



Phase 1: Review of the literature

THEME 7: Inspiring Future Workplaces



Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry

Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia

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SEAANZ Research Report

ISSN

Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia

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Attribution for this paper should be:

McKeown, T., Mazzarol, T., Lazaris, and Gilles, G. (2016) *Theme 7: Inspiring Future Workplaces: Phase 1 Report – Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia*, Small Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand (SEAANZ), for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and Department of Employment, www.seanz.org

Note:

This report has been prepared by SEAANZ for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Department of Employment. The report presents a review of the literature and is not a policy document. It presents a broad analysis of the specific research questions addressed by this study.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the first of a multi-stage project commissioned by the Australian Chamber titled '*Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia*' with funding from the federal Department of Employment. This first stage provides a review of the literature relating to five specific themes and the research questions associated with them that were identified by the Australian Chamber as vital to a vibrant and inclusive workplace relations system in Australia. The current report addresses *Theme 7: Inspiring Future Workplaces* and draws on more than 137 sources including academic research papers and selected "grey" literature from government and industry over the time period 1984 to 2016.

Key findings

Among the key factors shaping the future of the Australian workplace are: globalisation; technology; demographic change of the workforce; societal attitudes; environmental issues; and government policy. Australia's economy is open to global competition and businesses will need to adjust to this in order to survive. Technology will be both a creator of new work opportunities and enhancer of worker productivity. However, it will also disrupt many existing industries, replace a high proportion of current jobs, and change the nature of the workplace in relation to time and place. Future employment will most likely depend on workers being well-educated, skilled, globally oriented, good at problem solving, applying creativity and innovation, as well as confident in their use of technology.

Government policy and regulation will need to adapt to these forces and assist organisations and their employees to adjust to change. Regulations will need to be more carefully targeted towards a workplace that will require higher levels of flexibility and mobility of the workforce. The small business sector is likely to have an increasing proportion of "nano" enterprises comprised of individual self-employed workers, plus small micro-businesses. These firms will not be best served by an industrial relations system designed to address an adversarial model of bosses and workers. Government policy and regulation will need to become a facilitator working with employers and employees to shape a highly productive and globally competitive workplace.

Future workplace scenarios identified in the literature include the dominance of a few large global corporations in which employees have high pay and better conditions, but at the expense of their work-life balance and even privacy. Alternatively, there might be socially and environmentally friendly enterprises that take their corporate social responsibility seriously, as well as a large number of "nano", micro and small enterprises filling niches. Such firms will be characterised by more informal, flexible and highly mobile workforce structures in that are not bounded by time or place.

INTRODUCTION

This report, is one of a series produced by the Small Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand Ltd (SEAANZ) for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Australian Chamber) and the Australian Department of Employment as part of a larger study "*Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia Study*".

SEAANZ is examining five out of a total of seven themes within the larger study and this report examines the background literature relating to Theme 7 'Inspiring Future Workplaces'. It has examined the literature relating to the future structure and environment of the Australian workplace and the nature of work taking place within it. It has also explored the factors likely to shape this future.

The methodology followed

The review of the literature presented here drew on over 137 sources. The initial selection of papers for review were guided by a set of research questions provided by the Australian Chamber, derived from preliminary research undertaken by the University of Queensland (Gollan & Steele, 2015).

The approach taken to this literature review drew on a systematic approach recommended by academic sources (e.g. Webster & Watson, 2002; Ridley, 2008; Fink, 2010; Denney & Tewksbury, 2013). It commenced with a definition of key terms, in particular the classification of SMEs, which is a major area of focus for the study. An examination of online bibliographic databases was then undertaken with search parameters guided by the key words. The Endnote bibliographic database was used to store these documents which included both peer reviewed academic research papers and quality “grey” literature from mostly government and industry sources.

These sources were then examined using Leximancer text analytic software that uses algorithms to identify word frequency and co-occurrence counts to group words into concepts (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). These concepts are then graphically mapped to show their concentration and interrelationships within the wide corpus of text contained within the source documents. These are also grouped into themes to show the overall structure of the literature. This provided an initial foundation for the examination of the literature sources and assisted in helping to revise the initial research questions. The data used in the analysis included details of the author, title, abstract, journal of the material manually reviewed.

In addition to the Leximancer analysis NVivo a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software that enables the management and analysis of large quantities of rich text-based and/or multimedia information, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required (QSR, 2016). This analysis followed the process recommended by di Gregorio (2000). As a more manual analysis tool than Leximancer, NVivo offered a means of independently examining and coding the source data.

Finally, the literature was examined using a manual thematic analysis involving a review of each document. This was subsequently incorporated into the final report. Using both computer-aided and then manual analysis means enabled the confirmation of patterns identified in one method with those found in the other two and minimised the potential for researcher bias. The multiple perspectives provided from these three methods of manual and computer aided analysis provide a robust basis for further refinement of the research questions which were then used to guide the overall study. Further details on the methodology can be found in McKeown *et al.* (2016).

The structure of the report

The first section presents an overview of literature that is relevant to the research questions. It summarises the key findings from the Leximancer and NVivo analysis that was used to get an understanding of the overall shape and structure of the literature. The next section examines the body of literature that seeks to forecast what the future of work and the workplace will look like. In doing so it examines some future scenarios proposed by different organisations.

Also, examined in the report is the role that government is likely to play in future workplaces. This draws in the issue of workplace regulation and how this might serve to enhance or hinder future workplace design. The role of SMEs within the future workplace is also examined and how future workplaces might be able to avoid some of the historical adversarial conditions that have been a feature of Australian workplace relations in the past.

Finally, the report discusses the future of the Australian workplace as described within the literature. While it is not possible to predict the future, our review of the literature has sought to draw together the body of work that has discussed this outcome and described potential trends and forces likely to influence how future workplaces might look.

