

Towards Smart Working Organizations

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Abstract

The advanced rise of information and digital technology is driving public organizations as smart working organizations which drive innovation and collaboration and support public value creation. Smart working is emerging as a new way to shape the workplaces and work relationships as collaborative innovation. Public organizations drive innovation, using the potential of information technology to support digital, smart, lean, and open platforms for value creation. Developing smart working enables public organizations to adopt a service logic view and contribute to both value creation processes and collaborative innovation. The rise of smart working as collaborative and organizational innovation helps to strengthen managerial and human dimensions in work relationships and organization through advanced information technology.

Keywords

Public organizations; collaborative innovation, smart working; information technology.

Introduction

Today, the advent of advanced information and communication technology (ICT) is driving innovation in public administration, leading to digital, smart, and agile government. Following both a service logic and public value management view to public value creation (Osborne, 2018; Stoker, 2006), public organizations are rethinking how to drive innovative collaboration as a key source of public innovation (Törfin, 2019), achieving sustainability as a vision for change (Goodsell, 2006; Fiorino, 2010), promoting cooperation and social exchange with civil society and governance networks within social ecosystems (Dumay, Guthrie, & Farneti, 2010).

Smartness has become a desirable outcome and key source for sustainability and innovation. ICT is opening up the way to smarter public organizations (Gil-Garcia, Zhang, & Puron-Cid, 2016). Smart organizations perform better (Matheson and Matheson, 2001). Advanced smart technology and digitalization in government are leading to a smart State through the strengthening of inter-organizational, information sharing, and integration (Gil-Garcia, 2012). As smart organizations, public organizations support innovation and develop smartness in government as a way to continue the work by efficiency and effectiveness, and deliver services and operations (Gil-Garcia, Zhang, & Puron-Cid, 2016).

Public organizations are promoting innovation at the top of the public reform agenda through collaborative processes to support value creation (Ansell & Törfin, 2014). The rise of information technology is opening up to digital and smart public organizations as enablers of social and public value creation (Moore, 1995).

It is time to rethink the role of public organizations becoming smart organizations that contribute to continuous innovation and drive smart working as a collaborative innovation that enhances both the wealth and performance of employees within workplaces. Smart government helps to drive successful modernization in the public sector, rethinking the way by which government works by digitalizing processes (Schendler, Guenduez, & Frischknecht, 2019).

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic is originated with the rise of a new *coronavirus* (Sars-Cov2), which can infect also humans, causing, in particular, many cases of pneumonia, leading to severe acute respiratory syndrome-related. The rise of Covid-19 as a pandemic health question has led to a worldwide health crisis and has impacted the lives of people and organizations, stopping the normal continuing of social and economic organizational activities, and leading to restrictions in mobility and working *onsite*. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has led companies to reimagine the *online* working and rethink how to restructure the work organization *online*, by redesigning the organizational arrangements, accelerating digitalization, and enabling information technology as a key source for driving innovation and promoting changes in the organizational framework.

During the COVID-19 health crisis, the use of information technology has increasingly oriented the smart working as a part of a process of cultural and organizational changes (Torre & Sarti, 2018), empowering managers and followers in improving the ICT-enabled work relationships (Harris, 2003), and overcoming the merely working at a distance in virtue of historical contingencies (Dambrin, 2004; Munir et al., 2018), by rethinking a smart work organization developing the potential of ICT (Viceconte, 2020).

The use of information technology at work is opening to a space of collaboration by revisiting the work organization and leading to an increase of remote working, teleworking, and online working, and supporting smart working practices. During the most acute phase of the emergence from COVID-19, for example, smart working involved 97% of large companies, 94% of Italian public administrations, and 58% of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), for a total of 6.58 million agile workers, about one-third of Italian employees, more than ten times more than the 570 thousand surveyed in 2019 (Politecnico di Milano, 2021).

The employees in private companies and public organizations have therefore experienced a different way of working as enabled by ICT in transition from telework and remote working to smart working. The rise and diffusion of technology-enabled and smart working practices help to support knowledge sharing practices and enhance the human dimension within no governmental organizations (Zbucea, Ivan, Petropoulos, & Pinzaru, 2019).

