CALL FOR PAPERS

ASSESSING WORKER PERFORMANCE IN A CHANGING TECHNOLOGICAL AND SOCIETAL ENVIRONMENT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY AND MULTIFACETED PERSPECTIVE

SIXTEENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN COMMEMORATION OF PROFESSOR MARCO BIAGI

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Historic societal changes are taking place in the global scenario, and their impact on the world of work is clearly perceived by its actors and practitioners. Researchers and policy-makers are currently facing the task of devising effective analytical tools and providing solutions to the problems and the challenges arising from the new structural patterns taking shape.

Technological transformations, in particular the "Fourth Industrial Revolution", are producing far-reaching adaptations, if not a deep conversion, of models of production and work organization. These effects give rise to the need to rethink the relationship between the factors of production. As far as workers are concerned, the implications are uncertain, increasing their formal autonomy from standardized practices but also their dependency on digital processes with an impact on every phase of the performance of work, from the definition of tasks to monitoring and assessment. Due to the trends of downsizing, mergers, and decentralization, as well as the blurring of boundaries in employer-employee-customer relationships, new models for the organization and assessment of work performance have emerged (constant feedback; electronic performance monitoring and appraisal, ratings and rankings).

At the same time, a series of anthropological and geopolitical phenomena, including significant migratory flows, have increased the complexity of societies. This is mirrored in the changing patterns of internal labour markets and workplace organization, with ambiguous implications in terms of risks and opportunities. While it is widely acknowledged that diversity can serve as a factor generating innovation and wealth, multiculturalism entails the need to facilitate integration and prevent the segregation of minorities, against a background characterized by long-term issues relating to gender discrimination and disadvantaged employment. The workplace becomes the site of engagement between personal, cultural, religious, demographic, economic and social claims that need to be reconciled, without losing sight of the broader principles of citizenship within political communities.

The performance of work and the way it is assessed provide a useful perspective from which these patterns can be examined. Recent changes have had a significant impact on work performance, breaking down the previous, standardized, yet already problematic, models and categories and emphasizing the individual characteristics and personal implications for each worker involved in the production process.

The way work is organized and performed; the means to appraise its value; the guarantee of rights while assessing the fulfilment of the obligations on which the work performance is based; the integration of performance in complex and often dematerialized or virtual organizations, the interaction and interdependencies between individuals and groups within and outside organizations with a diverse workforce. All of these elements are part of the changing social environment, and each one calls for an effort to update the interpretative categories and the regulatory solutions, taking into account the web of manifold interests that converge on these issues, at times overlapping, at times conflicting.

Against this backdrop, there is a need to establish an integrated framework of knowledge, construct a sound taxonomy of the phenomena under examination, evaluate their impact, outline future perspectives and put forward a comprehensive set of policy proposals.

In order to move the discussion forward, encourage the exchange of views and promote an interdisciplinary debate, the conference will seek contributions from the international scholarly community on topics concerning the assessment of worker performance in a changing social environment from the perspective of the main actors and stakeholders involved, i.e.:

1. The Company

The company can be conceived partly as an active agent and partly as a target of contemporary societal changes. This track will seek to cast light on how emerging phenomena impact on companies.

The dematerialization of production processes and equipment has an impact on the design, execution and assessment of work performance. Online cooperative platforms, algorithms and other digital devices can lead to a de-structuring of personal and functional links at the workplace, raising new issues that challenge existing management theory and legal concepts. They include the collection and use of big data, the re-framing of job descriptions, employment grades and organization charts, the adaptation of the workforce to new processes, the management and monitoring of the execution of the performance and its output, and policies for rewarding and providing incentives for employees. Such transformations may put a strain on the traditional conceptualization of the company as an employer, testing the sustainability of existing categories and giving rise to the need to face new challenges, in particular striking a balance between the need to control, assess and coordinate the performance of work in virtual settings and the aim of promoting autonomy and the development of new competences (by individuals, work groups and organizations as a whole).

At the same time the socio-economic trend known as corporatization, meaning the propensity of companies to establish exclusive regulatory systems to develop their identity and promote their corporate culture, exposes the company to the consequences of the diversification of the workforce, increasing their responsibility to accommodate and manage diversity and reinforcing their accountability as factors of inclusion and access to full citizenship.

Against this background, papers presented under this track may address the previously mentioned issues by focusing on the following, not exhaustive list of research questions:

- To what extent and under which conditions can companies turn digital devices, commonly portrayed as a means to standardize and predetermine the performance of work with a view to maximizing productivity and efficiency, into a means to promote innovation, individual and organizational learning and autonomy in work performance?