Limitations

In approaching the methodology, we have been guided by best practice principles using software analysis tools (e.g. Leximancer, NVivo), and distributing the coding and analysis findings across several chief investigators who have independently assessed the results. Discussions in relation to the refining of the initial research questions were also held with our industry partner ACCI and other senior academics within the SEANZ community to review the work in progress before the finalisation of this document.

However, it should be noted that while more than 137 sources were examined for this literature review we do not claim this to be a full review of all available literature. Given the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the study it was not possible, for reasons of time, to examine every source that may be relevant to this theme. In selecting documents, we have deliberately focused on publications generated within the past decades and given priority to more recently published works. Some readers may identify missing sources or disagree with our conclusions. We welcome any feedback in this regard as part of the process of developing this study.

EXAMINING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section examines the research questions specific to this theme and provides a summary of the initial findings from the Leximancer and NVivo analysis. The specific research questions guiding this literature review were:

Research Question 1: *What will the Australian workplace of the future look like?*

Research Question 2: *What factors may play a role in shaping this future?*

Summary of Leximancer and NVivo results

The use of both Leximancer and NVivo analysis to undertake an initial review of the literature provided a more robust overview of the sources and how they mapped into themes associated with the research questions. This combination of visual and textual interpretation allowed concepts to be viewed in different ways, thereby improving the reader's interpretation. Comparing the results from the two separate analyses enabled a review to confirm findings, or raise new issues that were not apparent from a single form of analysis. The results suggested a need to revise the initial research questions supplied by Gollan and Steele (2015).

The Leximancer analysis identified two major "clusters" around which the literature was grouped. The first cluster focused on the future of businesses and the role of SMEs and innovation in the future of the workplace. Within this cluster were concepts associated with the emergence of entrepreneurship as a major driving force for innovation within the economy, plus the rise of the self-employed "nano" or micro-enterprise. The second cluster focused on the future of the labour market, in particular what the nature of work and employment might mean in the future. The conditions under which people work and the nature of their employment relationships with employers were also encompassed in this cluster.

The analysis suggested that attention should be given to the labour market and the dynamics taking place there that are likely to impact on the future of the workplace and the nature of work and employment. This will impact on the government's approach to workplace relations policy and the impact that such policies have on people. For example, the role of entrepreneurship as a focus for future work and workplace activity was highlighted in the literature. This included both start-up, SME and growth oriented firms.

Other issues that have been given attention in the literature in some detail are the way in which the workplace relations system drives conflict and impedes cooperative and productive workplace environments. Also, how work systems design can facilitate working together for mutual benefit, the impact of technology, trends in the nature of work, and factors that create high performance workplaces.

There are also indications from the literature of the need to examine the role of the SME sector; associated with this are notions such as the application of entrepreneurship and innovation in addressing not only employment growth, but also new approaches to the labour market. These findings provided the foundation for refined set of questions that were used to guide the rest of this study.

Take away: The future workplace will be more dynamic and comprised of a variety of different models of what "work" is. Independent contractors and "nano" or micro-enterprises may be found working in roles traditionally performed by employed labour. Technology will also change the notion of the workplace, which will no longer be bound by place and time.

FORECASTING THE FUTURE OF WORK

Any attempt to reliably predict the future is fraught with risk. Our review of the literature suggests that the existing forces shaping the Australian workplace are likely to continue for the foreseeable future although their exact impact and the outcomes they produce are difficult to forecast. Ware and Grantham (2003) conducted a year-long study of major organisations to examine the future of work and the workplace. They found that the primary source of competitive advantage within companies was human knowledge, but that most organisations were not effectively managing their human capital with inadequate workplaces, conditions and use of enabling technologies. According to the authors:

"To be even more blunt, the authors believe that the creative, integrated management of knowledge workers, the places where they work, and the technology tools and infrastructures they rely on can reduce workforce support costs by as much as 30 per cent while substantially improving worker productivity, effectiveness and satisfaction. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that creative redesign of workplace and workforce strategies can also give organisations much more agility – the flexibility to expand and contract the workforce and all its support costs to meet dynamically changing needs in an increasingly volatile business environment." (Ware & Grantham, 2003 p. 143)

They identified six main drivers of change: i) the changing nature of work itself; ii) the changing workplace demographics in an increasingly diverse community; iii) broad but fundamental changes in society; iv) technology; v) environmental issues; and vi) government policy (Ware & Grantham, 2003). Each of these six factors is identified within the literature by other authors as the major forces shaping the future of work and the workplace. Some of these visions are positive, some negative and others mixed.

Among the positive visionaries is Hannon (2011) who refers to the emergence of a young generation of “enthusiastic idealists” who are open to workplace change and flexibility as well as the use of technology to “...teach business leaders how to embrace the power of informal social networks online for problem solving and decision-making” (p. 57). Less enthusiastic about the future workplace is Humphry (2014) who observes the influence of the forces mentioned above, in particular technology and its impact on the flexibility and transience of employees. She observes that “workplace” will cease to be a location fixed in a specific place and time. In the future, it will be placed into the hands of the individual employee who will be left to “...set it up, keep it going and fulfil its many promises” (p. 363).

A pessimistic view is that expressed by Watson *et al.* (2003) in a report prepared for the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). This points to a range of trends taking place in the Australian workplace during the past two decades that have seen a decrease in full-time employment and a rise of casual and non-standard employment. Other concerns raised in the paper are the increased workloads and work intensification taking place within many industries and the pressures that this places on families and work-life balance. The casualization of employment has, according to the report, led to a rise in the proportion of “working poor” within Australia. Industry restructuring is partly to blame and many middle-aged male workers have become the most vulnerable. Further, there has been a decline or stagnation in the level of investment in employee skills training and development.

