent contractors under a hybrid instruction, focusing the inquiry on FedEx’s right to control in light of economic-dependence factors.\(^92\) The Washington Court of Appeals reversed, holding the jury instruction erroneous and prejudicial.\(^93\) The Washington Supreme Court affirmed the appeals court’s ruling and remanded the matter for retrial utilizing the economic reality test.\(^94\)

**B. The Lyft and Uber Misclassification Cases**

In 2013, Lyft and Uber drivers filed putative class action lawsuits against Lyft\(^95\) and Uber,\(^96\) respectively, alleging violations of the California Labor Code.\(^97\) In the case against Lyft, Judge

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\(^90\) 281 P.3d 289 (Wash. 2012).

\(^91\) WASH. REV. CODE ANN. §§ 49.46.005 – 920 (2013).

\(^92\) Anfinson, 281 P.3d at 292.

\(^93\) Id. at 293.

\(^94\) Id. at 299 (“The relevant inquiry is whether, as a matter of economic reality, the worker is economically dependent upon the alleged employer or is instead in business for himself.”) (internal quotation marks omitted).

\(^95\) Cotter v. Lyft, Inc., 60 F. Supp. 3d 1067 (N.D. Cal. 2015).


\(^97\) In both cases, the drivers sought classification as employees generally under California’s Labor Code. See, e.g., O’Connor, 2015 WL 1069092, at *1 (“Plaintiffs claim that they are employees of Uber, as opposed to its independent contractors, and thus are eligible for various statutory protections for employees codified in the California Labor Code, such as a requirement that an employer pass on the entire amount of any gratuity ‘that is paid, given to, or left for an employee by a patron.’”) (quoting CAL. LAB. CODE § 351 (West 2011)); Cotter, 60 F. Supp. 3d at 1074 (“[California e]mployees are generally entitled to, among other things, minimum wage and
Chhabria described the paradox faced by microentrepreneurs and employers alike in the shared economy. While Lyft drivers could work as little or as much as they wanted, they possessed no special skills, their work was essential, rather than tangential, to Lyft’s day-to-day operations, and they could be fired if they did not perform to Lyft’s specifications.\footnote{Cotter, 60 F. Supp. 3d at 1069.}

While recognizing that right to control is the principal test for employee/independent contractor classification,\footnote{Id. at 1075. Both courts acknowledged there are additional, secondary factors that must also be considered in the total mix. See id. at 1076; O’Connor, 2015 WL 1069092, at *5-6.} the court in the Lyft case noted that a finding of employee status does not require that the company retain the right to control every last detail; employee status may still exist even where a certain amount of freedom is inherent in the work.\footnote{Cotter, 60 F. Supp. 3d 1075-76, 1078-79 (noting, however, Lyft driver requirements such as not picking up non-Lyft passengers, not to have anyone else in the car, not to request tips, not to smoke or to allow the car to smell like smoke, and not to ask for a passenger’s contact information, as well as Lyft affirmatively instructing drivers to wash and vacuum the car once a week, to greet passengers with a smile and a fist-bump, to ask passengers what type of music they’d like to hear, to offer passengers a cell phone charge, and to use the route given by a GPS navigation system if the passenger does not have a preference; noting also that Lyft reserves the right to penalize (or even terminate) drivers who do not follow its rules).}

