

and New managing trans-disciplinarity

Guest Editors

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This call addresses the changing economic, political, and social scenarios that characterize the first part of the 21st century. The evolutions in the work place (i.e., the fourth and fifth industrial revolution) and the sequence of dramatic crises (the terrorist crisis of 2001, the financial crisis of 2007, the demographic and migration crisis, the climate crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the upcoming turbulence) call for innovative organizational development and demand organizational learning in order to face the transformation of lived work experience and related expertise. Bennett and Lemoine (2014) argue for a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment that is mobilized by revolutionary processes, triggering challenges for organizations and work practices in general. While organizational processes are becoming ever more fractional (Law 2002), with increasing exposition to uncertain and contradictory conditions (Engeström 2008), people engaged in workplaces are asked to change their daily practices (Czarniawska 2008) and develop processes of learning from practice and experience, looking for new and different knowledge

that is not yet available, nor actionable (Scaratti, Fregnan, and Ivaldi 2021; Scaratti and Ivaldi 2021).

In such a scenario, the ability of organizations to manage people and dynamic change has become strategically important for companies in their innovation work (Carroll and Conboy 2020). Turbulent and uncertain environments and developments in information and communication technology, as well as globalization, generational diversity, and the new relationship to work all require novel ways to generate value and productivity models (Stiegler 2014).

In organizational terms, this translates into the progressive emergence of agile work patterns (Harris 2015, 2016), according to ad-hoc models of organizational structure (Mintzberg 2009) and hybrid professional cultures (McGivern et al. 2015), whose rooting and development require relevant and targeted expansive learning paths (Engeström 2015).

This issue of *Academic Quarter* on the topic of “New managing and trans-disciplinarity” seeks new perspectives and lenses for:

- Stimulating the development of managerial thought and action models oriented toward sustainability and social generativity.
- Encouraging innovation and expansive approaches in managerial activities.
- Enhancing a critical and reflective process to overcome the mainstream neo-managerial approaches and achieve new ways of managing organizational processes.
- Highlighting experiences of transformative trajectories located in the intertwining of theoretical and practical dimensions in the real contexts of the practitioners.
- Initiating the planning of new concrete managerial practices.

An increasing number of studies (Frey and Osborne 2017; Makridakis 2017; Peters 2017) are focusing on the effect of the fourth industrial revolution on work in terms of employment and unemployment, and on which skills will be necessary for the future workforce, as well as on the best training tools for their development (Hecklau et al. 2016). The organizations responsible for producing goods and services are not simply factories or companies, but are above all also complex social contexts. Efficiency and the effectiveness of

production processes are thus closely linked to the subjectivity of the actors and to the concreteness and reliability of their actions, as well as to the cultural values they carry, in addition to the ability to promote sensemaking about the unfolding events, issues, and problems at hand.

The emphasis is placed not only on structural aspects, but also on organizational reality as a socially constructed artifact, as a process of cultural construction (Czarniawska 2008). This necessitates dual goals, including finding new recovery (as well as survival) trajectories and, among the scientific and professional community, the acquisition of relevant knowledge in terms of organizational and managerial studies able to enrich and refine the theories in use (Scaratti and Ivaldi 2021; Tsoukas 2009).

The proposal for this issue takes inspiration, on the one hand, from a theoretical and epistemological background positioned within the critical management studies perspective (Alvesson, Bridgman, and Willmott 2009; Alvesson and Deetz 2006; Alvesson, Hardy, and Harley 2008; Alvesson and Sandberg 2014; Alvesson and Willmott 1992); as well as theoretical constructs related to adhocratic and pluralistic organizations (Denis, Lamothe, and Langley 2001; Mintzberg 1985, 2009; Taptiklis 2005; Whitley 1984); work and professional hybridization processes (Battilana and Casciaro 2012; Blomgren and Waks 2015; Gümüşay, Smets, and Morris 2020; McGivern et al. 2015; Noordegraaf 2015); and organizational and expansive learning modalities (Engeström 2015; Engeström 2020; Engeström and Sannino 2021).

On the other, we follow the appeal outlined by Allen, Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2019) for an *ecocentric approach* to sustainability grounded in radical reflexivity and trans-disciplinarity as key elements of a renewed strategic approach capable of unsettling traditional and taken-for-granted understandings and practices of managerial activity, learning, and education. We invite contributions that are inspired by and connect to such perspectives. This call is also open to other well-argued approaches and epistemological stances.