This study aims to elucidate how public organizations are becoming smart working organizations, using the potential of information technology to enhance collaborative processes, strengthening managerial and technological capabilities.

The manuscript is structured in five sections. Following the introduction and methodological section, in the third paragraph, the rise of advanced information technology is leading to smart organizations which are driving public innovation through the lens of collaborative innovation as theoretical background. In the fourth paragraph, smart working is conceived as collaborative innovation which is enabling work, and organizational places as collaborative spaces which enhance the employee-manager relationships, following a social, interactive, and relational dimension. Finally, discussion and conclusions are outlined.

Methodological section

The study is theoretical and relies on a literature review and analysis which is related to public organizations that aim to drive innovation by embracing information technology to develop smartness and sustainability, by opening to smart working as collaborative and organizational innovation, and strengthening digital and smart platforms to contribute to value creation for public wealth. The selected contributions are drawn by literature related to smart and sustainable public organizations in relationship with the use of ICT that enables both smart working practices as an innovative and collaborative approach to work organization and digital and smart platforms as evolution of advanced information technology in government. The selected contributions are interpreted in a narrative synthesis to elucidate new perspectives and advance theoretical frameworks on emerging issues (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006; Dixon-Woods, Agarwall, Young, Jones, & Sutton, 2004).

Driving collaborative innovation through information technology

Innovation refers to the introduction of new elements into public service to be considered as discontinuity with the past (Osborne & Brown 2005). Public innovation is viewed as a continuous improvement of existing practices (Hartley, 2005). Innovation refers to the development and implementation of new ideas that disrupt the common wisdom (Osborne & Brown, 2011). Innovation «involves a step change that problematizes and transforms the way that things are usually imagined and done» (Törfling, 2019, p. 1). It is about «embracing new ways of thinking about problems and solutions and doing a new thing in new ways» (Crosby, t Hart, & Törfling, 2017, pp. 656-657). Innovation refers to an «intentional and proactive process that involves the generation and practical adoption and spread of new and creative ideas, which aim to produce a qualitative change in a specific context» (Sørensen and Törfling, 2011, p. 849). Public sector innovation develops through collaborative processes that involve public and private organizations, and facilitate value co-creation processes (Ansell and Törfling, 2014), coherently with a service logic view (Osborne, 2018).

While collaboration implies a similarity of education and values among the actors, innovation relies on the diversity of views and ideas as necessary sources to stimulate creative problem solving (Törfling, 2019). Collaborative innovation helps to support value creation within public organizations. Collaborative interaction helps to transform the structure of government in a significant way (Nambisan, 2008), and to promote multi-actor collaboration as a source to develop and implement innovative solutions (Törfling, 2019) for value creation (Osborne, 2010). Collaborative innovation

implies that the innovation process is opened up to actors from within the organization, other organizations, the private and third sector, and citizens that are integrated into the innovation cycle (Bommert, 2010).

Innovation is a non-linear and iterative process. The role of public managers is to enable open and flexible spaces for collaborative interaction with relevant actors. Collaborative innovation for public value creation requires that «managers should develop a pragmatic understanding of when and how different government and nongovernment actors should be a part of the collaborative endeavor» (Crosby, t Hart, & Törfing, 2017, p. 663).

Smart working public organizations driving collaborative innovation

Public organizations contribute to value creation processes by using the potential of ICT to communicate with citizens and various stakeholders as active co-producers of social, democratic, and public values (Criado & Gil-Garcia, 2019; Moore, 1995). The use of information technology in government is leading to sustainable, digital, and smart public organizations (Larsson & Grönlund, 2014; Larsson & Grönlund, 2016; Granier & Kudo, 2016; Janowski, 2015). Digital technology is driving the transformation of the relationships between sustainability-oriented public organizations and public services users by promoting driven e-governance platforms for co-construction and co-innovation where the locus of co-production is the service system (Osborne, Radnor, & Strokosch, 2016).