- How do companies establish the organizational and operational conditions to ensure that work performance is aligned with the requirements of technological and digital transformation, in terms of job design, job classification, working hours, development of human capital, motivation, incentive schemes and compensation policies?

- What parameters and criteria do companies rely on to assign tasks and goals to employees and to assess the achievement of the expected results in highly automatized and dematerialized organizations?

- How do companies assess the performance of work when the use of quantitative measures is either impossible or unsuitable?

- What methods and techniques of performance assessment may be adopted to strike a balance between the need to control and coordinate work performances increasingly dispersed over time and space, and the aim of promoting autonomy, innovation and the development of new competences in the performance of work? What is the role of digital devices in this respect?

- To what extent does technological transformation give rise to the recourse to flexible employment arrangements, and what features of the employment relationship are most affected by flexibility (e.g. working time, job rotation)?

- Can technological transformation represent a means by which the company can circumvent the obligations entailed in the traditional employment relationship? What are the structural elements linking the company with workers in digital contexts and to what extent do such elements find a suitable formalization?

- What managerial and organizational tools do companies adopt to accommodate the workplace to the increasingly complex demands of a diverse and multicultural workforce?

- What internal schemes and procedures do companies devise to ensure compliance with legal requirements relating to work performance in a changing technological and anthropological scenario (e.g. data protection, reasonable accommodation, health and safety, non-discrimination)?

- To what extent do companies take into account diversity and fairness issues when adopting measures aimed at appraising and rewarding the work performance? What are the implications of an increasingly diverse workforce in the workplace on the design of performance assessment systems and on the assessment of individual performances?

- What strategies do companies implement to turn workforce complexity into an asset, in both the productive/operational and the reputational fields?

- What kind of relationship does the company establish with other stakeholders, including local communities and the public administration, to address the increasing complexity of the work environment in a harmonious and co-ordinated manner?

2. The Worker

Global changes in the world of work have a direct impact on workers, with both positive and negative repercussions. With the emergence of new jobs, and the proliferation of different forms of work organization and performance distinct from the classical schemes of dependent employment, the boundaries between employee, employer and customer are increasingly blurred. This gives rise to legitimate doubts on who should be considered a salaried worker and who should be self-employed? In this connection the grey area of those in the middle with uncertain employment status continues to expand. The positive impact of ICT-related schemes to greater flexibility of work and increased employment opportunities may be offset by exploitation, precarious conditions, discrimination and erosion of basic employment rights dictated by the employers' desire to maximize profits and achieve customer satisfaction at any cost.

Employees who find themselves in this multicultural, extremely diversified and rapidly evolving working environment may be keen to claim new rights, better aligned with their cultural and ideological identity. This may be in contrast with (often legitimate) employer interests, customer demands or general public policy considerations. Employee needs are not always legally protected and the extent to which they are recognized may significantly vary from country to country and from company to company.

Another fundamental right of employees at risk is the right to privacy, that needs updated protections in the light of the increasing opportunities of constant and almost total control. Differences in the national legislations and the weakness or obsolescence of the respective legal provisions at national and international level may lead to social dumping and the avoidance of liability. The profound transformations of the world of work make it necessary to rethink many traditional paradigms in relation to the legal status, rights and obligations of workers as well as performance-assessment criteria, especially crucial in the multicultural and, in some cases, boundless working environment.

Papers presented under this track may address the previously mentioned issues by focusing on the following, not exhaustive list of questions:

- How do new forms of work and performance assessment impact on employee dignity and general well-being at work, including job-related stress?

- How should the protection of privacy be planned and safeguarded in relation to the wide-ranging possibilities of digital control? What information (and which method of gathering information) should be considered for the purposes of performance assessment? How is it

possible to strike a reasonable balance between employee privacy rights and the employer's interests?

- How can employees defend themselves against unfair practices in performance assessment systems? What legal remedies can be adopted in this regard? Are there alternative dispute resolution systems/ mediation procedures? What is the role of trade unions or other representative bodies in this regard?

- How is it possible to establish and enforce the criteria to ensure the maximum transparency and fairness of performance assessment systems? (Legislation, internal company regulations, codes of conduct, collective agreements)?

- How is it possible to strike a balance between the employee's cultural identity, personal beliefs and the values expressed by the company and society as a whole? To what extent should the employee conform to the company values and the founding principles of the social community? How are cross-cultural conflicts and disputes in the workplace prevented and resolved?