The court in the Lyft case also reviewed two recent California Court of Appeal cases that the court believed were closely analogous. In \textit{JKH Enterprises, Inc. v. Department of Industrial Relations},\footnote{142 Cal. App. 4th 1046, 48 Cal. Rptr. 3d 563 (Cal. Ct. App. 2006).} the appeals court upheld the Department’s classification of “special” delivery drivers as employees for purposes of the state’s workers’ compensation statute, even though, among other factors, the \textit{JKH} drivers maintained flexible schedules, used their own vehicles that they could use to make deliveries for other companies, and did not wear uniforms or badges that identified their affiliation with \textit{JKH}.\footnote{Cotter, 60 F. Supp. 3d at 1080 (citing \textit{JKH}, 142 Cal. App. 4th at 1050-52, 48 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 568-70).} Similarly, \textit{Air Couriers International v. Employment Development Department} held that delivery drivers were employees rather than independent contractors.\footnote{150 Cal. App. 4th 923, 59 Cal. Rptr. 3d 37 (Cal. Ct. App. 2007). In particular, as noted in \textit{Cotter}, the drivers were not penalized for rejecting any delivery jobs. \textit{Cotter}, 60 F. Supp. 3d at 1080 (citing \textit{Air Couriers}, 150 Cal. App. 4th at 926-28, 59 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 38-39). The court in the Uber case also cited \textit{JKH} and \textit{Air Couriers} for the argument that “freedom to choose one’s days and hours of work does not in itself preclude a finding of an employment relationship.” O’Connor, 2015 WL 1069092, at *14.}

\begin{itemize}
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As noted by the California Court of Appeal in *JKH*, when determining the employment relationship for purposes of workers’ compensation, the concern is not an employer’s liability for injuries *caused* by an employee to third parties, but rather injuries *suffered* by an employee that should be insured by the employer.104 This argument, according to California courts, supports a broad definition of employment with a presumption that anyone providing services to another is an employee.105 *Air Couriers* involved state taxes rather than workers’ compensation. Air Couriers therefore argued that *Borello*, the California Supreme Court case relied upon in *JKH*, was inapplicable. However, the California Court of Appeal in *Air Couriers* concluded that *Borello* could still be relied upon to provide the proper legal standard for determine whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor for purposes of applying state statutes.106

Returning to the case involving Lyft, the district court, noting that “the most important factor for discerning the relationship under California law, namely, the right of control, tends to cut the other way[,]”107 ultimately concluded that even if the underlying facts were not in dispute, the question must go to a jury because reasonable people could differ on whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor based on those same undisputed facts.108

The court in the Uber case applied a *prima facie* analysis for determining whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor under California law: “once a plaintiff comes forward with evidence that he provided services for an employer, the employee has established a *prima facie* case that the relationship was one of employer/employee[;]”109 the burden then shifts to the employer to prove the presumed employee is actually an independent contractor based on those same undisputed facts.110 The pertinent question to determine whether an employer can rebut a *prima facie* showing of employment is “not how much control a hirer exercises, but how much control the hirer retains the right to exercise.”111

Fundamental to the first element of a *prima facie* case is whether the drivers actually provide a service to Uber. Uber argued it is not a “transportation company,” but is instead “a pure ‘technology company’ that merely generates ‘leads’ for its transportation providers through its software.”112 The court considered this argument “fatally flawed in numerous respects,”113

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104 *JKH*, 142 Cal. App. 4th at 1063, 48 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 578 (citing S. G. Borello & Sons, Inc. v. Dep’t of Indus. Relations, 769 P.2d 399, 405 (Cal. 1989)).

105 Id. (citing *Borello*, 769 P.2d at 406); see also infra text accompanying note 109 for a further discussion of this presumption.

106 See *Air Couriers*, 150 Cal. App. 4th at 936-37, 59 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 46.

107 Cotter, 60 F. Supp. 3d at 1079.

108 See id. at 1076.


110 Id.

111 Id. (quoting Ayala v. Antelope Valley Newspapers Inc., 327 P.3d 165, 172 (Cal. 2014)) (internal quotation marks omitted) (emphasis in original).

112 Id. at *6; see also supra, text accompanying note 16.

viewing Uber’s self-definition as a mere “technology company” to focus exclusively on the mechanics of its platform rather than on the substance of what Uber actually \textit{does}. More importantly, the court considered the drivers to perform a service for Uber because “Uber simply would not be a viable business entity without its drivers.”

Uber argued it did not control its drivers to the extent they should be classified as employees. Similar to \textit{JKH’s} and \textit{Air Couriers’} drivers, Uber argued its drivers can work as much or as little as they like (as long as they give at least one ride every 180 days or every 30 days, depending on the program they sign up for), they never have to accept any leads generated by Uber, and they can completely control how to give any rides they do accept. The plaintiffs pointed out, however, that Uber’s Driver Handbook states that it expects drivers to accept all ride requests and that it will investigate and possibly terminate drivers who are rejecting too many trips. The court considered the control issue to be “very much in dispute.”

