Special Issue - CALL FOR PAPER

STILL IN SEARCH OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEMOCRACY: NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

Guest Editorial Team

Luca Carollo, University of Bergamo, luca.carollo@unibg.it
Lisa Dorigatti, University of Milan, lisa.dorigatti@unimi.it
Annalisa Murgia, University of Milan, annalisa.murgia@unimi.it
Simon Parker, Nottingham University Business School, simon.parker@nottingham.ac.uk
Thomas Steger, University of Regensburg, thomas.steger@wiwi.uni-regensburg.de

In the past few years, there is a growing movement among scholars around the world to promote the topic of the democratization of work (https://democratizingwork.org/), revitalizing a long-standing debate through scholarly discussions as well as public engagement events in many different countries. The publication and spread of the democratizing work manifesto, which has been supported by more than 6,000 signatures to date, made it salient that the success of such initiative is doubted without democratizing the very structures in which work is executed i.e., organizations.

Some classic accounts are extremely discouraging for the possibility to realize democratic organizations (see, for example, the "iron law of oligarchy" formulated by Robert Michels, 1966 [1911]). However, for Weber (2019 [1922]), bureaucracy was one of the principal means through which to realize more democratic societies, based on the equal treatment of citizens and of their issues. Likewise, the possibility to bring democracy in workplaces was a foundational for the Industrial Relations research field (see the classic work of Webb and Webb, 2010 [1897], in this regard).

The scholarly debate has so far identified various forms of democracy in organizations (for a general discussion, see Baglioni, 2001; Carrieri et al., 2015).

A first relevant analytical distinction was made between democracy in the administration of organizations and democracy at the point of production. With respect to the former, there are institutional arrangements that allow workers to be represented at the board level, thereby participating in corporate governance and influencing organizational strategic decision-making (Conchon, 2011).

The latter form – democracy at the point of production – has instead gained traction during the 70s, following the critique of Taylor-Fordist models of production, and it entails the participation of workers at workplace-level decisions. At that time indeed, intensive scholarly and political debate concerned how to give workers the possibility to have a say on their work, and two main ways were identified: the first considers indirect-representative forms of participation through work councils or other joint consultative committees, which provide a voice to workers through elected representative bodies (Rogers and Streeck, 1995). The second conceives workplace democracy as inextricably bound to forms of direct participation of workers, ensuring greater control over the way in which their work is designed and executed through, for example, self-managed workgroups, and the redesign of jobs. Scholars in the socio-technical tradition (e.g., Emery and Thorsud, 1969) were particularly active in this regard, while contributing to the development of practices of workplace democracy through an action research approach and a close collaboration between researchers and practitioners. The Swedish *Industrial democracy* movement and the German *Humanisierung der Arbeitswelt* program were the most evident results of these attempts.

In those same years in Italy, the pioneering work of Bruno Trentin (1997) was aimed, among other things, "to place the political focus on work as a constitutional right of citizenship and to strengthen democracy and freedom at work, so that each person can realise their own project of knowledge and life" (Trentin, 1997). It should be noted furthermore that, in a period of strong social and political turmoil, all these debates and contributions did not only focus on how to achieve more democratic workplaces, but also on whether these forms of workplace democracy fit within or work against the dominant

socio-economic capitalist system, trying to reform or radically subvert it (Tomasetta, 1972).

Although the momentum of the democratizing debate seemed to vane during the 80s, discussions around different conceptions of organizational democracy resurfaced. In the 90s, scholars have debated whether new management models, such as High-Performance Work Practices and Lean Production increased or, in fact, reduced workers' autonomy and control over their work (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994, Rinehart et al., 1997). It has also been argued that these models of work organization assume different forms, more or less favorable to workers' participation, in different institutional contexts (Turner, 1991).

In the last two decades, many scholars have provided fresh arguments in favor of organizational and workplace democracy (Harrison and Freeman, 2004). For example, Foley and Polanyi (2006) pointed out that organizational democracy has a positive effect on employee health, reducing stress and burnout, as similarly found in a study on Danish workplaces (Knudsen et al., 2011). In a study on the call-center industry, Doellgast (2012) has showed that even in low-end service organizations, workplace democracy is a central factor increasing job quality.

