

# Public Organisations Smart Working for Innovation

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## **Abstract**

Smart organizations rely on promoting human and technological capital in order to drive innovative and collaborative processes. Public organizations are going smart and working smart to drive collaborative and innovation-led processes. Collaborative innovation helps public organizations to contribute to value creation by going smart and agile by developing the potential of information and communication technology as an enabler of smart and agile work practices. Smart working helps shape work relationships in ways that enhance collaborative work spaces, opening the way for organizational innovation. Public organizations support a smart working mindset to enhance collaborative innovation. Smart public organizations support smart working as a way to drive collaborative innovation. Smart working introduction, experimentation, and developments provide an opportunity to drive digital modernization and transformation within public administration. Smart work practices empower people at work who behave with autonomy and flexibility in order to improve job satisfaction and quality of life within communities. The study is theoretical and relies on a literature review and analysis related to public organizations that aim to drive innovation by embracing information technology for constructing collaborative frameworks, managing smart work practices, and developing the opportunities of acting digitally and effectively across time and space.

## **Keywords**

*Smart Organizations; Public Organizations; Collaborative Innovation; Smart Working.*

## **Introduction**

Today, the advent of emerging information and communication technology is driving innovation-oriented, digital, smart, and agile public organizations (Mellouli, Luna-Reyes, & Zhang, 2014) that are rethinking on to identify sustainable visions by using the potential of digitalization and information technology and communication for engendering working practices that contribute to future societal development. Organizations are going smart to drive deep changes in processes and innovation at work. Introducing and embracing a smart-led mindset in work processes enhances employee interaction, social exchange, and cooperation, leading to innovative collaboration frameworks. Smart organizations perform better by promoting collaborative relationships and innovation within work environments (Matheson & Matheson, 2001), promoting cooperation and social exchange with civil society, supporting private-public innovative collaboration (Torfing, 2019). Promoting digital transformation helps to spread smartness as a key source for innovation and to drive smart working in public organizations for effective innovation (Gil-Garcia, Zhang, & Puron-Cid, 2016).

Smart government supports open and public innovation within a networked governance (Hartley, 2005; Mergel, 2018), enabling citizens as active co-producers of

public value (Moore, 1995), digitalizing processes by rethinking the work organization (Schendler, Guenduez, & Frischknecht, 2019). Smart work enables public organizations to become smart institutions and organizations that support human capital, and to improve digitalization processes that enhance human resource management systems and organizational practices. Smart work refers to people, technology, organizations, and practices for human resources value management. Smart work refers to a change management process (De Marco, Marcone, & Scarozza, 2022). Smart work supports space and time flexibility, leading to social, technological and organizational integration (Cuel, Ravarini, Ruffini, & Varriale, 2021).

The study aims to elucidate how public organizations are becoming smart working organizations that support collaborative innovation. The paper is conceptual. It proposes an interpretative view on social, organizational and technological issues emerging in relation to the pandemic crisis and considering the opportunities for collaboration and innovation at work.

The advent of a new *coronavirus* (Sars-Cov2) able to infect also the humans, causing, in particular, many cases of pneumonia, was opening to the rise of *COVID-19* that was leading to a worldwide pandemic health crisis which impacted on the life of people and organizations, driving companies to redesign the organizational arrangements, accelerating digitalization, and enabling information technology as a key source for change management and innovation. The organizational responses to the advent of pandemic *COVID-19* refer to the use of information technology at work as enabled by information technology in transitioning from telework and remote working to smart or agile working as an open space without boundaries and ready for fostering collaboration by revisiting the work organization, and leading to an increase of remote working, teleworking and online working, supporting smart, flexible, hybrid and agile working practices and organizational redesign during the most acute phase of pandemic health crisis (Politecnico di Milano, 2021; Viceconte, 2020). During *COVID-19* pandemic health crisis, smart or agile working was emerging as an innovative phenomenon and work design experiment, becoming part of a process of profound cultural and organizational changes (Torre & Sarti, 2018), empowering managers and followers to improve the information technology-enabled work relationships (Harris, 2003).