Gratton (2010) provides a more balanced perspective, identifying the global forces driving workplace change and the challenges and opportunities that they will generate. She identifies five major forces influencing the future of the workplace: i) technology; ii) globalisation; iii) demographic change; iv) societal trends; and v) environmental issues associated with climate change. For organisations and their managers seeking to navigate this future workplace she suggests attention must be given to at least five things. First, organisational managers should offer transparent and authentic leadership, engaging with the workforce in an honest and open manner and leading by example. Second, there needs to be an investment in the creation of high-performing virtual teams, enabled by technologies and the necessary training. Third, organisations need to foster the development of strong social capital facilitated by inter-organisational networks and relationships. Fourth, these networks should be not just focused on traditional supply chain or production issues, but entrepreneurial engagements with customers and other businesses in order to co-create opportunities. Finally, there needs to be a capacity for flexible working arrangements (FWA).

According to Moore (2016) the future of work will be shaped around a set of skills that employees will need to possess or develop. These include the ability to collaborate, use technology, communicate effectively, acquire and apply knowledge, be self-regulating, globally aware, and capable of real-world problem solving. For younger, university educated employees these attributes are relatively easily acquired. However, the Australian workforce is comprised of a highly diverse population and includes many older workers, migrants, and people with disabilities, cultural and ethnic background, family commitments and sexual orientations (AHRC, 2014). The workforce is likely to see greater older age group participation in the future (Phillipson, 2013). Yet for many older workers, and those with disabilities, the Australian workplace remains difficult to enter and navigate through (AHRC, 2016).

A future of competing worlds

In a report “*The future of work: A journey to 2022*” PwC (2014) prophesies a future in which the workplace will be one of three potentially competing paradigms.

The first paradigm is described as “*The Orange World*”, characterised as a fragmentation of the organisation into a large number of SMEs competing and collaborating within specialist niches. Success in this world will require high degrees of flexibility for both the employer and the employee. It will see

the rise of the “portfolio career” and the use of part-time, casual and mostly self-employed independent contractors or freelancers employed on a short-term contractual basis. This is a vision consistent with the predictions of others who view the future as being dominated by the self-employed “nano” entrepreneurs or independent professionals (IPros) (Popma, 2013; Leighton & Brown, 2013). As described in the report:

“Big business will be outflanked by a vibrant, innovative and entrepreneurial middle market. A core team embodies the philosophy and values of the company. The rest come in and out on a project-by-project basis. Some firms compete on quality and specialisation, while others offer commoditised price-dependent support. Telepresence and virtual solutions allow for greater remote working and extended global networks.” (PwC, 2014 p. 20)

For employees to be successful in *The Orange World* they will need to have valuable skills and expertise. Their loyalty to any particular organisation may be limited and transient, and they are more likely to have loyalty to professional associations and guilds, trade bodies or similar communities that offer them certification and recognition of their skills and qualifications, as well as training and development.

The second paradigm is that of *The Blue World*, characterised by a global market place dominated by a few large corporations focused on profit, growth and market leadership. To succeed in this world organisations will need to be very large and global, with sufficient economies of scale and scope to attract the best human capital from around the world. Employees working within this environment will enjoy job security, high financial reward, pensions, health care and long-term employment, but at the cost of flexibility, personal freedom and the pressure to perform. According to the report:

“In the Blue World, big company capitalism reigns supreme. Consumer preferences and profit margins dominate in a model built around flexibility, efficiency and speed to market. The relentless pressure on performance isn’t just driven by competition from peers, but also aggressive new entrants looking to lead innovation and undercut existing players. Blue firms follow the money and go wherever the opportunity is – their operating model enables them to survive and thrive in both stable and volatile economic conditions alike.” (PwC, 2014 p. 12)

In *the Blue World* employees working within large corporations will be required to surrender individual freedom to the employer who is likely to ask for personal data on their health, performance and even private life in return for job security. Such monitoring is, according to PwC (2014) likely to become more common in the future. Yet over 30 percent of people surveyed globally for the research indicated that they would be happy to surrender this information with younger age groups more willing than their older counterparts.

The third paradigm is that of *The Green World*, which is characterised by companies that possess a strong corporate social responsibility to deliver to customers, employees and other stakeholder’s outcomes that are social and environmentally beneficial. Motivating this behaviour will be demands from shareholders, consumers and employees to have businesses establish and move towards goals that offer social, ethical and environmental benefits. According to this world view:

“In the Green World, companies take the lead in developing a strong social conscience and sense of environmental responsibility. They are open, trusting, collaborative learning organisations and see themselves playing an important role in supporting and developing their employees and local communities. Companies have strong control over their supplier networks to ensure that corporate ethical values are upheld across the supply chain, and are able to troubleshoot when things go wrong. In turn, the combination of ethical values, support for the real economy and family friendly hours is an opportunity to create a new employee value proposition that isn’t solely reliant on pay.” (PwC, 2014 p. 15)

PwC (2014) do not predict which of these three “worlds” is likely to dominate in the future, although they indicate that these are more likely to be competing options for where the future workplace might head. Their vision is echoed in a major report issued by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia

(CEDA, 2015), which examined global trends, their impact on the Australian workplace and worker, and the likely policy responses from government.

The CEDA (2015) report acknowledges forces likely to shape future Australian workplaces that accord with those discussed above. In particular, the role of technology to either substitute for existing labour (i.e. estimates of up to 40% of current jobs being replaced by machines), or disrupt the way work is conducted with the effect of lowering wages. According to CEDA (2015) what is needed is a “new social contract” that recognises the role of government as a key facilitator of the nation’s human capital, innovation and economic growth. It argues for investment in “growth centres” to help drive global best practice and help transition the economy away from its current over reliance on the mining and resources sector. The coordination of state and federal government activities and a “comprehensive review of regulation, pricing and licensing arrangements” and the phasing out of industry subsidies are recommended. CEDA (2015) also calls for a much greater investment in education and training, particularly in the use of information and communications technologies (ICT). In addition, it recommends assisting workers from declining industries to redeploy through “a concerted effort to reskill workers prior to retrenchment” (p. 15).