Calls for the adoption of democratic forms of governance to improve organizational effectiveness have further grown in recent years, in particular in knowledge-intensive firm (e.g., Grandori, 2016). Sachs et al. (2010) have talked about an enlarged stakeholder governance of firms that, besides employees, should involve external stakeholders' representatives. The proposal by Sacconi et al. (2019) to establish firm-level 'Work and Citizenship councils' goes in the same direction, intending democracy as a way to make organizations more equal and 'really' socially responsible. In a recent essay, Grandori (2022) proposes to intend corporations as 'republics of rightholders' and to grant property rights to those investing labour and knowledge capital (typically employees), so that the internal diversity of ideas and backgrounds can contribute to improve collective decision-making.

Disappointed with liberal models of democracy, critical scholars have advanced instead a 'radical' view of organizational democracy (Rhodes et al., 2020), which should rely on conflict and dissensus to subvert current modes

of organizing and to find alternatives. Instances of such alternatives was found in employee-owned corporations and recovered factories (e.g., Atzeni and Ghigliani, 2007). Though, this literature has also acknowledged the difficulty and obstacles in realizing alternative democratic organizations (e.g., King and Land, 2018; Mondon-Navazo et al., 2021).

In sum, despite growing consensus among scholars that more organizational democracy is needed and that organizational democracy likely bears positive impact on the general well-being and democratic functioning of society (e.g., Budd et al., 2018; Butera, 2021; Timming and Summers, 2020; Weber et al., 2009), there is still debate around the ways in which organizations can best realize democracy.

The main objective of this Call for Papers on organizational democracy is to invite a conversation with the international scientific community, as well as with articles previously published in Studi Organizzativi (e.g., Sacconi et al., 2019; Butera, 1999; Butera, 2020) which have auspicated a fundamental reconfiguration of current modes of organizing and of their governance. Furthermore, the current Call for Papers is intended as a continuation of a previous Special Issue on 'New Trajectories in Workplace Cooperation' (see Signoretti et al., 2022), given that a substantial degree of cooperation around commonly agreed rules is deemed necessary to realize democracy, in organizations *and* society.

In light of these considerations, this Call for Papers not only asks whether organizational democracy is possible, but also how it can be realized, as we aim to discuss various forms of organizational and workplace democracy, while also recognizing potential advantages and constraints, the conditions that can sustain democracy in organizations, as well as its effects at the individual, organizational and-or societal level outcomes. Interdisciplinary as well as disciplinary based papers from organization and management studies, economic sociology, industrial relations or political sciences are welcome, addressing questions including (but not limited to) the following:

- Are there different types of organizational and workplace democracy or is it, perhaps, a matter of degree of democratization?

- Which internal (within organizations) and external (related to the organizational environment) conditions favor the emergence and persistence of organizational democracy?
- What are the fundamental freedoms and rights (e.g., the possibility to 'speak up', policies to promote inclusion and equality, other labour and social rights etc.), that have to be guaranteed to realize more democratic organizations?
- Is there a role for social movements, unions and civil society organizations in democratizing workplaces?
- How is it possible to conciliate democratic organizations with the growing inequality in the distribution of resources in organizations and societies?
- How organizational politics can be steered in favor of an increased participation of voiceless and marginalized organizational actors, rather than supporting powerful ones?
- What are the implications of internal democracy for organizations, workers, and the broader society?
- Could it be that certain ways in which 'democracy' is conceptualized make organizational democracy problematic, or perhaps even impossible, and why?

The special issue welcomes both qualitative and quantitative theory-driven studies, as well as conceptual articles. Essays and narrative illustration of cases that depart from the traditional shape and structure of scientific articles will also be taken into consideration, as far as they are guided by theoretical insights and puzzles. Also consider the possibility to contact one of the members of the guest editorial team in advance to discuss your paper proposal for the special issue.

The **deadline** for the submission of the full paper (in English) is **30 September 2022**. Papers will go through the standard review process of the journal and should be 8,000 words (maximum) in length, including abstract, tables, figures and reference section.

For more detailed information, please visit the journal's submission center https://journals.francoangeli.it/index.php/so/about/submissions (click on the upper left corner of the page to turn it to English) and the Editorial guidelines https://www.francoangeli.it/riviste/NR/So-norme_EN.pdf.

References

Appelbaum, E., Batt R. (1994), *The new American workplace: Transforming work systems in the United States*, Ithaca, ILR Press.

Atzeni, M., Ghigliani, P. (2007), Labour process and decision-making in factories under workers' self-management: empirical evidence from Argentina, *Work, Employment and Society*, 21(4): 653-671, doi: 10.1177/0950017007082875.

Baglioni, G. (2001), *Lavoro e decisioni nell'impresa*, Bologna, Il Mulino.