- In the case of multinational companies and mergers, how should the cultural differences in the approaches to performance appraisal systems and the perception of fairness by employees be dealt with?

- To what extent and under what conditions can the performance appraisal be a source of learning and motivation for workers? What is the role of new technologies in this respect?

- To what extent and under what conditions can digital devices be a means for the performance of work from the worker's point of view? Under what conditions can they support individual and collective learning in the performance of work, and make workers' competencies, expertise and skills (more) visible with a view to enhancing the workers' reputation in the (internal and external) labour market?

- To what extent different performance assessment systems produce different outcomes in terms of wage discrimination?

3. Public Authorities

Public Authorities as legislators, governments, public administrations and policy-makers are involved in the contemporary societal changes from multiple perspectives.

As legislators and governments, Public Authorities define, regulate and guarantee the public interest enshrined in constitutions and in other legal provisions, where the pursuit of a society's common goals are laid down. Societal changes put this role under strain. There is a widespread view that the political class is increasingly prone to the interests and values of large corporations and other powerful private players, often disguised as the common interest in innovation and economic growth, while failing to strike a balance between competing interest claims. On the other hand, a range of cultural, spiritual and other personal options and conditions demand to be publicly recognized and brought into the context

of the employment relationship, such as the right to display a religious symbol at the workplace. As a result, the State has the task of promoting an open and inclusive society while safeguarding the principles underlying the legal system.

As market regulators, they are responsible for ensuring that innovations are implemented in a way that does not impinge on fair competition and social cohesion. In this respect, the question arises as to whether these conditions are met when work is performed in the framework of online platforms, on-demand digital services and other players in the sharing economy. The same holds true when the State is unable to ensure that the performance of work is not exploited by taking advantage of the particular vulnerability of workers belonging to minorities and other disadvantaged categories.

Overall, in a broad and non-technical sense, Public Authorities are called to "assess" the socio-economic sustainability of the conditions under which work is performed in such a new technical and societal environment.

Furthermore, as employers, Public Administrations are faced with a growing demand for accountability with regard to the quality of the services they provide. This has led to the adoption of models and procedures aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the work performed by civil servants. Although the schemes used in the private sector can serve as a benchmark in this respect, the mission of the public administration is reflected in the specific characterization of public employment, that may require the adoption of special regulatory and organizational solutions.

Papers presented under this track may address these issues by focusing on the following list of questions that is not exhaustive:

- What role are Public Authorities playing in supporting and guiding technological innovation, in the framework of policies such as Industry 4.0 and the Digital Agenda?

- What material and regulatory resources are adopted by Public Authorities to ensure the development of human capital in line with the requirements of technological transformation?

- How can Public Authorities guarantee the enforcement of fundamental rights and freedoms in the context of the performance of work (e.g. non-discrimination, privacy, health and safety) in the new technological and societal environment?

- How effectively are Public Authorities acting as guardians of fair and socially sustainable competition against the background of technological transformation?

- What methodologies and programmes are public administrations adopting to increase the efficiency, quality and accountability of civil servants' actions, in terms of planning, assessment and rewarding of work performance?

4. Customers

The digitalization of the economy gives an increasing importance to the involvement of customers in the production and distribution process. In recent decades the customers' role has shifted from that of a passive buyer to an active stakeholder (or even shareholder). Whereas in the past, with the relevant exception of the Public Sector, customers were not considered an integral part of the organization, the advent of social media has broken down traditional barriers between employees, customers and employers making them more interdependent and blurring boundaries between their roles and status, giving rise to what is known as as "prosumerism" (merging the concept of producer and consumer). In the context of the sharing economy and networking, the company, the employees and the company act as resource integrators constantly interacting, sharing and learning from each other. New technologies and social media have enabled customers to share their experience in relation to a good or poor performance, thus generating free publicity that may be advantageous or harmful for the company and employees. Moreover, the customers can influence the choices of other customers, even at a great distance.

In conditions of intense competition, companies seek to control this flow of information and customer relations. This may be achieved partly through a constructive and constant dialogue with the customers and partly through a deeper involvement of the customer in the production, creation and marketing of products and services. In this way the customers take on multiple roles becoming co-producers, co-distributors, co-promoters, co-manufactures, co-ideators, co-evaluators, co-designers, and innovators. As a consequence, their roles and responsibilities are emphasized.

