CALL FOR PAPERS - Special Issue:

The interplay between digital technologies and organization design. A sociomaterial perspective

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OVERVIEW AND AIMS OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The spreading of digital technologies has been changing work and organizations, in a way that organizing is increasingly seen as the joint action of humans, knowledge and technology. The distinction between the design of technology, work and processes is becoming blurred: organizational routines and structures are inscribed in digital technologies, embodied in roles and habits, incorporated into technical arrangements and built into architectures. Objects and technologies are progressively more social, in the sense that they imply the active engagement of users and derive their meaning from social practices (Bruni, Parolin, 2014).

This profound transformation in the relationship between technology and organization design is effectively captured by the *sociomaterial perspective*, which refers to "a conception of materiality as integral to human activities and relationships" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008, p. 438). Materiality is understood as "technology in practice" (Leonardi 2012) and does not need to have "physical matter" when interacting with the social. The concept is further illustrated by Orlikovski (2007) through various examples. One of them refers to the Google search engine. "The performance and results of a Google-based search are sociomaterial. The Google search engine is a computer code that was produced and is maintained by software engineers, that executes on computers (configured with particular hardware and software elements), and whose operation depends on the millions of people who create and update web pages every day, and the millions of people who enter particular search terms into it. The result is a constitutive entanglement of the social and the material — 'a mangling of human and material agencies' or what Suchman (2007) calls 'a creative sociomaterial assemblage'.)" (Orlikovski, 2007, p. 1440)

The sociomaterial view is thus especially appropriate to interpret and manage the increasingly pervasive nature of digitalization in organizations and in the surrounding environments. The impressive development in fields such as machine learning, robotics, additive manufacturing, immersive environments, is imposing an urgent call to address in innovative ways the consequences that materiality, in the form of digital technologies, is having on organization and workplace design. It is also worth noting that the sociomaterial turn in organization studies shares multiple features with the

re-emergent interest in considering the organization as an outcome of sociotechnical design (Emery & Trist, 1960), involving also the digital dimension.

Given the fit of these perspectives with the topic of the WOA 2020, we propose a special issue of Studi Organizzativi in connection with the workshop. Questions addressed in the submitted papers may include, but are not restricted to:

- How do digital technologies affect the features and the meaning of work?
- What are the implications of a digitally enabled sociotechnical job design on workers´attitudes, motivations, satisfaction and wellbeing?
- How does materiality of technology affect organizational boundaries, and boundary-spanning activities within and across organizations?
- How do technology and social dimensions interact with power and politics in organizations?
- How does materiality of digital technologies influence the design and the acceptance/interpretation of coordination and control mechanisms?
- How does sociomateriality affect the attributes of professional knowledge and know how within and across organizations
- How do digital technologies affect the relationship between "design" and "use"? What is the role of users in co-constructing technologies and crafting jobs? Howdo digital technologies enable a processual view of organization design?
- How do organizational knowledge/processes/routines emerge at the intersection between design and technologies?

The special issue is open to a diverse set of theoretical and empirical methodologies as well as to a range of empirical settings. Both qualitative and quantitative empirical approaches as well as conceptual and theoretically focused contributions are welcomed.

References

Bruni, A., & Parolin, L. L. (2014). Dalla produzione automatizzata agli ambienti tecnologicamente densi: la dimensione sociomateriale dell'agire organizzativo. *Studi organizzativi*.

Emery, F.E. and Trist, E.L. (1960) Socio-technical Systems. In C.W. Churchman & M. Verhurst (Eds), Management Science, Models and Techniques, Vol. 2, 83-97. London: Pergamon Press.

Leonardi, P.M., 2012. Materiality, Sociomateriality, and Socio-Technical Systems: What Do These Terms Mean? How are They Related? Do We Need Them? Materiality and Organizing: Social Interaction in a Technological World. Social Science Research Network, Rochester, NY, pp. 25–48.

Orlikowski, W.J., Scott, S.V., 2008. Sociomateriality: Challenging the Separation of Technology, Work and Organization. The Academy of Management Annals 2, pp. 433–474.

Orlikowski, W. J. (2007). Sociomaterial practices: Exploring technology at work. *Organization studies*, *28*(9), 1435-1448.

DETAILS OF PROCESS

Papers will go through the standard review process of the journal and should be 8,000 words (maximum) in length, including abstract, tables, figures and reference section. (https://www.francoangeli.it/riviste/NR/So-norme_EN.pdf)

Deadline for full paper submission (in English): **31 March 2020**. The special issue is expected to be published in open access as the n.3/2020 of Studi Organizzativi

*The special issue will consider, **but will be not limited to** papers presented at WOA 2020 which address the intersection between technology and organization in a perspective of sociomateriality.*

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