The smart future of organizations and work should provide benefits and drive digital transformation for society (Veglianti, 2023), enabling work spaces for meeting places that enhance social, digital, and human components (Torre, 2024). Smart working is a multidisciplinary revolution that requires integrated governance among the players involved (Hur, Cho, Lee, & Bickerton, 2019). It goes beyond teleworking as a way to work at distance from the company's offices. The potential and opportunities offered by technologies enable people and organizations to redefine their relationships in order to provide mutual benefits and contribute to new ways and arrangements that support performance, value creation, and wellbeing as drivers of better quality of life and approaches in interpreting the working between organization and community within the society.

Technologies help to rethink on transformational as well as innovative organizational models and environments. Digital transformation helps improve organizational performance, driving technological and organizational changes within public

administration and fostering a smart pathway towards a Smart State (Gil Garcia, 2012), creating innovative places for collaborative work (Hu, 2020).

The paper is structured into six sections. After the introduction and theoretical background on public organizations managing collaborative innovation, the methodological section is presented. In the following paragraphs, smart public organizations are rising by driving innovation. Smart working is advancing to support collaborative innovation across work practices and organizational environments. Finally, discussion and conclusions are outlined.

## **Towards public organizations and collaborative innovation**

Innovation refers to intentional and proactive processes for breeding new and creative ideas (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017) and relies on doing things in new ways, and refers both to a discontinuity with the past, and to the development and implementation of new ideas that disrupt the common wisdom (Osborne & Brown, 2011). Public innovation is viewed as a continuous improvement (Hartley, 2005) and relates to collaborative interaction among public and private actors such as politicians, civil servants, private firms, and community-based associations (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017). Collaborative innovation relies both on engaging public and private actors in a trust-based dialogue to engender innovative solutions, integrating them in the innovation cycle, and bringing together both a similarity of education and values among the actors and diversity of views and ideas as necessary sources to stimulate creative problem solving (Torfing, 2019).

Digital-driven public innovation supports collaborative processes, enables value co-creation, and develops through public-private partnerships (Bertot, Estevez, & Janowski, 2018). Digitalization supports favorable organizational and behavioral issues (Scupola & Zanferi, 2016). Digital-led public innovation develops collaboratively and relies on enabling employees to explore new innovation opportunities, who can meet users and involve them in the innovation process. Technology helps open innovation-driven public organizations to include external knowledge in decision-making processes (Mergel, 2018).

## **Methodological section**

The study is conceptual, exploratory, and theoretical because the boundaries between public organizations going smart, innovation, technologies, collaborative frameworks and digitalization for smart work are not yet defined in a satisfying way. Conceptual papers regard untested relationships and aim to propose new relationships among constructs, focusing on integration and association of logical arguments, without providing data (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). The study is theoretical and relies on a literature review and analysis related to public organizations that aim to drive innovation by embracing information technology in order to develop smartness, by enabling smart working as a mode to create collaborative innovation at work, and strengthening digital and smart platforms to contribute to public value creation. The research is exploratory and concerns some fields of the study of public organizations. The role of digital and interactive information and communication technology is

relevant to understanding innovation within organizations. The use of information technology concerns both the fields of research related to public innovation. The concept of smartness is rising with regard to the advent of agile and smart working practices within work relationships. The study refers to the analysis of articles related to the linkage between smart working practices and public organizations going and working smart in order to drive collaborative innovation. The smart working theme is considered a field of experimentation within public organizations that are driving innovation by investing in smart solutions to address public value creation. The selected contributions are drawn from the literature related to smart public organizations working to drive innovative collaboration by using digital information technology. The selected contributions are synthesized narratively to elucidate new perspectives and advance theoretical frameworks for emerging issues (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006; Dixon-Woods *et al.*, 2004).

### **Public organizations are going smart**

Smart organizations promote collaborative relationships and innovation (Matheson & Matheson, 2001). Digitalization is leading to smart, intelligent, and cooperative organizations that are capable of managing complexity (Viceconte, 2020). Smartness is becoming a key source for innovation. Digital transformation supports change and innovation in public sector organizations through organizational design, work processes, cultural orientation to results, and customer satisfaction. Digitalization processes in government bring together human capital development and community-led and citizen-centered approaches to public services delivery and innovation (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2005). Digital transformation also relies on employees' and managers' skills and competencies (Buonocore, 2020). Technology helps public organizations to become more agile, flexible, and adaptive organizations (Mergel, Gong & Bertot, 2018). Smart and innovative public organizations are using information technology to improve the quality of life, interacting with citizens and engaging them to participate in and co-produce new services (Mellouli, Luna-Reyes, & Zhang, 2014).