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN FUTURE WORKPLACES

Despite calls for government to take a “hands off” approach within the workplace, there continues to be support for an ongoing role by government (Foreman-Peck, 2013; Deloitte, 2015; Greber, 2016). However, in many of these arguments government is viewed as an enabler rather than a provider of solutions, a partner and facilitator not a leader or authority figure (see: Bajorek, *et al.*, 2014; Blackburn & Schaper, 2012; Bray, Budd & Macneil, 2015; Bridge, 2010; ILO, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2014; 2016). The challenge for government policy makers and regulators is how to manage this process:

“Governments are faced with a balancing act...potential innovations that enhance cognitive capacity also pose new regulatory and ethical challenges for business, government, social institutions and international organizations.” (Deloitte, 2015 p.3)

Ideally the future workplace will be one in which conflict between employers and employees either is absent or significantly diminished. In place of adversarial and legalistic regulatory regimes would be a harmonious culture marked by employees and businesses working together constructively and negotiating arrangements of mutual benefit. This is the idealised goal of strategic HRM policies and practice (Bague, 2015).

However, it remains a major challenge for those seeking to achieve it even though there are examples of firms that have managed to overcome the obstacles (KPMG, 2016). The unique requirements of SMEs have also been recognised by state and federal governments leading to the establishment of special provisions within the IR legislation, plus the formation of dedicated points of contact and support such as the Small Business Commissioners and the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (ASBFEO) roles, as noted by Schaper (2014):

“Australia has also been capable of initiating its own unique public policy tools. For example, the creation of Small Business Commissioners in the last ten years has been a distinctively different initiative, developing independent statutory officers with a responsibility to speak out to government on behalf of the sector whilst also providing business people with information, advice and mediation.” (Schaper, 2014 p.232)

Nevertheless, the underlying structure of the Australian industrial relations system is based on an adversarial and legalistic model rather than a cooperative and mutually negotiated collaborative one (Stewart *et al.*, 2014).

Workplace regulation versus facilitation

The big picture scenarios outlined above provide a background to our review of the literature relating to the future of the Australian workplace. While globalisation, technology, social and demographic change and the environment all play significant roles, government policy remains a key factor. This is particularly the case for Australia, which has a long history of government regulation of workplace relations (Lambropoulous, 2013). Any consideration of the future of the Australian workplace must first address the nature of workplace regulation. One definition as to what regulations are suggests they either prescribe or prohibit certain individual and organisational activities with infringements resulting in criminal, civil or administrative penalties (Jacquemin & Janssen, 2012; Kitching *et al.*, 2015 p. 135; Nyström, 2014).

Regulations are most often seen as externally imposed by government across all levels. As reflected in the following comment from one source:

"...dealing with local government was 'quite good' [but] State government was the 'biggest hurdle' and criticism focused on State government processes...often in a state of change, too slow and staff not understanding or flexible in their approach". (Sawyer, Evans & Bisua, 2014 p.10)

The lack of definition as to what is meant by workplace relations adds complexity to any investigation of the future of the workplace. However, a working definition might be that offered by Stewart *et al.* (2014) who suggest that:

*"...in the absence of any guidance from the legislation itself, we assume that 'workplace relations' means relations (whether collective or individual) between employers and their employees, and their representatives (if any)." (Stewart *et al.*, 2014 p. 259)*

The workplace, and the relations that take place therein involve the three key players of management representing the employer, trade unions representing employees and the government with the role of overseeing and adjusting these relationships through regulation (for more detail see: Bray *et al.*, 2015; Dastmalchian *et al.*, 2014; Phillips, 2016; Teicher *et al.*, 2013). An example of the impact of the legal and adversarial approach to workplace relations found in Australia is illustrated by the work of Freyens and Gong (2015). A meta analyses of court decisions lodged under the *Workplace Relations Amendment Act 2005* found:

"...that in ideologically charged regulatory contexts such as statutory dismissal law where judges interpret rather than make the law and where legal standards are relatively weak, judicial processes are very unlikely to be free of social values and judicial decisions will regularly rest on the ideological stance of the judge." (Freyens & Gong, 2015 p.18)

It is not just the current major actors in the system of workplace relations who shape it. There are some unique features of the Australian workplace relations system which have shaped it and continue to impact on the way we think about work. As one author explains:

"Since Federation, Australia's industrial relations system has gravitated towards a system that has aimed to afford workers a sense of dignity combined with some sense of power that can counter the employers' power." (Southey, 2015 p. 149)

It is an insight that is helpful in understanding the nature of Australian workplace relations as a blend of employer and worker obligations and entitlements. What is important for the small business sector is that it is often also a system, which may be largely unhelpful or even irrelevant to the majority of SMEs that either don't have employees or who employ few people. In such firms, there is often no distinction between managers and workers.

WORKPLACE REGULATION AND THE SME

As Welsh and White (1981) declared in their classic *Harvard Business Review* paper on the financial management of small firms:

“A traditional assumption among managers has been that small businesses should use essentially the same management principles as big businesses, only on a smaller scale. Underlying that assumption has been the notion that small companies are much like big companies, except that small businesses have lower sales, smaller assets, and fewer employees. We would argue, though, that the very size of small businesses creates a special condition – which can be referred to as ‘resource poverty’ – that distinguishes them from their larger counterparts and requires some very different management approaches.” (Welsh & White, 1981 p. 18)

This “resource-based view” of the firm has now emerged as a major focus for understanding the nature of SMEs and the process of entrepreneurship (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001; Alvarez & Barney, 2004; 2005; Alvarez, 2007). Workplace relations in the small firm are therefore unlike those that occur within large organisations due to the lack of human resources.

To put this into perspective Australia has approximately 2 million businesses operating within the economy. Of these 95.6 percent employ fewer than 20 people and 84.2 percent employ less than 5 people. Furthermore, 60 percent or approximately 1.23 million businesses have no employees other than their owner-manager (DIISR, 2011). What this means is that the workplaces of the majority of Australian firms are characterised not by a formal organisational structure with managers and staff, but a more informal environment (Gunnigle & Brady, 1984; Matlay, 1999; Savery & Mazzarol, 2001; Kotey & Sheridan, 2004). Formal HRM processes and practices will emerge within SMEs as they grow in size and complexity, but they are adopted in response to the need to manage an expanding workforce, and may slow down as the firm reaches a given size (Kotey & Slade, 2005). The adoption of formal systems is driven out of necessity or under pressure from external regulation as in the case of occupational health and safety (OH&S) (Bahn *et al.*, 2013).