Uber also argued there was insufficient monitoring of the drivers to warrant their classification as employees, relying on \textit{Alexander v. FedEx Ground Package System, Inc.},

114 Id. (“Uber . . . sells rides. Uber is no more a ‘technology company’ than Yellow Cab is a ‘technology company’ because it uses CB radios to dispatch taxi cabs, John Deere is a ‘technology company’ because it uses computers and robots to manufacture lawn mowers, or Domino Sugar is a ‘technology company’ because it uses modern irrigation techniques to grow its sugar cane.”).

115 Id. at *7; Lyft had also asserted that is was not an employer because the drivers provided services only for their riders, not for Lyft; an argument rejected by the court as “not a serious one.” Cotter v. Lyft, Inc., 60 F. Supp. 3d 1067, 1078 (N.D. Cal. 2015) (citing Yellow Cab v. Workers’ Comp. Appeals Bd., 277 Cal. Rptr. 434, 437, 226 Cal. App. 3d 1288, 1293 (1991) (holding taxi drivers employees for workers’ compensation purposes; “Contrary to Yellow’s portrayal here, the essence of its enterprise was not merely leasing vehicles. It did not simply collect rent, but cultivated the passenger market by soliciting riders, processing requests for service through a dispatching system, distinctively painting and marking the cabs, and concerning itself with various matters unrelated to the lessor-lessee relationship[, such as service and courtesy].”)) (internal quotation marks omitted); see also Schwann v. FedEx Ground Package Sys., No. 11–11094–RGS, 2013 WL 3353776, at *5 (D. Mass. July 3, 2013) (finding “beyond cavil that the pick-up and delivery drivers are essential to FedEx’s business”; “FedEx cannot assert that it does not provide delivery services by simply refusing to recognize its delivery drivers as employees.”), rev’d, No. 11–11094–RGS, 2015 WL 501512 (D. Mass. Feb. 5, 2015) (holding Federal Aviation Administration Authorization Act preempts Massachusetts’s independent contractor classification statute, MASS. GEN. LAWS ANN. ch. 149, § 148B (West 2014), upon which the court’s earlier decision was based).


117 See id.

118 Id. The court also noted “that Uber seeks to control . . . details right down to whether drivers ‘have an umbrella in [their] car for clients to be dry until they get in your car or after they get out.’” \textit{Id}.

119 See id. at *14.

120 765 F.3d 981 (9th Cir. 2014).
which held that FedEx drivers were employees, in part, because management representatives
accompanied the drivers in ride-alongs at least four times a year. Uber claimed that it never
cconducts any performance inspections or ride-alongs. The court found this argument
unpersuasive, noting that Uber drivers are actually monitored by Uber customers during every
ride through a ratings system that Uber uses to determine whether to fire a driver. In the
court’s view, this gave Uber tremendous control over the manner and means of its drivers’
performance, for, unlike in Alexander where drivers knew they would be monitored four times
per year, Uber drivers “are potentially observable at all times.”

Having concluded the Uber drivers made a presumptive showing they were employees
providing a service to Uber, the court held it was a mixed question of law and fact to be decided
by a jury as to whether the drivers were actually independent contractors rather than
employees.

As the discussion in this part has demonstrated, control remains an essential factor in
determining whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor. However, the primary
shift in analysis has been from control equating to responsibility for harm caused to innocent
third parties by the worker—the traditional agency law test—to control belying the true
entrepreneurial nature of the worker’s independent status—the economic reality test. In other
words, if the employer controls how the worker performs and the worker’s “business” is
substantially dependent upon its relationship with the employer, then the worker is in reality
more of an employee than independent contractor.

