

Global Challenges and Individual Decisions: Inquiring the Role of Technology and Digital Phenomena

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Immediately prior to the global outbreak triggered by the widespread of Sars-Cov-2, the challenging theme debated within scientific community and society was the protection of the environment, together with the construction of a sustainable future for next generations. Generally speaking, environmental protection is conceptually connected to a number of other challenges that are identified by the United Nations as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), that is, the "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation,

peace and justice”.¹ Technology plays a prominent role in both the challenges previously described. As management scholars, we are expected to understand whether the rapid technological changes represent either a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1970), or an evolutionary change (Penrose, 1959; Friedman, 1998). Seemingly technology enhances our individual possibilities, creating a tension between individuals and humanity (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007). Organisations are responsible for mediating between these two dimensions, taking into account both technology and individuals. Technological changes and the mounting role played by artificial intelligence and Big Data, impending sociological and demographic discontinuities, such as the phenomenon of global migration flows, and growing uncertainties in the political environment, such as the debate on the role of the European Union and the changing attitude towards protectionism, all seem to challenge the role of organisations and the understanding of the ‘organising for what’, as described by the theme of the WOA 2021 held in Genoa.

As the global pandemic slowly seems to appease, thanks to a massive and widespread vaccination campaign, part of the well-established social habits looks irrevocably changed. Accordingly, digitalisation has played a pivotal role, both as a means and an end. Technology has supported the productive world in reducing the social distance imposed by the pandemic, thanks to a number of tools, especially the ones for conference calls that have supported workgroups in not interrupting productive system. Conversely, since the pandemic has accelerated the process of digitalisation in many sectors (i.e., from education to public administration), digitalisation and the extreme reliance on technology have raised the production rhythm. Therefore, organisations face nowadays increasing and, sometimes, conflicting ethical and social demands: on the one hand, the pervasive technology usage has restricted the possibility of individual detachment from social connections; on the other, digitalisation contributes to creating unreleased spaces for work and interaction with each other.

The fear for environmental downfall and the necessity for overcoming the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic have merged in the EU policy, witnessed by its name “Next Generation EU”, given to the extraordinary recovery programme enacted by the European Parliament. Therefore, environmentalism and sustainability have emerged as renewed global challenges, and the warnings about the future of the planet go together with digital advancements, currently seen as the key for interpreting our times from an organisational perspective. The contributions that are part of this thematic issue of the *puntOrg International Journal* (pIJ) have in common this approach, adopting an organisational lens whereby new ways of organising, only partially drawing on exogen phenomena, do not disregard the two main pillars of our discipline, that is, *design* and *behaviour*, in a dialectic relationship that seems to be working even in times that are considered challenging and changing.

The paper written by Irene Pescatore, “Smart Organisations: A New Relationship between Organisations and Individuals in the Digital Age”, addresses the necessity to still believe in a socio-technical approach in order to re-design an updated relationship between humans and technological tools. The former, as a way to challenge the hegemony of the Scientific Management and the School of Human Relation, and the latter to rethink the contribution of digitalisation and smart agency in orienting human action.

In the research carried out by Filomena Pagnozzi, “People Analytics and Human Resource Management: How the Use of Smart Data Can Improve the Training Processes”, Big Data are employed to design training paths that are as personalised as possible. Also in this case, the functionality of training is not much changed if compared to the development of the industrial

¹ Taken from the United Nations’ website accessed online at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> (last accessed: May 20, 2022).

organisation but rather is tailored to enhance the individual capabilities. Training is not regarded as a means to achieving the effectiveness of production cycle but rather to creating new margins for unveiling new possibilities of development, so as to foster creativity and entrepreneurship of the self.

Samuel Collino and Giancarlo Lauto, in their investigation “The Design of Interactive Training for Digital Transformation: A Practice-Oriented Case Study”, focus on the design of training path for digitalisation, aimed at making product development more effective. Accordingly, the concept of hybrid organisation supports practice-based empirical research that interrogates both researchers and practitioners in what must be altered when organisations interact with digitalisation processes.

As further evidence of the dialectic relationship between technology/design and sustainable future/behaviour, the article by Mauro Sciarelli, Anna Prisco, Lorenzo Turriziani and Valerio Muto, titled “Do Perceived Riders’ Conditions Influence Online Food Delivery? Investigating Determinants of Online Food Delivery during COVID-19 Outbreak”, investigates the evolution and widespread of the former giggers, who have legitimately become a distinct category of workers in the case of food delivery services, thus advocating for their recognition as dependent entrepreneurs. The study explores the general perception of working condition in a digital era in order to better understand the prevalence of the design over behaviour.

In “Defining the Leader in an Agile and Remote Working Environment”, Simona Pontillo, Stefano di Lauro and Gilda Antonelli point out how leadership, the *par-excellence* coordinating mechanism in organisations, well known as something with tangible and offline characteristics, has been interpreted and acted remotely, thanks to a literature review that demonstrates how digital connections could be sometimes a way for alienation rather than a way of integration.

As for the urban development lived during the first industrial revolution, with the investigation titled “Towards Cities as Smart and Inclusive Communities”, Mauro Romanelli addresses the issue of smart cities, which are the most invasive and visible artefact of digitalisation, if seen outside business organisations. At the same time, designing cities means designing the future of society, acting as a workshop for innovation, where the main task is to imagine a twofold adaptation process where cities are shaped following technological development and seemingly technology that follows cities’ changes.

Closing this thematic issue are two book reviews that call into question the global challenges around the dialectic of means and ends. Silvio Ripetta contributes with the first book review of *Failure*, written by Arjun Appadurai and Neta Alexander. The second book review by Josef Pallas comments on *Organizing Indipendence: Negotiations between Journalism and Management in News Organizations* by Elena Raviola.

After reflecting on how common and traditional categories in managerial theory are still connected to social phenomena that seems to be genuinely brand new, it could be hypothesised that COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated processes that were already taking place. Perhaps, what is changed is the weight that those global challenges have gained if compared to the past. Again, the two main pillars of organisation theory rescue scholars and practitioners in handling global challenges.

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