Workplace management systems built on an industrial relations (IR) model, designed for managers versus workers, are less appropriate for SMEs than they are for larger organisations (Wooden, 2005; Dunphy & Rozenbergs, 2008). There is also evidence suggesting that regulations may not in fact have the impact on workplace relations within SMEs as they were intended to (Rahim & Brady, 2015). The overall view emerging from the literature on workplace relations and SMEs is that it is not so easy to see or even understand how the SME sector fits in to the system.

In a report on workplace relations in Australia the Productivity Commission (2015a/b) made a number of recommendations of relevance to SMEs. The report includes several moderate and incremental reforms to the current operation of unfair dismissal laws, which would leave most of the existing legislation and its protections intact (Productivity Commission, 2015). Although other research suggests that very few SMEs have been adversely affected by these laws (see: Harding, 2002; Robbin & Voll, 2005), the issue has captured a good deal of attention in the public and political domain (Bryson & Howard, 2008). According to the Productivity Commission:

“...the basic premise of assisting small business to navigate the complexities of unfair dismissal legislation is reasonable but the Code does not achieve that outcome and provides a false sense of security.” (PC, 2015 p.31)

The recent proposal to introduce a new type of workplace agreement for SMEs, called the “Enterprise Contract”, would see employers vary industrial awards for classes of employees (for example, casual employees or weekend employees), and this would allow employers to innovate at the firm-level in a way not otherwise available under awards (Productivity Commission, 2015). An Enterprise Contract lies

somewhere between an individual and a collective agreement and is one the Productivity Commission suggests would involve less complexity and be particularly appealing to small businesses. However, it is not without controversy and has been likened to a return to the *WorkChoices* IR legislation that was so contentious an issue from 2005 to 2009 (Buchanan, 2015).

Our review of the literature highlights the need for more flexibility within the existing IR legislation, particularly in relation to its effects on SMEs (see: Barry, 2016; Carmody, 2016; Forsyth, 2016; KPMG, 2016). In summary, what emerges from our review of this literature is the existence of a range of recent research reports addressing the nexus between IR legislation, workplace regulation and their impact on the management of the workplace within SMEs (see: Barry, 2015; Thornwaite & Sheldon, 2014).

Overcoming conflict within the workplace relations system

Despite the adversarial nature of the Australian IR system our literature review did not find many studies that had specifically explored the notion of conflict as a major driving force for workplace change. One exception was a study by Freyens and Gong (2015) who conducted a meta-analysis of the IR court decisions lodged under the *WorkChoices* legislation (2005-2009). They found that only 8 per cent of cases were lodged on grounds of procedural unfairness, which compared with 20 per cent under other IR legislative regimes. Of particular relevance to SMEs is their suggestion that this was most likely due to:

“Work Choices exempting small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) from unfair-dismissal regulation and those SMEs were more often sued by employees on grounds of procedural unfairness than larger firms.” (Freyens & Gong, 2015 p. 12)

Where “conflict” did potentially emerge within the literature is in relation to SME owner-managers’ frustrations with the compliance costs or “red tape” associated with the management of workplace regulations. This is highlighted in areas such as OH&S where there is a strong regulatory regime imposed on workplaces. In an echo of the earlier work of Welsh and White (1981), Kvorninga, Hasleb and Christensen (2015) observe that:

“...small enterprises have limited resources” and “that contextual factors can limit the efficacy of programme mechanisms and should be taken into account when designing programmes.” (Kvorninga et al., 2015 p.253)

Table 6 lists a range of sources that illustrate the range of issues and perspectives associated with workplace relations issues and regulation in Australian SMEs. An example is Southey (2015) who identifies the unique approach to the notion of unfair dismissal where:

“Australia’s ideological desire for a ‘fair go’ cannot be neatly packaged under a single political philosophy.” (Southey, 2015 p.150)

The need to avoid a homogenising approach to SMEs is also echoed by Healy *et al.* (2015) who investigated the cause of skill shortages in Australian small firms. Their findings resulted in a caution that employer involvement is essential in dealing with the problem. This highlights the key role played in the small firm of the owner-manager as the central figure in decision making and resource allocation. Unlike the large business, SMEs are typically operated by one or two owner-managers – often as a family owned enterprise – where all the “management” responsibilities and directors’ liabilities fall on the heads of these individuals (Banham & He, 2010; Clarke & Klettner, 2010; Prestney, 2008).

Table 6 lists a range of sources that illustrate the range of issues and perspectives associated with workplace relations issues and regulation in Australian SMEs. These have been categorised into concerns with red tape (a topic which has been discussed also in Theme Report 1: Spotlighting Workplace Regulation and Theme Report 3: Enabling Healthy & Safe Workplaces); human resource

management (which has been a recurring issue in all of the Theme Reports) and the capacity and capability issues which were particular concerns also noted in all of the Theme Reports).