One of the important prerogatives the digital economy confers on the customer is to be able to carry out the direct or indirect assessment of product or service by posting reviews or ratings to express their satisfaction. In this way the customer has the possibility to influence the employer's decisions in relation to the assessment of worker performance and other strategic decisions regarding employees' hiring/ firing, salary (bonuses) and career advancement. Performance assessment systems have already become important for the public administration in relation to citizens' claims for greater accountability and efficiency of civil servants. Even if the respective assessment have a legal basis, aims and consequences that are different for workers in the Public and the Private sectors, mutual learning is already a fact. The question arises as to how to ensure the fairness of the assessment (in most cases subjective) that may derive from discriminatory and abusive motives or simply from a desire to discredit rivals. Moreover, customer assessment can provide to an unprecedented extent management with additional possibilities to discriminate against workers and undermine basic employment rights.

Papers presented under this conference strand may address the previously mentioned issues by focusing on the following, not exhaustive set of questions:

- What are the instruments and procedures adopted by companies to measure customer satisfaction as far as the worker performance is concerned? How are those measures implemented in practice and what are the consequences for the employees? What is the difference, if any, in this field between the private and public sector?

- To what extent do customer assessment influence the strategic choices of employers? Who decides the role the customer should play? Are there any legislative limitations in this regard?

- How is it possible to ensure the fairness of customer assessment in relation to the worker? Are there any particular requirements (additional safeguards) if the evaluation is carried out by an algorithm or other digital means?

- Customer involvement in the production, delivery and evaluation process might imply the need to grant powers and responsibilities previously entrusted to employees/managers. How should any conflicts be dealt with from an organizational and legal perspective?

- May the performance assessment made by customers become a source of learning/improvement/motivation for the employee?

- What are the consequences of the employer's distorted use of the customer assessment system? How is it possible to prevent discrimination/unfairness in the evaluation of employee performance? What legal means are available to employees to defend themselves and their reputation against unfair/discriminatory evaluation?

- Are there any tasks or occupations in which the performance is more suitable to be assessed by customers and others that are not?

- Since the customers' assessment may provide a record of employee's work experience, is there any way to ensure the transferability of customer assessments?

- How do customer satisfaction measurement tools interact or overlap with traditional systems of the worker performance assessment?

- How can customers' performance assessment systems contribute to the identification of best practices in the public and private sector?

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SUBMISSIONS

Participants who intend to contribute a paper to one of the conference tracks should submit an **expression of interest** by **20 July 2017** with:

- the title of the proposed paper;
- a brief description of about **150 words (not including the bibliography)**, that should outline the topic and highlight the nature of the paper (theoretical analysis, discussion paper, presentation of empirical data, and so on);

- the disciplinary (or inter-disciplinary) domain of the paper (e.g. Labour Law, Organization Theory, Labour Economics);
- the author's affiliation;
- an indication of the conference track the paper for which the paper is intended. In this respect, the Organizing Committee reserves the right to assign papers to the track and session they consider to be most appropriate.

Expressions of interest will selected by the Organizing Committee by **1 September 2017**.

Selected authors will be invited to present an extended abstract (**2000 words, bibliography excluded**) no later than **13 October 2017.** Abstracts should include a brief discussion of the results and conclusions of the paper.

Extended abstracts will be selected by the Organizing Committee by **30 October 2017**.

Selected authors will be required to submit a paper of **8000 - 10000 words** no later than **31 January 2018**. The papers should present a complete piece of research rather than simply the description of work in progress.

In cases in which it is not possible to accommodate all the contributions in the plenary or parallel sessions, the Organizing Committee may offer authors the opportunity to present their work in the poster sessions.

The Organizing Committee reserves the right to refuse full papers that are not consistent with the conference tracks or with the expression of interest/full abstract previously approved.

The Organizing Committee will select the contributions to be included, after revision, in the conference proceedings to be published in 2019 by an international publisher. By submitting their final papers, the authors agree to the publication of their paper in the proceedings in case of acceptance by the Organizing Committee, in compliance with the no-multiple-submissions rule.

The working language of the conference sessions is English, and no interpreting services will be available. Abstracts and papers should be submitted in English.

DEADLINES

- Deadline for submission of expressions of interest: **20 July 2017.**

- Deadline for submission of extended abstracts: **13 October 2017.**

- Deadline for submission of full papers: **31 January 2018.**

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Expressions of interest, abstracts and full papers, as well as the requests of information, should be addressed to: Iacopo Senatori (Researcher, Marco Biagi Foundation): **iacopo.senatori@unimore.it**

The first draft of the conference programme will be distributed by the end of **January 2018**.

Further information will be posted on the Marco Biagi Foundation website **www.fmb.unimore.it**