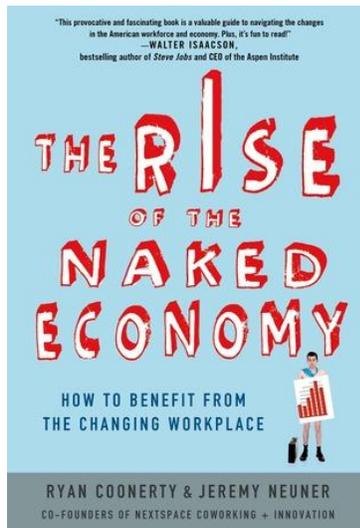




Book Review



The Rise of the Naked Economy: How to Benefit from the Changing Workplace

By: Ryan Coonerty and Jeremy Neuner
Palgrave Macmillan: New York, NY (2013)
244 pages, Hardcover, \$28.00
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Reviewed By: Belal A. Kaifi, Trident University International

The workplace is continuously evolving and employees are no longer interested in the 40 hour work week, dealing with traffic, and sitting in a cubicle. “In May 2010, four coworkers in London rode naked on the Tube during their morning commute wearing nothing but shoes, the coed quartet made quite an impression on more stodgily dressed commuters” (p.1). By spending an entire workday together naked—members of the group wanted to break down barriers, improve communication, and develop a higher level of trust among themselves. The current workplace reminds some employees “of other situations (i.e., prison life) in which people are forced to spend their days in confined windowless spaces with their time strictly regimented by outside forces” (p. 37). Coonerty and Neuner (2013) discuss the current workplace and how the volatile economy has encouraged employees to challenge the status quo by taking advantage of technology, entrepreneurial endeavors, the global demand for skilled workers, and outsourcing. The authors mention a study by Princeton economist Alan Blinder who said that almost 30 percent of the jobs in the United States, including lawyers, accountants, and other traditional “good jobs,” can be outsourced. Interestingly, the authors state that Amazon’s Mechanical Turk “uses more than 100,000 workers from 100 countries to perform specific tasks for an average of \$1.40 an hour” (p. 15).

The authors also discuss a new wave of telecommuting by synergizing with other freelancers and creating high performance project teams that are able to undertake highly specialized tasks. The authors are co-founders of the Nextspace Coworkers + Innovation phenomenon. The authors explain what coworking is: The traditional office, for all its gross inefficiencies, still offers the valuable resource of face-to-face camaraderie. So a new industry began a few years ago to provide self-styled work spaces for freelancers, entrepreneurs, and other independent professionals—where they could engage with other humans on their own terms and schedule (p. 19).

The authors argue that the social contract has changed significantly over the years and it is time to renew the social contract. “In its broadest sense the social contract is a philosophical concept, a set of assumptions and principles recognized by both the elite and the populace at large about how civil society will work” (p. 39). The authors explain, “But the conditions, cultures, and economic models that built that social contract are long gone” (p. 40). For example, one reason why the social contract needs to be updated is because of its lack of consideration for women who make-up about 47 percent of the workforce. Furthermore, this new economy demands “superspecialization” and some MIT management professors have described this trend as “hyperspecialization”. The authors state, “Into this new dynamic comes talent brokers like Jody Greenstone Miller, the cofounder and CEO of the Business Talent Group (BTG), a firm that places specialized talent with companies and organizations to work on specific projects” (p. 70). It should be mentioned that education is also becoming highly specialized at some universities around the world while some programs (e.g., Yale’s School of Management) has a more generalized or interdisciplinary approach to teaching their students. The question remains how to bridge the gap between specialists and generalists.

In the new workplace, a significant amount of employees are able to telecommute. “Nearly 40 percent of US workers could do at least some parts of their jobs by working from home. Although about 3 out of 4 employers say that they trust employees working from home to do their work, about a third of those employees would prefer to have some means to monitor employees who are working from home” (p. 113). It is also important to consider the work space of the future and what it might look like. “Imagine showing up for your first day of work at a new company. Instead of issuing you’re your computer, activating your new smart phone, and showing you to your new desk, the company simply hands you a stack of money. And with that money you’re meant to buy the technology you need to get your job done as well as purchase access to the range of work spaces you’ll likely need to be at your creative, innovative, and productive best” (p. 163).

This book is a must read for all students, academics, entrepreneurs, and managers. The concepts and ideas that are discussed in this book allow an individual to evaluate his or her current understanding of the naked economy. The authors provide outstanding examples and anecdotes that help the reader understand the changes that have taken place in our economy and the changes that will be taking place in our economy.