

Exploring dark and unexpected sides of digitalization: How digital technologies challenge organizations and organizing

DEADLINE: June 30, 2019

Guest-Editors:

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Abstract

In the past decade, the proliferation of digital technologies such as social media, internet platforms, algorithms, artificial intelligence and ‘big data’ have gained interest from businesses and academic researchers alike. Practitioners and scholars have revealed far-reaching organizational and managerial implications of these new technologies. At the same time many risks have also been identified including matters such as the loss of individual rights and the difficulty of resisting new forms of organizational control; increasing power imbalances between corporations, employees, and customers; the intensification of organizational surveillance; the opacity and biased nature of machine based processes and decisions; and many unexpected externalities that have yet to be explored. With this call for papers, we draw on and extend the emerging critical debate on the economic, ethical, social, and political implications of digitalization. We encourage scholars to critically explore the dark side and unexpected consequences of digitalization, i.e. issues that have (so far) been overlooked, ignored, or suppressed with regards to the impact of digital technologies on organization and organizing. The aim of this call is to span the boundary between multiple disciplines, to fertilize the discourse amongst critical scholars, and to develop the necessary theoretical and empirical groundwork around the implications of digitalization for organizations and organizing processes.

Outline

Mainstream management and organization research generally celebrates the proliferation of digital technologies such as social media, algorithms, artificial intelligence and big data. Scholars hail digitalization for its commercial and economic potential and its capacity to create efficient ways of working and organizing, to develop new products and services, or to address and influence users, customers, clients, or the public in general (e.g., Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014; Constantiou and Kallinikos, 2015; Mount and Garcia Martinez, 2014; Varian, 2014; Yoo et al, 2012).

Critical research, by way of contrast, has shown how the same digital technologies can facilitate new forms of exploiting users’ ‘free’ labour (e.g., Beverungen et al., 2015; Fuchs, 2010), utilize the ‘excess’ resources and capacities of individual citizens (Bauer and Gegenhuber, 2015; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), promote an illusory sense of resistance that counteracts genuine forms of resistance (Ossewaarde and Reijers, 2017), and lead to the emergence of new workplace conflicts (Upchurch and Grassman, 2016). From these critical perspectives, the proliferation of digital technologies appears as a threat to individual rights of organizational members and citizens alike.

Taking a more macro-perspective, scholars emphasize that digital technologies increase the power and authority of businesses, and of certain well-known internet firms in particular (Taplin, 2017; Scherer et al., 2016; Whelan, 2017). Corporations such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, or Uber use the data and information that emerges from the combination of digital technologies and everyday human interactions to monitor, predict, and modify human behavior, in order to produce revenue and enhance market control for themselves or other corporations (e.g., Lanier, 2013; Richards, 2013;

Zuboff, 2015). From this perspective, scholars criticize the centrality of surveillance to the business models of platform capitalism (Hansen and Flyverbom, 2015; Richards, 2013; Whelan, 2018; Zuboff, 2015).

With this call for papers, we aim to extend the critical debate on the impact of digital technologies and internet firms on organizations and organizing. Today, the link between digital technologies, the increasing power of internet firms, and the accompanying power shifts in and around organizations is not well understood in theoretical or empirical terms. We invite scholars to explore the 'dark' and the unexpected sides of digitalization, i.e. issues that have been (so far) overlooked, ignored, or suppressed in regards to the digitalization of organizations and organizing (see Linstead, et al., 2014).

We believe that the further exploration of the dark and unexpected sides of digitalization is one that is well suited for cross-disciplinary research and for thinking critically beyond established boundaries. We welcome contributions by scholars from various disciplines, to engage with critical organizational research applying perspectives such as critical theory, political economy, postmodernism, post-colonialism, Marxist or feminist theories. The political and ethical implications of digitalization on organizations and organizing can be analyzed on multiple levels: The macro-level, on which capitalist ideologies and digital technologies shape the context for organizations, shift or amplify power balances, and create new forms of dependency and exploitation; the meso-level, where the relation and interaction between multiple organizational actors (governments, internet firms, military, financial intermediaries, businesses, civil society, etc.) change due to the availability of digital technologies; and the micro-level of the individual behaviors of users, workers, customers, investors, competitors, or citizens in organized contexts, that can increasingly be predicted, controlled and modified based on algorithms and the available data. We therefore invite theoretical and empirical contributions around, but not limited to, the following topics:

- How do digital technologies for collecting, storing, connecting, and disseminating data change the way individuals and organizations interact? How are the boundaries between technology and human (inter-)action affected? What are the challenges for organizational structures and organizing processes? What could the workplace of the future look like (Colbert et al., 2016; Newell, 2015)?
- What are the dark and unexpected sides of digitalization? What social and environmental issues are emerging in the course of digitalization? How are considerations of accountability, responsibility, and democracy affected in society (Flyverbom et al., 2017)? What does it mean for human rights?
- What does digitalization mean for the natural environment and how human beings and organizations engage with or exploit the natural environment?
- How does big data relate to class, gender, race, and geo-political privilege?
- How does digitalization affect social imbalances such as inequality, exclusion, or discrimination? Who will be winners, who will be losers of digitalization? How does digitalization change or amplify established distributions of power?
- To what extent are new digital technologies the realization of McLuhan's (1970: 66) despotic vision of a global "guerrilla information war with no division between military and civilian participation"?
- What critical perspectives can be applied to explore the dark and unexpected sides of digitalization (e.g. critical theory, political economy, postmodernism, post-colonialism, Marxist or feminist theories etc.)?
- What empirical methods, data sets, or analytical techniques can be employed to explore the dark and unexpected sides of digitalization?

Submission

Papers may be submitted electronically from 31 May 2019 until the deadline date of **30 June 2019** (final deadline) to SAGETrack at:

<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/organization>

Papers should be no more than 10,000 words, excluding references, and will be blind reviewed following the journal's standard review process. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the guidelines published in Organization and on the journal's website:

<http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200981/manuscriptSubmission>.

For further questions about the special issue please use the guest editors' contact email: darksideofdigitalization@gmail.com

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Short bios:

Hannah Trittin is an Assistant Professor for Business Ethics at Leuphana University Lüneburg since March 2018. Before, she was a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Zurich, where she also obtained her PhD in 2016. Her research interests are business ethics, corporate social responsibility (CSR), diversity management, and digital technologies including social media and gamification. Her works particularly draw on Bakhtinian and Habermasian discourse ethics and have been published in *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* and the *Journal for Business Ethics*. She serves as reviewer for several journals including the *Journal of Management Studies*, *Business & Society*, as well as the *Journal for Business Ethics*.

Andreas Georg Scherer is a Professor of Business Administration and Theories of the Firm at the University of Zurich. His research focuses on Business Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility and the Political Role of the Businesses Firm in a Globalized World. His research is based on critical theory (Habermas), discourse ethics and deliberative theory, constructivism, political economy, and institutional theory. In his most recent empirical projects, he addresses topics such as big data and digitalization, corporate tax avoidance, fighting corruption, and social innovation. His work has been published among others in *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *ORGANIZATION*, *Organization Studies*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Business & Society*. He serves as an associate editor of *Business Ethics Quarterly* and sits on the editorial board of several journals. In the past, he served as a guest editor of special issues at various journals such as *Business Ethics Quarterly* (2009), *Business & Society* (2014), *Journal of Management Studies* (2016), *ORGANIZATION* (1998, 2007), and *Organization Studies* (2010).

Glen Whelan is a Lecturer at McGill University and Visiting Scholar at York University, Toronto. His current research focuses on how high-tech corporations' impact on society. In 2014-2016 he completed a project, 'Internet Privacy', whilst Marie Curie Research Fellow at Copenhagen Business School. And from 2017-2021, he is collaborating on a Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Insight Grant on 'Artificial Intelligence, Corporate Accountability and Public Understanding'. His work often builds on various critical traditions: e.g., Deleuze, Foucault, Gramsci, Habermas. He has published in such journals as *Business & Society*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Ephemera*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Journal of Management Inquiry*. He is the current social media editor for *Journal of Business Ethics*, and has previously edited, and is in the process of editing, a special issue for the same journal.

Iain Munro is a Professor of Management at the University of Newcastle, UK. He has undertaken critical research across a number of related areas including information warfare, business ethics, and power in organizations. Iain currently sits in the editorial boards of *ORGANIZATION*, *Organization Studies* and *Human Relations*. He has co-edited two special issues: i) Labatut J., Munro I., Desmond J. (2016) 'Animals and Organization': A special issue for *Organization*, 23(3), ii) Maréchal, G., Linstead, S., and Munro I. (2013) 'The Territorial Organization' A special issue for *Culture and Organization*, 19(3). He is also co-editing two further special issues: i) de Vaujany, F., Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, A., Munro, I., Nama, Y., and Holt, R. (forthcoming) 'Organizational control and surveillance of new work practices' A Special Issues of *Organization Studies*, Deadline for paper submissions: 29 June 2018, ii) Rhodes, C., Munro, I., Thanem, T., and Pullen, A. (forthcoming) 'Dissensus! Radical Democracy and Business Ethics': A Special Issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics*, Submission Deadline: 4 June 2018.