Table 6: Illustrative examples of Australian Workplace Relations Issues in SMEs

Source	Red Tape	HRM	Capacity/Capability
ACCI, 2015	Over 1/5 respondents spend 6-10 hours per week on Compliance 73 % thought the burden of regulation increased over the past 12 months.	Workplace Health and Safety and Workers Compensation most complex areas	
Ai Group, 2015	Awards are still far too complicated 8% of CEOs listed regulatory compliance as the number one factor causing lower labour productivity in 2014	Too difficult and costly to terminate poor performing employees	Lack of skilled workers
Healey et al, 2015			Main cause of skill shortages is a requirement for specialized knowledge.
OECD, 2014 Overview of Australia	Australia ranks 11th out of nearly 190 countries on World Bank's Ease of Doing Business		Support programs that address shortfalls in expertise and specialisation / handling regulation and administrative processes
Southey, 2015		Unfair dismissal provisions offer the broadest ranging and most accessible worker protections to date	

An example of the interface between workplace relations and regulation is provided by Southey (2015) who identifies the uniquely Australian approach to the notion of unfair dismissal as one where:

“Australia’s ideological desire for a ‘fair go’ cannot be neatly packaged under a single political philosophy.”
(Southey, 2015 p.150)

There is also a recurrent theme of the need to avoid a homogenising approach to SMEs and this is captured in the work of Healy *et al.* (2015) who investigated the cause of skill shortages in Australian small firms. Their findings resulted in a caution that employer involvement is essential in dealing with the problem. This highlights the key role played in the small firm of the owner-manager as the central figure in decision making and resource allocation. A key explanation offered is that unlike the large business, SMEs are typically operated by one or two owner-managers – often as a family owned enterprise – where all the “management” responsibilities and directors’ liabilities fall on the heads of these individuals (Banham & He, 2010; Clarke & Klettner, 2010; Prestney, 2008).

Due to the resource scarcity found within SMEs the conflict arising from workplace regulation over OH&S, dismissal, pay and conditions generally impacts personally on the owner-manager and their employees. In some cases, such regulations are simply ignored by small business owners, but this does not assist the owner-manager, the employees or the business to achieve the best outcomes. Good governance from the strategic to the operational level is required (Prestney, 2008).

However, the pattern of evidence emerging from the literature is that workplace conflict is not inherently a feature within SMEs. The small size of the workforce in most small firms engenders a collegial, team-like environment. Any conflict that emerges is likely to be caused by increasing numbers of employees as the firm grows and the lack of formal HRM systems in the firm to mitigate such conflict. Busy owner-managers struggle to find the time to understand and navigate a complex workplace relations system.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF THE AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACE

When considering the future of the Australian workplace we can refer back to the “three worlds” scenario outlined by PwC (2015), and recognise that all three worlds already exist within the economy. As noted earlier, the current landscape of Australia’s business community is characterised by a few large firms and a very substantial number of small ones. Further, the contribution of SMEs to the national economy is significant, with small firms contributing around 35.3 per cent of industry value added and medium-sized firms around 22.4 per cent (DIISR, 2011).

In some sectors, such as agriculture, forestry and fishing, SMEs contribute 83 per cent of all industry value added, while in the mining sector this figure is only 9 per cent. However, in manufacturing SMEs contribute around 19 per cent, and in services around 40 per cent of industry value added (DIISR, 2011). This highlights the importance of “*The Orange World*” of SMEs to the national economy within some sectors, while in others (e.g. mining, information media and telecommunications) it is the large firms of “*The Blue World*” that dominate. Table 8 lists some of the key sources used to guide the discussion that follows.

“Blue”, “Orange” and “Green” worlds collide

It might be argued that much of the division over whether we see either “*The Blue World*” or “*The Green World*” become the dominant paradigm remains a battle essentially fought out between large firms. While some corporations may choose to adopt corporate social responsibility (CSR) agendas independently, many are motivated by extrinsic forces such as consumer or societal pressure (Rizkallah, 2012), or government regulatory pressure on corporations to minimise or eliminate waste, phase out the use of harmful substances, and make better use of renewable resources (Rizos *et al.*, 2015).

The willingness of large firms to adopt a green world view has been treated with cynicism by some authors, for example in discussing a hypothetical large corporation known as “Cybercorp”; Rowland (2009) made the following observation:

“Given the ontology of the cybercorp, it is clear that corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be a reality only if it is imposed from outside, through some mechanism that affects profit. But in that case, compliant behaviour on the part of the cybercorp is ‘responsible’ only in the narrow sense of being prudent of its own interests. It may be socially responsible in its effect, but not in its primary intent.” (Rowland, 2009 p.115)

However, the quest for “*The Green World*” scenario is an agenda embraced by many governments and government authorities around the world. In several instances this is being developed with a view to encouraging change within “*The Orange World*” of the SME community.

For example, the European Commission launched a “*Green Action Plan*” (GAP) for SMEs in 2014 with the aim of helping small firms use environmental challenges to create business opportunities. Fusion (2015), a partnership of 10 organisations across England, Netherlands, France and Belgium has produced a guide for policy makers to help them develop a “circular economy” in which SMEs can be assisted to adopt environmentally responsible practices. In Australia, White (2015) suggests that an environmentally sustainable “circular economy” is likely to generate around \$26 billion by 2025.

