

Chapter 16

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.

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 momen-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1918-8.ch016

tous 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
3. Reduces the time a person devotes to traditional work within the organization's workplace(s)
4. Creates numerous types of employment relationships with a range of employment options available to employers and employees

In this context, virtual workers within an organization who interact with their counterparts in international teams, remain within the jurisdiction of an organization. As such, they are not necessarily engaging in working anywhere in its purest interpretation. Granted, they may be working in non-traditional ways, but their work remains under the auspices of the organization's physical footprint. Management protocols, systems and structures, policies, process, legal edicts, ethical obligations and similar constraints bind these workers. These functional elements of traditional work settings are topics covered in most textbooks on management and organizations (Samson & Daft, 2015) or human resource management (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2008). However, many of these elements emerge as problematic gray areas in considering anywhere working, throwing up thorny questions about the social relations of this work practice.

Anywhere working is a logical outcome of the ubiquitous nature of digital infrastructure and the rapid advances in ICT (Lin, 2012). The increasing inclination for managers to establish 'bring your own device' [BYOD] working environments also increases the potential for workers to undertake anywhere working. Today's digital age assists people and organizations to engage in new and agile working arrangements not previously available. Working in the home office, work hubs and hot desk environments remote from the home organization's physical location are commonplace today.

Data from the United States [US] suggest this current trend for anywhere working will continue. Among the non-self-employed population in the US, working from home has grown by 103% since 2005 and by 6.5% in 2014 alone. As the negative effects of the 2007 Global Financial Crisis on economies worldwide continue to diminish and businesses steadily recover, the number of people engaged in any-

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