

## Chapter 43

# Working Anywhere Management Opportunities and Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the literature relating to information and communications technology (ICT) and opportunities and barriers relating to anywhere working. The workforce is becoming more global, and workers can work from anywhere and still be connected with colleagues and collaborators. Although ICT is an enabler of anywhere working, sustainable anywhere working requires specific management skills and capabilities. Globalization of work requires organizations to manage workers ranging from full-time employees through to freelancers working in different locations including a central office, co-working center, from home, and other flexible options. The chapter concludes by proposing a research agenda and conceptual framework to identify the management skills and capabilities required to successfully manage anywhere working (other terms include telework and telecommuting). The proposed conceptual framework will inform researchers and managers on best practice for adopting sustainable anywhere working to achieve strategic business objectives.*

### INTRODUCTION

Anywhere working (telework, telecommuting, flexible work, remote work, smart work, distributed work, work shifting) refers to employees who work at a location other than a central office location. Nilles (1975) is credited with coining the terms telework and telecommuting, and since the 1970s, technology has advanced to the point where many work tasks can be completed anywhere at any time. On the one hand, technology can provide the connectivity and tools to work anywhere and on the other hand may lead to workers to feeling socially and professionally isolated and unable to separate work and personal life (Freeland 2019, Taplett, Krentz et al. 2019).

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## ***Working Anywhere Management Opportunities and Challenges***

Demographic and socio-economic drivers are changing how and where work is done. A significant driver is the changing work environment and flexible working arrangements (World Economic Forum, 2016). At the same time, workers in emerging economies have similar skills to those residing in developed countries; women are more highly educated, and older workers are staying in work longer (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015). As the physical location for many jobs becomes less important, organizations can locate talent anywhere in the world by focusing on the work, not the location. Information and communications technology (ICT) underpin digital businesses and can be used for communication such as discussions, monitoring of employees and information sharing (Beauregard, Basile et al. 2019).

Unexpected issues can arise, including extreme weather events, such as the Australian bush fires in 2019/2020, snowstorms, cyclones and floods that can impact a business's ability to provide services to customers. The novel coronavirus in early 2020 forced the quarantine of thousands of people globally who are either in isolation, unable to travel or in hospital. At the time of writing the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared the coronavirus a global pandemic. Some businesses, particularly in China, had closed for some time, others have asked their workers to telework. Japan was also under considerable pressure to provide support for workers to work at home due to the potential impacts of the virus, mainly as Japan is the 2020 host of the Olympic Games (Uhereczky 2020).

As a response to these trends, organizations are likely to employ a small number of core full-time employees supplemented by colleagues contracting or consulting (freelancing) for specific projects wherever they may reside around the globe (World Economic Forum, 2016). The flexibility of using remote and temporary workers introduces management complexity in two ways. The first is how knowledge can be transferred from temporary workers to the organization. The second is how to develop a corporate culture that keeps workers engaged and productive (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015). The management challenge is to be able to exploit cultural differences to gain a competitive advantage while managing conflicts and problems (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014). An unresolved problem concerns the skills required for managing workers who work from a location other than a central office. Managers need a clear communication plan when dealing with teams that work from diverse locations as well as an understanding of each team member's motivations and expectations (Blount, 2015).

The objectives of this chapter are twofold. The first objective is to examine the literature on the implications of information and communications technology (ICT) for anywhere working relating to management skills and capabilities. The second objective is to propose a conceptual framework derived from the literature to guide practitioners and researchers on balancing ICT disruption and human resource management practices.

## **BACKGROUND**

The academic and practitioner literature has been examining anywhere working (other terms include telework, telecommuting, remote working) since the 1970s (Nilles, 1975, Hunton, 2010, Blount, 2015). The earlier literature in the 1970s and 1980s also used terms such as working from home, homework, the electronic cottage, Telecottage and telecenter (Nilles, 1975, Bibby, 1995, Toffler, 1980). More recent literature used terms such as virtual worker, virtual teams (Westfall, 2004), home-anchored worker (Wilks and Billsberry, 2007) and flexible work (Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997).

The many terms used in the literature signal the difficulty of defining anywhere working. One criticism is that definitions are too broad (Huws, 1991). In Nilles's early work, telecommuting was defined as local

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