Table 7: Illustrative Future of Work Literature Relevant to SMEs

Source	Context	Focus	Main Findings	Workplace relations implications
CIPD, 2015	SME specific/ UK	Productivity policies moving beyond needs of individual businesses	A supportive 'ecosystem' is needed	Encourage local skills 'ecosystems' to provide business support to enable SMEs to improve their people management and HR practices. • Continue to invest in the creation of industrial partnerships which focus on supporting SMEs.
Hajkowicz, et al, 2016	Australia	Digitally enabled workforce	Digital technology allows even nano businesses to build reputations and access large markets & lowered barriers to entry for start-ups & opportunities to experiment with new business models.	Digital technology will continue changing workplace structures, operations and relations
Kinner, 2015	Australia/ Hi tech start-ups	Crossroads 2015: An action plan to develop a vibrant tech start up ecosystem	Need to take immediate and far-reaching steps to address market failures that are impeding the maturation and growth of our start up ecosystem. The plan proposed by StartupAUS contains eight actions	Policymakers need to understand that tech start-ups have different needs from small businesses.
Martin, 2016	Analysis of contradictory views	The sharing economy	Need for empirical research which critically analyses the nature and impacts of the sharing and collaborative economies in their many and varied forms	The sharing economy can be framed as: (1) an economic opportunity ;(2) a more sustainable form of consumption.
PwC, 2014	Survey of 10000 people in UK, US, China, India, Germany	The future of work: A journey to 2022	Three scenarios – with one being 'small is beautiful' being the most relevant to SMEs	Companies begin to break down into collaboration networks of smaller organisations; specialisation dominates the world economy
PwC, 2015	Survey of 2,000 UK consumers 220+ CEOs around the globe	The 'connected living' market	Greater control over 'portfolio' careers, contracting time and talents to employers for defined projects, rather than employee of an organisation.	Increasingly work as members of collaborative professional networks, using online tools and forums to build a profile and connect with opportunities.
Stormer et al, 2014	UK/ Analysis of 300+publications Interviews with 23 experts	The labour market of 2030	New business ecosystems leading companies to be increasingly defined as 'network orchestrators.' Four scenarios offered with Innovation Adaptation being most relevant to SME growth	Collaboration in value creation networks is enabled by the virtualisation of business processes, fuelled by the rise of the digital economy. The highly networked companies tend to be smaller ones. SMEs are growing and booming, while large multi-business companies tend to stagnate or shrink.
World Economic Forum, 2016	HR Managers	Future of jobs	Discussions about the employment impact of disruptive change polarized: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limitless opportunities in newly emerging job categories and prospects that improve workers' productivity and liberate them from routine work • massive labour substitution and displacement of jobs 	Leveraging flexible working arrangements and online talent platforms: Physical and organizational boundaries increasingly blur. Modern forms of association such as digital freelancers' unions and updated labour market regulations will increasingly begin to emerge to complement these new organizational models

The challenge of diversity

A major area of focus for future workplaces will be the need for organisations to learn how to manage an increasingly diverse workforce. This challenge of diversity management was first articulated in the late 1980s in a forecasting study of the changing nature of the American economy and its social and cultural demographics (Johnston & Packer, 1987). It spawned an entire field of academic research and HRM policy known as “Diversity Management” (DM) (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). This flowed on into Australia, but interest in the field has waned in recent years (Davis et al., 2016).

Australia is a highly diverse, multi-cultural society with strong anti-discrimination laws encompassing race, age, disability and gender (AHRC, 2014). The *Fair Work Act 2009* also provides anti-discrimination provisions for the same things. However, there continue to be claims and complaints of discrimination within Australian workplaces based on such differences (AHRC, 2016). While there is some evidence that diversity in the workforce can enhance productivity (e.g. Ali et al., 2011; 2015; Mohr & Shoobridge, 2011; McGuirk et al., 2015), much more attention needs to be given to this in future research.

Economic change driven by globalisation and technology will disrupt many existing industries and it will be important to develop social and economic programs designed to assist employees to transition to new opportunities (Dhakal et al., 2013; Meyermans, 2016; Dutta-Gupta et al., 2016). There will also need to be a diversity management approach to addressing the needs of different industries and to recognise the highly diverse nature of the SME sector where a “one size fits all” approach is to be avoided (Bekiaris, 2010; Hardie & Newell, 2011).

Challenges of time and place

A key issue facing the management of future workplaces is balancing the needs of the individual employee with those of their employer. Within the workplace this generally translates into a negotiation over flexible work arrangements (FWA) (Hill et al., 2008). Two of the most common areas negotiated within FWAs are flexibility of time (flexitime) and flexibility of place (flexplace).

As discussed earlier, technology is allowing the workplace to effectively transcend the conventional boundaries of time and place (PwC, 2016). Existing regulations, laws and policies will have to be adjusted to keep pace with the changing working conditions and emerging issues. As noted by Kidman (2016):

“...the rapidly evolving field of the ‘Internet of Things’ - a broad term used to describe network-aware devices that can share data for a variety of purposes [where] the ownership of the server that allows it to talk to other products is arguably more vital than the ownership of the product itself.”

The emergence of the digital economy offers both significant opportunities and challenges to future workplaces (Degryse, 2016; Hajkowicz et al., 2016; Ruggieri et al., 2016; Störmer et al., 2014). Digital technologies and artificial intelligence are already beginning to replace workers in formerly highly skilled jobs. However, human problem solving abilities remain superior to computers particularly in unstructured, non-routine environments. Human workers will still be needed in employment tasks that require perception and manipulation, creative intelligence and social intelligence (Bradlow, 2015). The role of government in this environment is to keep pace with the technological change and ensure that they don’t become a drag on the economy. For example, as the ACCI’s (2015) annual red tape survey commented:

“A key message is that governments, like the private sector, need to be aware of the changing nature of technology and update their communications methods and strategies accordingly.” (ACCI, 2015 p.18)

“The Orange World” of the “nano” firm and the “gig economy”

This impact of technology will have the potential to significantly enhance “The Orange World” of the SME. However, it will also mean that small firms, many of which will be “nano” businesses of one person, must be recognised for their importance and enabled to participate in the economy with the same rights as their larger counterparts. As noted by Tewari *et al.* (2013):

“SME space tends to be highly complex – with heterogeneity in firm size, specialisation, spatial dispersion and performance. Moreover, in many countries SMEs, for a large part, operate in the informal sector compounding complexity.” (Tewari *et al.*, 2013 p.1)

The rise of the “nano” enterprise of independent professionals (IPros) and self-employed sub-contractors operating within networks is already an emerging trend reflected in the literature (Horowitz, 2010; Leighton & Brown, 2013; Popma, 2013; Meyermans, 2016). There is also a global call for more entrepreneurship and new venture creation in order to stimulate economic growth and the creation of more jobs (OECD, 2015; Osimo, 2016; Kinner, 2015; Wiens & Jackson, 2015). However, only a few start-up firms will survive beyond five years (Davila *et al.*, 2015), and even less will grow strongly to generate jobs and GDP (Clayton *et al.*, 2013; Acs *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, SMEs can and do innovate and often provide a valuable linkage within a wider industry network that incorporates both small and large firms (Laperche & Liu, 2013; Palangkaraya, Spurling & Webster, 2015; White, Gunasekaran & Roy, 2014; Mooney & Sixsmith, 2013).