Innovation is a key dimension that characterizes smartness in government (Gil-Garcia, Zhang & Puron-Cid, 2016). Smart government means rethinking the way governments work by digitalising processes in order to support innovativeness and collaboration (Schendler, Guenduez, & Frischknecht, 2019), catalysing innovation to drive public administration as smart organization (Gil-Garcia, Helbig, & Ojo, 2016), leading to a smart State, strengthening inter-organizational collaboration, information sharing and integration. Digital and smart public organisations involve private and public actors, developing knowledge and capabilities in the pursuit of public goals (Gil-Garcia, 2012), by involving citizens in policy-making for sustaining public values, equity and development (Janowski, 2015).

### **Working smart within collaborative and innovative workplaces and organizations**

Smart working supports employee freedom, accountability, and flexibility with regard to places, times, and tools to be used at work for results. Smart working supports social

collaboration and relies on managers who are able to promote a sense of community, empowerment, and flexibility. Smart working visions and applications contribute to introducing a new management philosophy, leadership behaviors, and styles. According to Sarti and Torre (2017), smart working vision and practice help to modify the traditional work framework and environment, leading to a new search for different and undefined solutions for better employee work, performance, and well-being. Today, working by developing the potential offered by information technology refers to smart, dynamic, or agile working practices that contribute to value creation and empower the relationships between the organization and people. The future of work relies on promoting the interplay between new work practices, digitalization, and employees' working approaches (Comacchio, 2021). Smart working helps to drive organizational innovation and support cultural change (Torre & Sarti, 2018), leading to workspaces that foster open collaborative innovation, bridging work time and space (Hu, 2020).

Smart work facilitates communication, interaction, social and creative collaboration among employees (Hu, 2020), and encourages social exchange between followers and leaders (Iannotta & Meret, 2020), leading to the monitoring of physical, technological and social dimensions of working in agile ways. Smart work helps shape social change, leading the employees to redefine better their time, work, space, and life for wellbeing (Butera, 2020), and opening to collaboration within organizational environments (Hur, Cho, Lee, & Bickerton, 2019).

Smart work refers to an internal working process within smart government for efficient government achievement and employee high quality of life (Eom, Choi, & Sung, 2016). Smart working refers to organizational models that shape the relationships between the individual and the organization and that propose autonomy in working methods to achieve results. Smart work refers to a results-oriented, social, and collaborative framework, and supports a networked way of operating. Smart and agile work, or ubiquitous working, is conceived as a way that enables a new view of work organization, which may benefit both the employee, ensuring a smart work-life balance, and the organization, improving cost reduction and driving productivity improvement (Butera, 2020).

The work enabled by technology should always be smart. Smart work relies on an intelligent rethinking of the way and modes of working. Smart working is emerging as an innovative approach to organizational work and to human resource management policies and practices (Decastri, Gagliarducci, Previtali, & Scarozza, 2020). Public organizations are experimenting technological advancements to offer their employees new ways of working, overcoming physical and time barriers, and designing work organization modes based on telework, home-based telework, mobile work (Reina & Scarozza, 2020), and embracing a smart working approach by redefining the work organization to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, and to enhance flexibility and autonomy, promoting collaboration and cooperative frameworks (Ravarini, Cuel, & Varriale, 2020).

Introducing and implementing smart working approaches, practices, and policies helps to develop results-driven and collaboration-oriented organizations, and empowers the managers who are playing a proactive role in driving the employees at work and

sharing with them the organizational goals by following a collaborative approach (Politecnico di Milano, 2018).

Digitalization helps to enhance collaborative spaces and blended forms of work, integrating physical, digital, and relational aspects and sides (Montanari, 2020). Adopting smart working practices supports larger innovation and autonomy at work. Smart working helps to support cultural change and relies on organizational innovations that provide a detailed roadmap (Torre & Sarti, 2018). Promoting smart working practices helps to rethink a new workplace that strengthens interaction and collaboration, leading deliberately to changing attitudes and behaviours of both employees and their managers. Smart working could become the norm, driving continuous change management and innovation at work (De Marco, Marcone, & Scarozza, 2022).

