Chapter 2
The Social Relations of Anywhere Working: Major Themes and Meanings

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ABSTRACT

The idea of anywhere working provides opportunities to utilize non-traditional work spaces and new employment relationships. However, the new employment relationships ensuing from the work practice have implications for both employees and employers. While thinking about the nature of anywhere working tends to focus on macro-level issues and micro-level practices, the social relations of anywhere working is a peripheral concern. This chapter reviews some of the images and meanings attached to work through the ages. Subsequently, the dominant ideas in the anywhere working literature emerge as employee centric, employer centric and technology centric themes. The notion of a sociological paradigm frames the discussion and analysis of anywhere working in its broadest context. Given its rapid spread, anywhere working may be represented as a watershed in employment relations and work practices. In this light, new ways of thinking about the social relations and the nature of work itself are required.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates the idea of anywhere working as a discrete work practice with distinguishing characteristics from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The first part discusses the main images and meanings attached to work through the ages. The notion of a sociological paradigm introduces a broad framework for the identification and analysis of the salient features of anywhere working.

The second part discusses the practical implications of anywhere working in a broad context, pinpointing areas that require significant new understandings about the work practice and its ensuing social relations from the perspectives of employees, employers, and the wider society. Discussion in the final part assumes that anywhere working may reach a tipping point in the next decade to emerge as the preeminent work practice in a new era. If this point eventuates, anywhere working will have momentous implications for a range of stakeholders and their understandings about the nature of work. While anywhere workers can be either employees or contractors, for the purposes of discussion, this chapter focuses on workers with a direct employment relationship with a home organization.

BACKGROUND

The idea of anywhere working provides opportunities to utilize non-traditional workspaces and new employment relationships in a variety of industry sectors and organizational types in both for-profit and not-for-profit settings. The idea of anywhere working is extremely complex, and while the practice seems ubiquitous, a review of the foundational and contemporary literature reveals subtle points of differentiation (cf. Nilles, 1976; Hislop et al. 2015). The work practices associated with telework, virtual work and anywhere work tracked the rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICT), although, over time, these terms tended to conflate. Garrett and Danziger (2007) disentangle this amalgamation, suggesting that interpretations of anywhere working should tacitly recognize the legitimacy of traditional understandings of work, workplaces and organizations as a point of comparison.

To this end, the four pillars of anywhere working posit that the practice:

1. Occurs in places external to an organization’s designated workplace(s)
2. Depends on increasingly sophisticated ICT to facilitate the work practice
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