For the majority of SMEs, the ambition for growth is low due to the strategic vision and desires of the firm’s owner-manager (Perry, Meredith & Cunnington, 1988; Moran, 1998). Growth, particularly high growth, is fraught with risk and requires an entrepreneurial mindset that is generally not present in the majority of SMEs (Hambrick & Crozier, 1985; Smallbone *et al.*, 1995). Outside the fast growth start-up entrepreneur domain is the emergence of a “gig economy” characterised by self-employed individuals working within teams of similarly structured “businesses” to undertake skilled technical or professional work and with little connection to an employer (Lewis, 2015).

While the “gig economy” is often seen as synonymous with entrepreneurship and opportunities for people to advance their careers based on their abilities, rather than through long service, firm loyalty or “time-serving” (see: Card & Mulligan, 2014; Gettler, 2013; Horowitz, 2010; Lewis, 2015; Ruggieri *et al.*, 2016), there is also concern about precariousness, the lack of job security and access to traditional employment entitlements such as sick and recreation leave, minimum wages, superannuation, unfair dismissal and so on (see: Broughton & Richards, 2016; Di Stefano, 2016; Martin, 2016). As Lewis (2015) notes:

“...a significant growth in the gig economy would pose a major problem for Australia’s industrial relations system.”

One idea as to just what this “problem” could look like is found in the work of Dobbins, Plows and Davis (2016). Writing of the growth of jobs in the UK, they suggest that this growth actually is more of a “mask bogus self-employment in the shadow economy”. They link this to the language of entrepreneurship noted above but provide a different insight, suggesting that while “people might self-identify as being entrepreneurs by managing to earn anything at all in a post-crisis jobs market”, on average, the self-employed earn less than other workers, as well as having less access to benefits like training and pensions.

Boosting workplace productivity

Any discussion over the future of the workplace needs to consider how changes in the current status quo might improve productivity. Despite having enjoyed a long boom of almost 25 years the national economy is now facing a new challenge as the forces of globalisation, technological, demographic, social and environmental change impact the workplace. For example, CEDA (2015) predict that within the next 20 years' technology might replace around 40 per cent of existing jobs in Australia, while simultaneously lowering workers' wages in the remaining sectors. At the same time, the application of technology as a major enhancer of productivity is also an anticipated trend with evidence from the mining and resources sector as recent examples (Durrant-Whyte *et al.*, 2015).

However, while jobs will be lost in some sectors there is optimism that new ones will be created in areas such as: i) food and agribusiness; ii) mining equipment, technology and services; iii) medical technologies and pharmaceuticals; iv) oil, gas and energy resources; and v) advanced manufacturing (Bradley, 2015). Yet such industries will demand a workforce that is globally competitive, highly skilled and able to make best use of the new technologies (Cave *et al.*, 2014; Coyte, Ricceri & Guthrie, 2012).

A review of workplace productivity in the UK found that larger firms were more likely to have experienced higher rates of productivity growth, and that such firms were more likely to have targeted "premium quality" rather than "standard or basic" quality products. They also possessed an internal culture that was open to change and supported by workforce training and development. These firms also regularly monitored their productivity performance levels, with strategic HRM programs to assist the implementation of "smart" and "agile" work (Beatson & Zheltoukhova, 2015; Ulrich, Schiemann & Sartain, 2015).

SUMMARISING THE FINDINGS

Attempting to predict the future is both challenging and fraught with risk. As outlined in this report the main factors shaping the future of the workplace are globalisation, technology, the changing demographic profile of the workforce, societal attitudes, environmental change and government policy (Ware & Grantham, 2003; Gratton, 2010). A variety of future scenarios have been predicted. Some are optimistic and see globalisation, technology and diversity as an opportunity to embrace change and build a world class labour market with matching enterprises (Hannon, 2011). Others see a more dystopian vision characterised by high unemployment, low wages and impermanent, insecure jobs (Watson *et al.*, 2003).

In general, there seems some agreement that work will be more flexible and mobile with technologies enabling the workplace to be redefined in terms of location and time (Humphry, 2014; Moore, 2016). Work will be defined less in terms of position, title or place, and more in terms of outcomes or achievements. The workforce of the future will be more diverse and technologies are likely to make it easier for currently marginalised employees (e.g. older workers, the disabled) to participate.

As forecast by PwC (2014) the future workplace may be found in one of three "worlds" comprising large global corporations driven by market share and profit, socially responsible organisations and SMEs. Such "worlds" of work already exist and the majority of workplaces have shifted into these three paradigms. For the employees of the future there will need to be a willingness and capacity to adapt to change, learn new skills and potentially adopt a "portfolio" career, which might include self-employment.

Government will continue to play an important role in shaping the future of the Australian workplace as it has done throughout our history. Regulation in the workplace may need to adapt and shift more towards a facilitation model. Attention will also need to be given to the needs of the SME sector, which

is likely to be increasingly comprised of “nano” or micro-enterprises. Such firms will not be best served by legislation and regulation designed for large organisations.

Conclusions and future directions for research

Our review of the literature relating to future workplaces has touched on a range of issues and emerging themes about the future of work. The original set of six research questions which began this part of the research project conflated to form three main areas for investigation. A review of the literature has then reduced these to two key questions of:

Research Question 1: *What will the Australian workplace of the future look like?*

Research Question 2: *What factors may play a role in shaping this future?*

Research question 1 is very difficult perhaps impossible to answer with any certainty. However, research question 2 is easier to address. While the review does not definitively answer these two research questions, it does hopefully provide some useful insights and lines of inquiry for future investigation. As outline in this report the future of the workplace will be shaped by a combination of forces already discussed. Each of these will have its own impact and will offer both opportunities and threats to employees, employers and entrepreneurs. Future research should engage with representatives from all three of these stakeholders and seek their views on where they see future change within their careers and companies. Government agencies will also play a key role in shaping the future workplace and future research should include interviews with key state and federal policy makers.

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