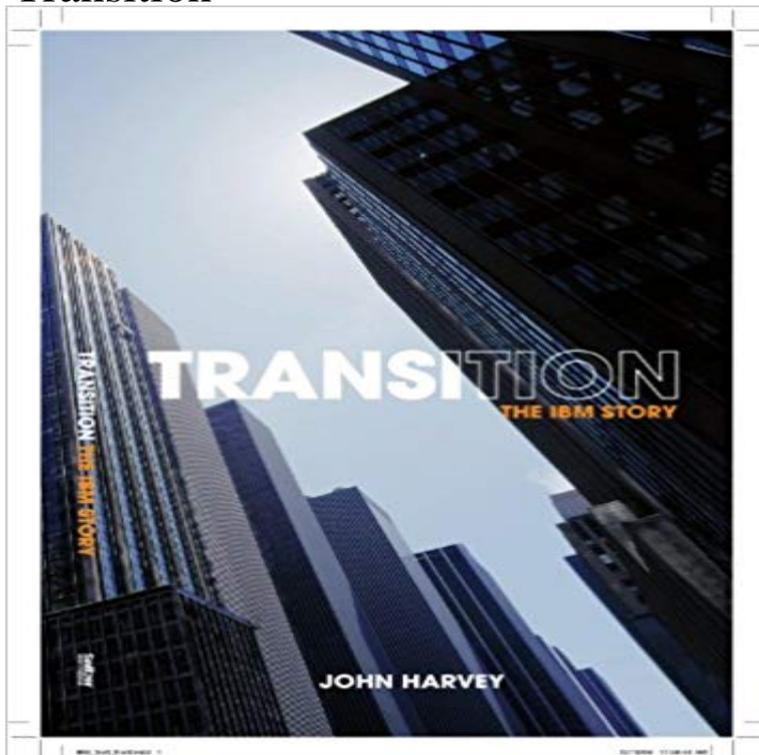


Transition



In the mid-1990s, Australia stood at an economic crossroad. Commodity prices were subdued. Worldwide agricultural protectionism was rife. Most forms of manufacturing were commoditising leading to global industry consolidation on a scale that meant Australia could no longer compete. It was clear that the way services would eventually be delivered was about to change radically. As many of our traditional markets began to weaken, a question faced Australia: could it adapt to these challenges and implement the business changes required to remain internationally competitive? As they struggled to adapt to these new economic paradigms, Australian organisations found it was much more difficult to meet the dynamic requirements of demanding customers than to mass-produce standard items for purchasers with little market power. An ever-increasing demand for quality and customer orientation was becoming paramount for businesses. Meeting this demand required human creativity, which emerged for the first time as a key driver of value and became a major economic force. In the emerging knowledge economy, companies of all types were striving to construct new workplaces and business models that were more amenable to creative work. The changes required to achieve this were massive and highly disruptive. To many observers, the degree and rapidity of this transformation was analogous to the industrial revolution in terms of its dislocation, confusion, unforeseen consequences and human costs. This book is the story of how one company, IBM, responded to these challenges and undertook a radical transition that enabled it to compete in the world economy. It chronicles the steps IBM implemented to transform itself from being Australia's leading exporter of elaborately transformed manufactured goods in the mid-1990s to

the leading exporter of IT services a decade later. These steps also provide a blueprint for any organisation intent on radically transforming its operations. IBM achieved significant change, not just by overhauling itself, but by transforming federal and state government policy, pioneering new endeavours between industry and academia, and forging collaborative partnerships with other major industry players and associations. IBM could not make systemic changes of this kind on its own. Its transformation was highly collaborative; assisted by senior government, industry and academic leaders of the time, many of whom have kindly contributed to this book. Ultimately, this story demonstrates the transformative power of collaboration and the potential to exploit that power to create competitive advantage on the world stage. The IT setting is irrelevant. IBM's journey is instructive for any Australian company facing similar challenges within the rapidly changing global economy. Importantly, it proves that Australia is more than capable of becoming globally competitive in other industry sectors provided all the stakeholders engage in collaborative leadership. Australia has already proved itself internationally competitive in mining and agriculture; however, we cannot continue to rely principally on just two sectors for the strength of our export growth. As Australia moves through the 21st century, export strength across a number of industry sectors will be required to foster ongoing economic success. Hopefully, IBM's successful transition from a manufacturing exporter to a services exporter will give other stakeholders in the services sector a blueprint for creating export opportunities in their industries. If this book encourages the private sector, government and academic institutions to collaborate further to ensure that not just the IT services sector but the services sector in general contributes strongly to the growth of Australian exports and the economy in the future then it will have achieved its goal.

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