Foreword

There is no doubt that the future of work is being shaped in dramatic new ways by new technology. A Report of the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) in June 2015, *Australia’s future workforce?*, predicted that computers and the digitalization of the economy will displace up to 40 per cent of jobs within two decades, and substantially change the way work is conducted. We need to be cautious about predictions of widespread displacement of jobs, because they have been made for a number of decades now, with little evidence that this has indeed occurred, or even that new technology has been the driver, rather than just a facilitator, for increasing casualization of labor. However, there can be no doubt that the digital economy is having a major impact on the way we work, and this will continue for the foreseeable future.

Telework is a major contributor to change in the way we work, with great potential to create vast changes in the future. In 2008 according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics almost a quarter of the workforce worked at least some of their time in the job at home. This is likely to have grown since that survey, and to continue growing, especially because of increased female labor force participation, since working from home enables flexibility with child-care. Furthermore, it is now evident that highly specialized occupations, involving accountants, medical professionals, and academics to name some, as well as manual skills, can be facilitated through telework.

However, working from home only encompasses one, albeit important, aspect of teleworking. The 5th European Working Conditions Survey of 2012 found that only 4 per cent of the labor force mainly worked from home, but about 20 per cent mainly worked at premises other than their employer’s. This included working at client’s premises or another outside site.

Teleworking, therefore, can include numerous sites, including not only home, but also client’s premises, cafes, purpose built teleworking hubs, and on transport services. Magazine articles have begun to appear about ‘connected’ professionals teleworking as they continuously travel. Hence ‘anywhere working’ is indeed the appropriate designation for this mode of working.
In historical perspective, anywhere working represents the closing of a long cycle. Location of employees in a central site was only adopted by manufacturers in the second stage of the industrial revolution, from late in the nineteenth century. The advantage for employers was the greater degree of direct supervision that this allowed, as well as continuous use of large-scale capital equipment. However, previously in the first stage of the industrial revolution, it was the norm for workers to work from home in the large textile sector in the UK, and for tradesmen who might also work on clients’ sites. Anywhere working returns to more decentralized modes of work.

There are huge benefits for employers, employees and society with anywhere working. Employers can achieve productivity gains, and save on costs of building infrastructure or rents because they will need to provide less office space, and offer more flexibility in work organization, which can enable labor cost savings and facilitate a wider pool of labor from which to recruit. If they are multisite employers they can save on travel costs for employees between sites, and they can more easily offer services at greater distances from their own location. Employees can enjoy greater flexibility in how they manage their hours, cut down on commuting time, and potentially work far away from their employers’ physical location. Society generally, can benefit from substantially reduced costs of providing expanded transport infrastructure for in-out city commuter patterns, reduced costs and expanded capacity for high level service delivery in areas such as health. Medical specialists, for example, can more easily provide consultation and diagnostic services to rural and remote areas, and professionals can increasingly participate in virtual conferences instead of travelling globally. Change of this kind will ultimately benefit the globe by reducing carbon emissions.

However, there are also potential downsides to anywhere working. Employers will need to adjust to less direct supervision of employees, and manage effective work health and safety. Employees can suffer from isolation from fellow workers, bearing some of the costs of necessary hardware and software, and need to manage their time effectively to avoid observed tendencies for work intensification through expectations of 24/7 availability. The frequently observed mutual benefits to employers and employees of positive work cultures may be hard to replicate with anywhere working. Unions may also find it difficult to offer effective employee voice because of difficulties in reaching employees for recruitment and organization. Adequate infrastructure provision through the internet capacity is a pre-requisite, but not always a reality, particularly in remote areas.

None of the potential downsides sketched here necessarily preclude the great potential benefits for all parties of anywhere working. But they will require mutual dialogue to ensure realization of the potential, and leadership by government. This book is extremely timely, because we are at a significant turning point for the reorganization of work in our society. Most of the issues raised here, and more besides,
are analyzed in specific contexts of organization and industry sectors in a number of countries in this pioneering book. It is a very useful starting point indeed for informed discussion of the issues, and the contributors are to be congratulated.

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