



Call for Papers

Digital technologies, power relations, and participation in organizing processes

Guest Editors

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Digital technologies are widespread and ubiquitous in contemporary organizations and workplaces, often associated to new organizational forms (as for self-regulated teams, network organizations, platform-based organizations) and new etiquettes (as for 'Industry 4.0'). Their diffusion and presence triggers issues related to various aspects of organizations such as structure, coordination, competence, communication, participation, and power (Beverungen, Beyes & Conrad, 2019). In fact, whether these novel ways of organizing offer new opportunities for workers' autonomy, participation, and self-fulfillment, or enable new forms of labor exploitation, remains to be seen.

This call for papers focuses on power and control in digitalized organizations. The recent diffusion of wearable technologies at work (such as the bracelets for monitoring employees' movements within Amazon) or, less recently, digitally-enabled surveillance systems allowing the creation of complex datasets on employees' performance, are just two of the many examples of how organizational power and control can be exerted through digital technologies (Irani, 2015; Zuboff, 2019). Indeed, recent cases of gig economy workers' mobilization, for example the food delivery platform couriers ("riders") in Italy and in the UK, suggest that technology can also be a tool for collectively organizing and renegotiating power.

The debate about the consequences that digital technologies may have on power relations in organizations tends to be polarized in two positions (Meyer, 2019; Miele & Tirabeni, 2020; Nielsen, Andersen, & Danziger, 2016): an alarmist and an optimistic one. On one hand, some authors suggest that technology may support the existing distribution of power as individuals, groups, and organizations already advantaged in the political process are able to shape the diffusion, design, and use of new technologies in ways enhancing their established interests (Norris & Reddick 2013). In this vein, the introduction of digital technologies in organizations has been seen as a further opportunity for managers to control workers (Nielsen, Andersen, & Danziger 2016). On the other hand, scholars suggested that technology may transform pre-existing power relations (Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006) and profoundly change prior power dynamics, reinforcing peer-relations, transforming organisational practices, professional roles and re-allocating responsibilities (Petraiki, Klecun, & Cornford 2016).

In such a debate a deterministic view of technology emerges, missing that there are: “more intricate, and often ambiguous, dynamics that happen between total domination and total emancipation” (Meyer *et al.*, 2019, p. 2). In fact, according to a non-deterministic view of technology, power relationships are not imposed by technology; on the contrary, they rely on the ways technology is used, which in their turn are influenced by various organizational dimensions (e.g. pre-existing cultural backgrounds, information infrastructures, relationships and textures of practices). For example, studies adopting a sociomaterial perspective (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) have emphasized the interplay between digital technologies and human agency as a driver for change in power distribution within several fields, such as journalism (e.g. Plesner & Raviola, 2016) or healthcare (e.g. Introna, Hajies, & Al-Hejin, 2019).

It is well known that workers’ participation and know-how are necessary conditions for the effective design and introduction of technologies in organizations (Ciborra and Lanzara, 1988). Thus, digital technologies may also have implications for the design of work, for example by influencing the opportunities for job crafting, which entails the change of physical, cognitive, and relational boundaries of tasks (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2003) and also by modifying the features of professional fields and expertise (e.g. Stein *et al.*, 2019). Following a sociotechnical perspective, social dimensions in technological development are not effects but matter of design (Butera *et al.*, 1989; Butera, 2015; Shaba *et al.*, 2019).

The debate is thus multi-faced and rich. Accordingly, this *Special Issue* calls for contributions dealing with the above issues, and in particular with:

- how digital technologies modifies power relationships in organizational structure and processes;
- practices of power renegotiation enacted through digital technologies;
- digital technologies and practices of human resources management;
- the visible and invisible work behind digital technologies;
- the relationship between technology appropriation and power renegotiation;
- the relationship between technology, power and workers’ participation;
- theoretical and methodological approaches for better understanding the relationship among digital technologies, power, and organizing;
- digital technologies, meaning, and images of work;
- joint design of technology, work, and organization;
- the interplay between digital technologies, professional expertise and organizational fields;
- critical perspectives on technology, work, and organizing.

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Submission and review process

- Deadline for full paper submission (in English): **September 28, 2020**.
- Manuscripts should be 8,000 words (maximum) in length, including abstract, tables, figures and references
- Manuscripts can be uploaded through the journal website:
http://ojs.francoangeli.it/_ojs/index.php/so/about/submissions
- Submitted manuscripts will go through the standard peer review process of the journal.
- The Special Issue is expected to be published as the n. 1/2021 of *Studi Organizzativi*.