The use of information technology enables public organizations to drive a community/citizen-centered approach to public services design (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2005), empowering the citizen as a responsible partner in the co-production of public services (Linders, 2012), developing digital platforms and spaces, and virtual communities that contribute to networked co-production and value co-creation (Fishenden & Thompson, 2013).

The rise of advanced technology is opening up to digital and smart public organizations following a service logic and public value view, by involving civil society and promoting interaction and citizen-centered services effectiveness (Osborne, 2018; Dumay, Guthrie, & Farneti, 2010; Stoker, 2006; O'Flynn, 2007; Moore, 1995). Smart government initiatives involve government and non-government actors to improve the quality of life for people and communities (Gil-Garcia, Zhang, & Puron-Cid, 2016).

Digitalization is leading to building smart organizations able to manage complexity by using simplicity, intelligence, and collaboration (Viceconte, 2020). Public organizations are using the potential of information technology to drive public organizations as digital and smart platforms and collaborative spaces to enable value creation processes within social ecosystems (Osborne, 2018; Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014; Harrison, Pardo, & Cook, 2012). Digital transformation in public sector organizations implies to use of technology for driving change and innovation in organizational design, work processes, cultural orientation to results, and customer satisfaction, relying on the skills and competencies of employees and managers

(Buonocore, 2020). Technology helps to drive public organizations as more agile, flexible, and adaptive organizations (Mergel, Gong, & Bertot, 2018).

By using information technology, public organizations are becoming smart and innovative in creating new services for their citizens to improve their quality of life, interacting with citizens and engaging them to participate (Mellouli, Luna-Reyes, & Zhang, 2014) to serve the public interest as the result of dialogue with citizens (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). As key components of government administrative reform, the role of information and communication technology is to help the building of a smart State through the strengthening of inter-organizational, information sharing, and integration (Gil-Garcia, 2012). Smart government means rethinking the way governments works by digitalizing processes through the use of emerging technology and relying also on perceptions and expectation of public managers for success or failure. Smart government initiatives require both innovativeness and collaboration (Schendler, Guenduez, & Frischknecht, 2019). Information technology catalyzes innovations in government, leading to public administration as a smart organization able to achieve agile and resilient government and governance infrastructure (Gil Garcia, Helbig, & Ojo, 2014). «Smart is not an end state, but can be an enabling condition that may or may not lead to other desirable outcomes» (Gil-Garcia, Helbig, & Ojo, 2014, p. 12).

Today, working by developing the potential offered by information technology refers to smart working or agile working. The work as enabled by technology should be always smart. Smart working is emerging as an innovative approach to work organization and human resource management (Decastri, Galiarducci, Previtali, & Scarozza, 2020). Public organizations are experimenting with the widespread usage of technological advancements to offer their employees new ways of working, overcoming physical and time barriers, designing work organization modes based on telework, home-based telework, mobile work (Reina & Scarozza, 2020), and embracing a smart working approach in redefining the work organization to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, and to enhance flexibility and autonomy, promoting collaboration (Ravarini, Cuel, & Varriale, 2020). Public organizations are driving smart working practices, by embracing the potential of information technology, giving value to the relationship between the administration and the employees (Reina & Scarozza, 2020; Ravarini, Cuel, & Varriale, 2020).

Digital public service innovation as a collaborative process helps to drive co-creation and support the development of public-private partnerships (Bertot, Estevez, & Janowski, 2018). The advent of digital and interactive information technology helps to strengthen collaborative public co-production and co-creation, leading to open public innovation (Criado et al., 2021). The potential offered by information technology is opening to unexpected and favorable organizational and behavioral issues (Scupola & Zanferi, 2016). Digital government systems are driving collaborative processes (Dawes & Pardo, 2002). Digital public innovation and digitalization processes develop collaboratively and enable more actors who are proactively involved in collaboration and rely on employees as explorers of innovation opportunities, meeting the users who can play an active role in the innovation process. The use of information technology helps public organizations to develop open innovation by including external

knowledge in decision-making processes (Mergel, 2018). Digital public service innovation helps the development of public-private partnerships by engaging the citizens and the community (Bertot, Estevez, & Janowski, 2018).

