

10 – Sustainable work: the issues for Australia

John Burgess and Julia Connell

Australia has experienced two decades of dynamic economic reform that has included deregulation, privatisation, labour market and tax reforms. These policies have resulted in societal inequalities with almost half of the workforce now employed in jobs that are casual, part-time and/or on fixed contracts. Consequently, the contemporary workforce is divided into two groups: those in high skilled, stressful jobs who would like to work less hours, and those who have to support themselves and their families with insecure incomes. The rewards from economic growth are also very unevenly distributed. As a result, there is a need to rethink and re-conceptualise work in Australia, which has been given a narrow meaning, largely connected to market activity for the purposes of welfare policy design. Outside of the market there is much work that is neither recognised nor rewarded.

Over the past decade or so Australia's workforce has undergone enormous change. Both large and small organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors have been subjected to environmental pressures and forces of change that have led to major transformations in organisational work structures and contracts. The responses to these influences have led to change within the industries in which Australians work, the occupations they undertake and the employment contracts they hold. Consequently, this topic underpins a number of important theoretical and policy questions such as:

- the nature and availability of employment for current and future generations
- the characteristics of future jobs and workplaces, and