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## Smart Cities and the CFO

If the 1800's were a time of prosperity for gypsies and psychics – then 2020 is the renaissance for a new type of crystal ball gazing – the futurist.

Brook Dixon is one such person. Both CFO and futurist of Canberra-based consulting firm Delos Delta, he is responsible for implementing projects that have transformed Australia's capital cities and regions into high tech smart cities, but still more needs to be done.

When Dixon talks of the future, he does it in a way that transcends you to an Australia 10-15 years into the future.

Planning for what cities will look like, Dixon has consulted government and industry on projects that have modernised on-demand transport legislation for the ACT Government that allowed Uber and other rideshare platforms to operate legally in Canberra and across the country to designing a Social Cohesion project currently being rolled out in Melbourne's inner-city suburb of Footscray.

A reformer and innovator keen to build better cities and communities, "it's the application of technology," he says, "that will offer endless opportunities to modernise and improve how we live and work."

The former head the ACT Government's smart city agenda for a large part of the first decade of the millennium, Dixon's work saw him receive a Churchill Fellowship to travel the world and study digital and smart cities.

Upon returning, a direct connection can be drawn from Dixon's tour to establishing Delos Delta. Dixon saw what very few people could, and recognised a hole existed around the issue of smart cities development and moved quickly to fill it.

According to Dixon, when Delos Delta was established in 2017, very few companies in the country had the expertise to develop and deliver large-scale smart city-projects.

"It was clear the demand for smart city strategies, advice and solutions would increase rapidly. We ensured it became a pillar of the business and since then we've worked with more than 80 cities and councils across Australia."

Smart cities have been an issue widely discussed and whether Australia understands the benefits they deliver economically fascinates Dixon. It's a question he continues to ponder.

He says Australia is slowly increasing its understanding. "The Australian Smart Communities Association (ASCA) and the ANZ Smart and Cities Council, have played key roles in building knowledge and momentum in the last five years."

The Federal Government's recent Smart City and Suburbs Program helped accelerate the awareness and investment in smart tech around Australia. And from Delos Delta's part, they have been working hard to spread the message.

In any smart cities program, economics remains key for government and the benefits that will be delivered, but that shouldn't be government's only consideration. "It has to be more strategic in its thinking."

"In a smart city, technology is the *means*, not the *end*," Dixon says. "Smart cities don't roll out new technology because tech is fashionable – it delivers better outcomes for people, economy and environment. "

*"In practice, it means talking to the community, collaborating with businesses, and co-designing smart city solutions that make a difference."*

For Dixon, the smartest cities take a holistic approach to technology deployment. “Beyond the technology itself, they also give significant time and attention to modernisation of regulation, governance, institutions and processes. Effective use of modern tech depends on modern regulations and the two need to complement each other.”

What a smart Australia will look like in the future and the technological developments we can expect from disrupters like uber, driverless cars and trucks on and how technology will be implemented, depends on the pace of the government and how likely it is to loosen the regulatory reins.

“A smarter Australia will be better than it is today,” Dixon says. “We want to grab all the benefits of digital tech and protect against its risks.”

“Smart tech will make Australians more productive and prosperous. It will increase the value and lifespan of infrastructure, create new jobs and industries, help make Australia greener and conserve our natural assets and improve our way of life, giving us more time to do the things we enjoy, and spend time with friends and family.”

However, Dixon also thinks COVID-19 has created a shift ahead of time in the labour market and how it operates. COVID-19 he says, “has almost single-handedly fast tracked the changes smart cities will bring to the labour market.”

The landscape is about to change dramatically. If Dixon is right, robots will continue to disrupt industries, office workers won’t be tied to office computers – they’ll work remotely and ubiquitously, the global digital economy will see an increase in independent contractors, entrepreneurs, innovators, multiple job-holders, start-up founders, and co-working aficionados.

“People will take-up flexible-working options in increasing numbers, working three days a week for example, aiming to balance their aspirations of economic, career and lifestyle.”

But Dixon also emphasises an extreme optimism for future employment, dismissing the naysayers who predict a world with less and less jobs.

“There’s no doubt, smart tech will destroy some jobs, but it will create new jobs – jobs we can’t predict or imagine today. Smart tech supported by smart planning and policy will guarantee plenty of jobs, better working conditions, and the ability to share prosperity.”

If Australia doesn’t want to be left behind as a developed nation in the smart cities race, then Government along with the private sector must get on the front foot and gear up Australia’s labour market for the digital age.

“Australia,” Dixon says, “needs a pipeline of investment in digital connectivity, digital skills literacy, and innovation capability.”

*“We need an ongoing program of reform to labour market legislation and human resource management, ensuring our market isn’t left behind by the digital revolution. The investment and reform will create immense economic opportunities for Australia and set us up to be smart city leaders.”*

Dixon remains critical of how Australia has positioned itself in a world where smart technologies and cities continue to prosper while we languish.

“Australia is not leading the smart city race. We should be. We’re a nation of innovators, leaders and early adopters. Not only should we be leading in the deployment of smart tech, but in developing new smart city solutions to export around the world.”

We require strong leadership from governments, a pipeline of investment in smart infrastructure and connectivity with programs that not only support innovators and smart tech vendors to design and develop new solutions to sell globally, and an ongoing investment in digital training and literacy so all Australians can share the benefits of smart tech and create new digital businesses.

**"If we do that, Australia will take the lead in a race it should be well and truly ahead in."**

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