Smart working as collaborative innovation in workplaces and organization

Driving smart working helps to promote a results-driven and collaboration-oriented organization, strengthening the role of managers in empowering the employees at work and sharing with them the organizational goals by following a collaborative approach (Politecnico di Milano, 2018).

As Harris has stated (2003) «taking work into home environment challenges and changes the responsibilities of employers accustomed to a traditional employment relationship» (p. 435). Butera (2020) has defined smart and agile work or *ubiquitous working* as a way that enables a new view to work organization which may benefit both the employee, ensuring a smart work-life balance, and the organization, improving costs reduction and driving productivity improvement. Smart work is results-oriented, social and collaborative, and refers to a networked way of operating.

Smart working refers to an organizational model that shapes the relationships between the individual and the organization, which proposes autonomy in working methods in exchange for the achievement of results. It relies on an intelligent rethinking of the way by which work activities are carried out, even within company spaces, removing constraints and inadequate models linked to the concepts of fixed workstations, open spaces, and single offices that are ill-suited to the principles of personalization, flexibility, and virtuality (Gastaldi, Corso, Raguseo, Neirotti, Paolucci, & Martini, 2014). Transforming the workplace by technology helps to support value creation processes at work in terms of productivity, efficiency, absenteeism, staff retention, and talent attraction too (Tagliaferro & Ciaramella, 2016).

Digitalization is leading to enhancing collaborative spaces at work, promoting blended forms of work between the physical, digital, and relational sides (Montanari, 2020). Smart working helps to support cultural change and requires organizational innovation for which a detailed roadmap must be provided (Torre & Sarti, 2018). Smart working is defined as a new management philosophy based on providing employees with freedom and flexibility in choosing the place, time, and tools used in their work, in conditions of greater responsibility and accountability for results.

Smart working requires social collaboration and managers who can promote a sense of community, empowerment, flexibility, and virtuality. Organizational policies, technology, physical layout and leadership behavior, and styles exert influence on the success of smart working practices and approaches (Crespi, 2016). Adopting smart working practices helps to support larger autonomy and foster confidence and propensity towards innovation (Langé & Gastaldi, 2020). Smart working practices are agile, dynamic, and emergent, as the outcomes of designed organizational systems that facilitate customer-focused, value-creating relationships that benefit the organization and people (McEwan, 2016).

The rise and widespread diffusion of smart working-oriented practices are opening up to a new smart workplace as a collaborative space that is driving employees to use information technology as a means for strengthening interaction and collaboration, reinforcing shared norms, goals, and identification. Smart working helps to foster an openness-driven and knowledge-exchange-oriented smart organizational culture in the work environment. Promoting smart working practices helps to rethink a new workplace which is deliberately designed to produce changing attitudes and behaviors of both employees and their managers, by overcoming obstacles that refer to employees' social isolation and managers' resistance toward remote working (Errichiello & Pianese, 2019).

Smart working is emerging as a collaborative space for flexible work: «the adoption of smart working implies that employees can choose when and where to work and select among various workspaces both outside (e.g. home and coffee shop) and inside (e.g. open spaces and concentration areas) the organizations» (Errichiello & Pianese, 2019, p. 299). Smart working helps to drive organizational innovation as a means to support cultural change (Torre & Sarti, 2018). As a new way of interpreting the work, smart working allows a better balance between quality of life and individual productivity and focuses on integration and collaboration between people, in particular, and between organizations, in general. It is an intrinsically multidisciplinary revolution, which requires integrated governance among the players involved (Hur, Cho, Lee, & Bickerton, 2019).