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121 O’Connor, 2015 WL 1069092, at *14 (citing Alexander, 765 F.3d at 985).
122 See id.
123 Id.
124 Id. (quoting Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 201 (Alan
visibility . . . assures the automatic functioning of power.’”)). Foucault described the Panapticon
architecture in which prison cells encircle a central tower, allowing guards in the tower to view
the interior of any cell at any time, though the prisoners never know when they were being
observed. Foucault, supra.
125 Id. at *10-12.
126 The U.S. Department of Labor recently reiterated that it uses the economic reality test to
determine whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor for purposes of the FLSA.
See Administrator’s Interpretation No. 2015-1, The Application of the Fair Labor Standards
Act’s “Suffer or Permit” Standard in the Identification of Employees Who Are Misclassified as
127 “Employer” is used here generically—an employer may employ employees as well as
independent contractors.
IV. REVERSING THE DEPENDENCY IN THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP TO CLASSIFY INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS

Businesses have long found hiring independent contractors to be economically efficient. It makes no sense for, say, a computer services firm to hire an employee just to create an occasional marketing brochure; just as it makes much more sense to outsource its payroll management. In the classic sense, independent contractors possess a skill outside the core competencies of the hiring company that is needed only for a limited purpose and duration. Independent contractors have traditionally provided occasional skills tangential to the hiring party’s business. But businesses have found hiring independent contractors to be economically efficient even when the workers’ skills are directly related to the hiring company’s core competencies and are needed not only continuously, but also required for the business to exist.\(^\text{128}\) Therein lies the conundrum,\(^\text{129}\) as the latter workers act more like employees but are classified as independent contractors.

This has led to fairly absurd results, such as FedEx claiming it is not in the package delivery service and Lyft and Uber claiming they do not provide transportation services,\(^\text{130}\) and Microsoft hiring “permatemps” for years on end.\(^\text{131}\) But is it different in the sharing economy, where microentrepreneurs bid on short-term jobs through intermediaries and may perform work arranged by different companies—for example, Uber or TaskRabbit—in the same day,\(^\text{132}\) or who are supplementing incoming from other part- or full-time jobs?\(^\text{133}\)

The ultimate issue is who is dependent upon whom? Courts and commentators have argued that if the worker is dependent on the employer, how can it be a truly independent

\(^{128}\) See David Weil, The Fissured Workplace: Why Work Became So Bad for So Many and What Can Be Done to Improve It 44 (2014) (describing generally the trend of hiring independent contractors arising from firms hiring employees to focus on competencies demanded by capital markets (i.e., profit maximization) while shedding (to independent contractors) more and more of the actual work done by the enterprise); see also Vizcaino v. Microsoft Corp., 97 F.3d 1187, 1189 (9th Cir. 1996), rev’d in part, 120 F.3d 1006 (9th Cir. 1997) (en banc) (“Large corporations have increasingly adopted the practice of hiring temporary employees or independent contractors as a means of avoiding payment of employee benefits, and thereby increasing their profits.”).

\(^{129}\) See Lisa J. Bernt, Suppressing the Mischief: New Work, Old Problems, 6 NE. U. L.J. 311, 311 (2014) (“The task of differentiating an employee from an independent contractor has been the cause of some angst for generations.”)

\(^{130}\) See supra notes 112-115 and accompanying text. These were not the first companies to make such a claim. See, e.g., Lehigh Valley Coal Co. v. Yensavage, 218 F. 547, 552-53 (1914) (rejecting coal mining company’s claim it was “not in the business of coal mining at all, in so far as it uses . . . miners, but is only engaged in letting out contracts to independent contractors”).

\(^{131}\) See Vizcaino, 97 F.3d at 1190 (describing how Microsoft had fully integrated temporary workers into its workforce).

\(^{132}\) See Singer, supra note 3.