Smart working allows better balance between quality of life and individual productivity, and focuses on integration and collaboration between people and organizations, enabling management to play an essential role to drive high performance and employee satisfaction, and construct favorable manager-employee relationships, in redesigning the boundaries between home and work, and enabling management to empower the employees to better work through technologies (Harris, 2003).

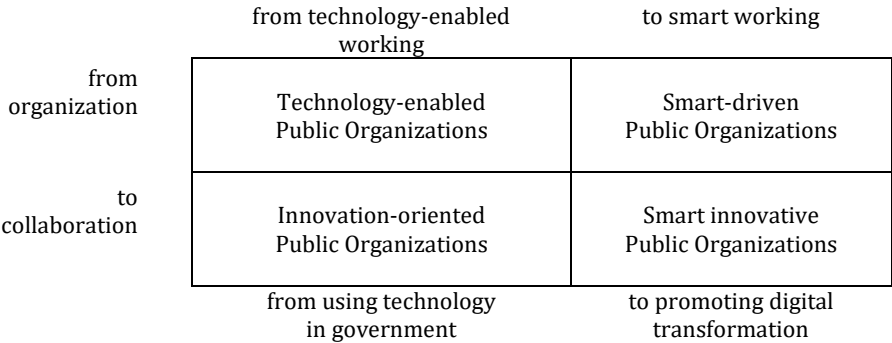
Smart working helps to shape smart, flexible, collaborative working spaces and to foster openness-driven and knowledge-exchange-oriented organizational culture in work environments, fostering autonomy and coaching, leading to self-management of employees, and supporting flexibility, coherence, and integration (Iannotta & Meret, 2020).

## Conclusions

Smart organizations and work are interrelated modes of rethinking more productive, efficient, and wealthy practices for value creation processes and organizational well-being. Smart working organizations enable collaborative, innovative workspaces that facilitate information and knowledge exchange and transfer among employees. Technological advancements are driving innovation in public organizations. Digital transformation in the public sector relies on collaborative innovation that supports smartness and empowerment at work, and helps change the way employees and the organizations relate to workplace management. Driving collaborative innovation allows organizations to develop digital platforms and processes, shaping meeting places for work and cooperation between organizations and the community, by involving the civil society.

The information and digital technology enable public organizations to identify a smart way to redesign the work organization and develop human capital. Smart working public organizations support collaborative innovation processes and contribute to value creation, empowering people, enhancing smart working as a collaborative space that enables innovation, leading to innovative behaviors and attitudes of employees, managers, citizens, and other stakeholders involved in the collaborative processes.

As shown in Figure 1, the study aims to identify some pathways that public organizations are proceeding by becoming smart organizations which contribute to public value creation and support the development of communities in long-term horizon, promoting the shift from technology-enabled working to smart, agile and intelligent working, by implementing the digitalization processes, and identifying innovation-oriented processes and services, promoting organizational and cultural changes in long-term.



**Figure 1. Towards public organizations going smart for innovation at work**

Smart and innovative public organizations contribute to shaping collaborative spaces by leveraging digitalization to enable smart working and drive innovation in collaborative frameworks that involve communities. Public organizations are rethinking a smart view, following a service logic view of public services delivery and design within communities. Technology helps to drive collaborative innovation, enhancing organizational, social, and human dimensions, and enabling managers and employees to develop collaboration, knowledge sharing, and empowerment.

Smart organizations rely on human and technological capital in order to drive innovative and collaborative processes, and facilitate new ideas and implementation with regard to the ways of arranging work organization and practices. Smart work practices and initiatives facilitate the building of hybrid workplaces and organizations in order to effectively govern the interdependences among technological and human sources, shaping digital and physical working meeting places that contribute to social innovation, performance, productivity, and value creation processes.

This study has some limitations. This study identifies only a theoretical framework for analysis to understand the pathway to smart, innovative public organizations, leveraging the potential of digitalization and information technology to support cooperative and collaborative processes. Thereby, no case studies are provided in the analysis. Public organizations are still in infancy in rethinking and reshaping a smart mindset and planning on dealing with smart organizational innovation.

Further research will consider how the hypothesized propositions can be applied within local autonomies, translated into managerial and leadership training programs, tested in human resources policies and practices, and how technological advancements and digital platforms contribute to community- and collaborative-workplace development.



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