At stake is a concept of trans-disciplinarity that refers to a process of development of conceptual and methodological frameworks, made by people from different fields working together on a specific common issue (Klein 2008): this entails both potential divergences

and conflicts as well as the generation of actionable and sustainable knowledge about the problem under study.

We look for experiences and professional/organizational practices in which, moving between and beyond disciplines (Nicolescu 2010, 2012), it becomes possible to link civil society, media, university, government, industry, and the natural environment, generating cognitive knowledge (abstract representations), embodied knowledge (feelings, intuition, imagination), and enacted knowledge (experience and know-how) (Dieleman 2017). Examples of this, including criticalities, uneasiness and hardships embedded in such processes, can be found in projects of urban rethinking and citizens' participative processes.

Following the above premises, the issue asks for contributions related to the following questions: what organizational and managerial forms, inspired by an adhocratic model, support the re-launch of work and production activities involved in dealing with and overcoming critical situations? How can dynamics of professional hybridization be managed and face the need to reconfigure existing working, professional and organizational cultures? Which trajectories of expansive learning are adopted for transforming the existing operational balances and what are the managerial implications? What criticalities and potential conflicts do we have to deal with? Which leverages should be improved for managing them? How can we develop a critical contribution (see Bondarouk and Brewster 2006; Janssens and Steyaert 2009) that disrupts traditional managerial models (global competition, mass customization, neo-liberalistic approaches in conceiving management and organizational processes), and works toward a development of services and new ways of sharing, including a circular and generative economy (Butera 2017; Stiegler 2014)? How can we improve the facilitation of problem-oriented, transformational experiences addressing real societal and environmental issues, developing collaborative (across traditional knowledge boundaries) action-oriented research, through mutual embedded learning processes? From a methodological perspective, how can we produce relevant knowledge starting from real situations experienced by people engaged in concrete work contexts enriching our realm of observations (Brush, de Bruin, and Welter 2009; Cassell and Symon 1994)? How can we de-

velop the adoption of a practice lens (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011)? How can we cultivate a sensemaking orientation (Maitlis and Christianson 2014) in work and organizational studies, conceiving social life and organizing as an ongoing production, increasingly understood to be complex, dynamic, distributed, mobile, transient, and unforeseen? Which training models and actions are suitable for supporting professional hybridization processes?

The issue aims to invite epistemological, ontological, methodological, and practical frameworks and repertoires that help organizations to face the strong transformation required by the challenge of successfully managing the transition to hitherto unreleased models. Dwelling on organizational scenarios characterized by dimensions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, such as those emerging from the ongoing transformations (among all the pandemic and digital ones), calls for a renewed interpretation of management, at an institutional, organizational, social, and operational level. At stake is the ability to recognize and manage different practices and aggregations, in an interweaving of subjective, relational, scientific, cultural, and institutional dimensions that characterize managerial action.

There is therefore a need to rethink the traditional principles of management and reflect on new inspiring principles and models of behavior aimed at bringing the person and the social sustainability of organizational activities back to the center. In this sense, important stimuli come, for example, from the statements of the 2019 Business Roundtable and from the United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education, including:

- delivering value to customers, fostering the tradition of pioneering companies in meeting or exceeding customer expectations.
- investing in employees, including support through training and education to help develop new skills for a rapidly changing world.
- promoting diversity and inclusion, dignity, and respect.
- dealing fairly and ethically with the suppliers.
- Supporting the communities in which the companies work, as well as respecting social needs and protecting the environment by the adoption of sustainable practices in all organizational and entrepreneurial activities.

- Orienting working, professional and organizational cultures toward the challenge of generating collective value, while facing unprecedented articulations and complexities connected to the problems that arise and impose radical transformations.

The challenge is to translate the above principles and turn them into habits rooted in practice, that are valid both for the construction worker in Dubai (avoiding underpaying or keeping employees unskilled) and the stockbroker on Wall Street (instilling ethics and not fraudulent behaviors), while of course considering the different work domains.

At stake is a reconfiguration and regeneration of management, subjected to renewed attentions, dealing with transversal phenomena such as generational and cultural differences, digital transformation, work-life balance, new ways of working, innovative and sustainable organizational and business models, and the generation of collective value and common goods.

This issue of *Academic Quarter* is dedicated to articles from the fields of management and organizational studies, work and organizational psychology, human geography, cultural anthropology, philosophy and other social sciences, with the aim of encouraging and developing the emergence of unconventional managerial approaches that are capable of fostering creativity and innovation at all organizational levels, dealing with the unexpected events that affect the life of all contemporary organizations, and working at the borders of academic disciplines, social aggregations, communities and groups.

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