\(^{133}\) See, e.g. Hall & Krueger, supra note 14, at 10 (reporting that approximately two-thirds of Uber drivers have another full- or part-time job).
contractor? But the majority of Task Rabbit “Taskers” and Uber drivers, unlike FedEx drivers, appear to be the antithesis of dependent workers—relatively few are solely economically dependent on one “employer.” But they can still be vulnerable and the goal of labor and employment laws is to protect vulnerable workers.\footnote{Marc Linder, Towards Universal Worker Coverage Under the National Labor Relations Act: Making Room for Uncontrolled Employees, Dependent Contractors, and Employee-Like Persons, 66 U. DET. L. REV. 555, 601 (1989) (“Whether such workers are called dependent contractors, employee-like persons, or uncontrolled employees, the rationale underlying this class of legislation is obviously that, even absent traditional looking-over-the-shoulder physical control, certain categories of quasi-entrepreneurial workers are economically so dependent on the entities for which they work that they are effectively precluded from competing as capital accumulators.”) (footnote omitted); Ruth Burdick, Principles of Agency Permit the NLRB to Consider Additional Factors of Entrepreneurial Independence and the Relative Dependence of Employees When Determining Independent Contractor Status Under Section 2(3), 15 HOFSTRA LAB. & EMP. L.J. 75, 130 (1997) (“[W]orker[s] of true entrepreneurial status . . . who are truly independent readily can sever the business relationship and take their services and equipment elsewhere when faced with unfair or arbitrary treatment, or unfavorable working conditions. They usually have contracts with more than one company, or contract with one company on a full-time basis for short durations, and consequently are not dependent on a single employer in the same all-or-nothing fashion as traditional employees who tend to work on a full-time basis for an indefinite term.”) (footnote omitted) (quoted by Cotter v. Lyft, Inc., 60 F. Supp. 3d 1067, 1074 (N.D. Cal. 2015)); see also In re FedEx Ground Package System, Inc., 734 F. Supp. 2d 557, 585 (N.D. Ind. 2010) (applying Kansas law) (noting additional factors relevant to independent contractor classification, including whether the worker’s business is independent in nature).
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Public policy, reflected through various employment and labor laws, recognizes that employees should be afforded some levels of protection—e.g., from discrimination, income insecurity, workplace injuries, etc.\footnote{See Bernt, supra note 129, at 330-35 (discussing the “purposive” approach to labor law); Matthew T. Bodie, Participating as a Theory of Employment, 89 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 661, 722 (2013) (arguing that while some workers may not meet traditional classifications as employees, they should still be included in protections targeted to vulnerable workers); see also S. G. Borello & Sons, Inc. v. Dep’t of Indus. Relations, 769 P.2d 399, 406 (Cal. 1989) (“[D]etermining whether a person rendering service to another is an ‘employee’ or an excluded ‘independent contractor’ must be applied with deference to the purposes of the protective legislation.”).

As noted above, most statutory definitions of employee are essentially meaningless,\footnote{See generally, Bernt, supra note 129, at 335-37 (discussing the purposes underlying labor law); Carlson, supra note 29, at 306 (discussing employee wage protections given the rise of impersonal industrialization).} while misclassification and labor statutes create a rebuttable presumption a worker is an employee if the worker provides services to the employer.\footnote{See supra note 29 and accompanying text.} But the courts continually have to fall back on their multi-factor tests, consistent only in their most
heavily weighted factor—the right to control. But the right to control factor is still problematic, as the cases discussed in this article demonstrate. Fundamentally, we are using a twentieth-century test to classify workers in the twenty-first-century economy. And that test is failing, considering, as illustrated in Part III above, that when faced with almost identical undisputed facts, courts reach inconsistent conclusions or are forced to defer to juries. This inconsistency could also be stifling innovation, as companies become unsure of the liabilities they may face under their sharing economy business models.

Conversely, enterprises such as TaskRabbit, Uber, Lyft, and other similar sharing economy ventures, are wholly dependent upon their workers. Whether the work performed by the classified independent contractor is central to the business of the employer has always been a factor in the traditional agency analysis, the economic reality test, and in misclassification statutes—but always secondary to right to control. Nevada has actually made it one of two primary considerations to determine whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor for workers’ compensation purposes—a person is not an employer if it enters into a contract with


140 Cf. Cotter v. Lyft, Inc., 60 F. Supp. 3d 1067, 1081 (N.D. Cal. 2015) (“The test the California courts have developed over the 20th Century for classifying workers isn’t very helpful in addressing this 21st Century problem.”).