The role of management is central to driving high performance and satisfaction of employees working, dealing with the technology between home and office. In particular, managers have a delicate task in recalibrating perceptions of the boundaries between home and work to develop positive employee relationships (Harris, 2003). Working by technology enhances the role of middle managers: «telework contributes to developing the manager's coaching role and leads to shifting middle managers' role towards more monitoring and less close supervision» (Dambrin, 2004, p. 364). Telework helps to foster autonomy, leading to self-management of employees and driving managers as coaches than controllers. Promoting leadership for smart working helps to ensure flexibility, coherence, and integration (Iannotta & Meret, 2020).

Discussion and conclusion

Technological advancements and developments are driving innovation in public organizations and changing the way by which employees and organizations relate to workplace management. Digital transformation in the public sector implies driving processes that foster collaboration, smartness, and empowerment at work.

As sustainability-oriented and smart-driven organizations, public organizations develop and integrate strategic, managerial, and technological capabilities to gain the benefits of technological innovation as a source that enables organizations and employees to contribute to value creation processes. Public organizations strengthen the potential of digital and smart government and platforms by involving civil society

and interacting with citizens within both networked governance and shared partnerships for breeding value for the community. Innovation always concerns the life and development of sustainability-oriented public organizations. The advent of information and digital technology offers public organizations the chance to embrace smartness as a way to redesign work organizations and develop the human capital and resources as drivers for sustainability.

Smart working is becoming a new collaborative arena and space that enable innovation in work processes, behaviours, and attitudes of employees, managers, citizens, and other stakeholders involved in the collaborative processes. Public organizations evolve as smart and sustainable organizations that are investing in human, behavioral, and technological sources to develop capabilities for promoting healthy and wealthy work environments and relationships which involve, in particular, the cooperation among employees and managers. Smart and sustainable working public organizations adopt smart working as a way to enhance collaborative innovation and processes, using information technology as a key source that drives smart working, collaboration, and digital platforms.

As shown in Figure 1, the main contribution of this study is to elucidate how public organizations can use the potential of information technology to become smart and sustainable organizations that can contribute to public value creation.

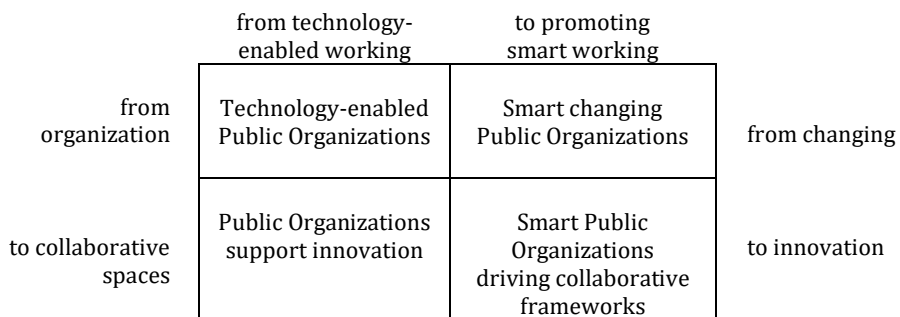


Figure 1. Towards smart public organizations

Smart public organizations support the development of communities at work on the long-term horizon, promoting the transition from technology-enabled working to smart working practices and views. They implement the digitalization processes and identify an innovation orientation to processes and services to promote sustainable organizational and cultural changes in the long-term horizon.

Public organizations have to rethink a smart and sustainable vision to work processes and services delivery and production, following a service logic view to public services delivery and design within communities. Smart public organizations behave as engines of innovation, enabling managers and employees to develop collaboration, knowledge sharing, and empowerment. Thereby, public managers play a key role in driving a cultural change in supporting the potential of social and human relationships as sustained by the potential offered by information technology.

In this study, there are some limitations. This study identifies only a theoretical framework of analysis to address the pathway leading to smart public organizations. Thereby, any empirical research and case studies are provided in the analysis. In particular, public organizations are still in their infancy in redefining an organizational workplace and structure which is smart-driven and technology-enabled. Public organizations develop smart working, reshaping a smart mindset for organizational change and innovation.

Further research perspectives and investigations will consider how the hypothesized propositions are applied within local autonomies and be translated into managerial and leadership training programs, to enhance human resources policies and practices, and promote technological advancements and digital platforms.

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