Budd, J.W., Lamare, R.J., Timming, A.R. (2018) "Learning about democracy at work: Cross-national evidence of individual employee voice influencing political participation in civil society", *ILR Review*, 71(4): 956–985, doi: 10.1177/0019793917746619.

Butera, F. (1999), "L'organizzazione a rete attivata da cooperazione, conoscenza, comunicazione, comunità: il modello 4C nella Ricerca e Sviluppo", *Studi Organizzativi*, 2/1999.

Butera, F. (2020), "Sociotechnical systems design revisited at the end of the 20th century : STS 2.0", *Studi Organizzativi*, fascicolo suppl. 1/2020: 102-125, doi: 10.3280/SO2020-001-S1007.

Butera, F. (2021), "La questione organizzativa italiana. Rigenerazione organizzativa, politica per il bene comune e la difesa sociale, formazione delle persone integrali", *Menabò di Etica e di Economia*, 151/2021, available online at: https://www.eticaeconomia.it/

Carrieri, M., Nerozzi, P., Treu, T. (2015), *La partecipazione incisiva. Idee e proposte per la democrazia possibile nelle imprese*, ASTRID, Bologna, Il Mulino.

Conchon, A. (2011), *Board level employee representation rights in Europe: Facts and trends*, Brussels, ETUI.

Doellgast, V. (2012), *Disintegrating democracy at work. Labor unions and the future of good jobs in the service economy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

Emery, F. E., Thorsrud, E. (1969), *Form and content in industrial democracy*, Assen, Van Gorcum.

Foley, J.R., Polanyi, M. (2006) "Workplace democracy: Why bother?", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 27(1): 173-191, doi: 10.1177/0143831X06060595.

Grandori, A. (2016), "Knowledge-intensive work and the (re)emergence of democratic governance", *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 30(2): 167-181, doi: 10.5465/amp.2015.0133.

Grandori, A. (2022), "Constitutionalizing the corporation", *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 78: 57-76, doi: 10.1108/S0733-558X20220000078004.

Harrison, J. S., Freeman, R. E. (2004), "Is organizational democracy worth the effort?", *The Academy of Management Executive* (1993-2005), 18(3): 49-53.

King, D., Land, C. (2018), "The democratic rejection of democracy: Performative failure and the limits of critical performativity in an organizational change project", *Human Relations*, 71(11): 1535-1557, doi: 10.1177/0018726717751841.

Michels, R. (1966 [1911]), *La Sociologia del partito politico nella democrazia moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino.

Mondon-Navazo, M., Murgia, A., Borghi, P., Mezihorak, P. (2021), "In search of alternatives for individualised workers: A comparative study of freelance organisations", *Organization* (online first), doi: 10.1177/13505084211041709.

Rinehart, J., Huxley, C., Robertson, D. (1997), *Just another car factory? Lean production and its discontents*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

Rhodes, C., Munro, I., Thanem, T., Pullen, A. (2020), "Dissensus! Radical democracy and business ethics", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 164(4): 627-632, doi: 10.1007/s10551-019-04405-3.

Rogers, J., Streeck, W. (1995), *Works councils: Consultation, representation, and cooperation in industrial relations*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

Sacconi, L., Denozza, F., Stabilini, A. (2019), "Democratizzare l'economia, promuovere l'autonomia dei lavoratori e l'uguale cittadinanza nel governo dell'impresa: una proposta", *Studi Organizzativi*, 1/2019: 149-178, doi: 10.3280/SO2019-001006.

Sachs, S., Rühli, E., Meier, C. (2010), "Stakeholder governance as a response to wicked issues", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 96(1): 57-64, doi: 10.1007/s10551-011-0944-4.

Timming, A., Summers, J. (2020), "Is workplace democracy associated with wider pro-democracy affect? A structural equation model", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 41(3): 709–726, doi: 10.1177/0143831X17744028.

Trentin, B. (1997), *La città del lavoro: Sinistra e crisi del fordismo*, Milano, Feltrinelli

Turner, L. (1991), *Democracy at work: Changing world markets and the future of labor unions*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

Webb, S., Webb, B. (2010 [1897]), *Industrial democracy*, Charleston (US), Nabu Press.

Weber, M. (2019 [1922]), *Economia e Società*, Roma, Donzelli editore.

Weber, W.G., Unterrainer, Ch., Schmid, B.E. (2009), "The influence of organizational democracy on employees' socio-moral climate and prosocial behavioral orientations", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30(8): 1127-1149, doi: 10.1002/job.615.