141 See, e.g., Carmel DeAmicis, Homejoy Shuts Down After Battling Worker Classification Lawsuits, RE/CODE (July 17, 2015, 10:17 AM), http://recode.net/2015/07/17/cleaning-services-startup-homejoy-shuts-down-after-battling-worker-classification-lawsuits/ (reporting Homejoy, a startup company providing cleaning services, is shutting down after failing to find sufficient funding, citing as a “deciding factor” four lawsuits that had been filed against it regarding misclassification). But see Farhad Manjoo, When the Best Employees Are Actually on the Payroll, N.Y. TIMES, June 25, 2015, at B1 (reporting on sharing economy startups that are hiring workers as employees rather than independent contractors).


143 See, e.g., S. G. Borello & Sons, Inc. v. Dep’t of Indus. Relations, 769 P.2d 399, 404 (Cal. 1989) (listing one factor as whether or not the work is a part of the regular business of the principal); McCubbin through McCubbin v. Walker, 886 P.2d 790, 794 (Kan. 1994) (noting one factor as whether the work is part of the regular business of the employer); MASS. GEN. LAWS ANN. ch. 149, § 148B(a)(2) (West 2014) (considering whether the service performed by the worker is outside the usual course of the business of the employer); RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF AGENCY § 220(2)(h) (1958) (considering whether or not the work is a part of the regular business of the employer).
an independent enterprise and it is not in the same business as the independent enterprise. Unfortunately, the first half of this test—the worker’s independent enterprise—still incorporates, by implication, the right to control test.

If flexible, short-term-gig workers are to be provided the normative protections afforded employees then the focus of the classification test will have to change with the times. These workers are not necessarily dependent upon their “employers,” but those employers are certainly dependent upon their workers. In exchange for creating the foundation for a thriving enterprise, it could certainly be argued these workers deserve the same protections afforded “typical” employees. This certainly appears to be the approach being taken in California. The California Supreme Court has noted the modern trend to find employment when the work being done is an integral part of the regular business of the employer and the worker does not furnish an independent business or professional service. And on June 3, 2015, the California Labor Commissioner based its finding that an Uber driver was an Uber employee for purposes of California’s Labor Code requiring employers to reimburse employees, in part because the driver was integral to Uber’s business (providing transportation services to passengers).

Carlson argues the best response to the classification difficulties is to rethink the use of employee status for determining statutory coverage. Alternatively, the focus could instead shift to the level of dependence by the enterprise on the services provided by its workforce. If a worker’s services are central to the business of the firm—a package delivery driver for a package delivery firm; a driver for a transportation service firm; a worker performing tasks for a firm that


145 Borello, 769 P.2d at 408-09.


147 Carlson, supra note 29, at 356-57 (suggesting, for example, that payroll and withholding laws should be based on the amount of compensation).
exists to provide Taskers for customers—then that worker should be considered an “employee” for purposes of statutory protections.

V. CONCLUSION

This article has focused on worker classification within a new business model in which internet-based intermediaries match service providers with customers. Reviewing past tests used to classify workers as employees or independent contractors, including the recent FedEx ground package delivery system cases, and particularly more recent cases involving Lyft and Uber drivers, this article has shown these tests are failing to achieve any sort of consistency or guidance.

As discussed in this article, the control factor in the economic reality test currently focuses on the extent to which the worker is dependent upon the employer for the worker’s livelihood, under the argument that the more dependent the worker is the less independent the worker actually is. However, with the rise of the sharing economy, workers are much less dependent on the intermediary employer, yet the employer still exercises a significant (at least according to some courts) degree of control. This article has argued that the nature of work exemplified by the sharing economy requires a classification test that focuses not on the dependence of the workers on the employer, but the dependence of the employer on the workers. If the enterprise arranging all of these individualized tasks and services is dependent on the service providers for its existence, then those service providers should be considered employees of the enterprise.