



**WOA 2021, Genoa 10<sup>h</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> June 2021 (rescheduled)**

## **ORGANIZING FOR WHAT? MEANING AND PURPOSE IN HUMAN ACTION**

### **PRESENTATION**

In his keynote speech delivered at WOA 2019 (Palermo), Prof. Yannis traced the evolution from classic organization theories to an emotion-, meaning- and identity-seeking context. While the iron cage of bureaucracy was deemed responsible to eliminate the subjectivity of individuals, the focus has now moved to an 'empowered' individual constantly looking for meaning and identity, to the point of becoming more insecure or even victim of a 'control illusion'. While this movement has been differently interpreted by different schools of thought, it can be surely said that the quest for meaning is a fundamental psycho-social process through which people try to find their place in organizational contexts.

Beyond the meaning-seeking individual, sense- and meaning-making processes importantly span the individual, group, organization, community, and societal levels. While organizational boundaries and traditional motives for people to participate in organizations somewhat loosen, the quest for meaning and purpose in coordinated action is all but losing importance, as envisioned in the garbage-can model where human actors, technology, problems, and solutions mix together, and a coherence is found precisely through organizing.

Technology, as pervasive it may be, is a key variable, because its effects crucially depend on how it is made sense of and enacted by human and non-human actors. The increasing relevance of technology in the way we communicate, learn, work, or entertain calls into question the role and the importance of individuals as architects or agents of change in the organizational domains they inhabit. While digitalization is key to organizational success, unconditional faith in Artificial Intelligence or Big Data Analysis can easily bring upon the idea that implementation is what really counts in the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution. However, this idea neglects the paramount importance of creativity, critical thinking, and meaning-making in understanding technological innovation and the effects thereof, beyond implementation. Rather, in a macro-organizational perspective, it is essential to look at the aims of organizational action (organizing for what?) and, understanding technology as an instrumental element of organizational action, at the meaning and sense behind the organizational regulation toward desired outcomes.

## **AIM, TRACKS AND TOPICS**

Given the focus of this year's WOA, key questions prompt us to ask: (how) is it possible to find a balance between efficiency and equity, between control and chaos, between the pursuit of organizational goals and meaningful individual action? What is the role of 'mediating entities' (e.g., communities, groups, the civil society) in this process? What is the role of 'intermediary bodies' (unions, professional associations, governmental or public bodies) in negotiating meaning and norms between organizations and a new individual(ism)? What is the role of organizational artefacts such as structures, routines, praxes, and tangible and intangible elements of organizational culture in the individual and collective sense-making and meaning-making processes?

We encourage organizational scholars participating to the 2021 WOA in Genoa to contribute with new empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives

In order to guide researchers in framing their potential contributions, in the following table we present some preliminary ideas concerning topics and tracks for the WOA conference. However, contributions on other topics which are broadly consistent with the general theme are also encouraged. Thus, the research community is strongly encouraged, but not limited to making contributions that relate to the following topics:

<b>ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>PROCESSES</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking for meaning in organizational design</li> <li>• Meta-organization design: designed around value or meaning?</li> <li>• Meaning and institutions</li> <li>• Grand societal challenges, social movements, and meaning in organizations</li> <li>• Governing meaning? Meaning management beyond meaning making</li> <li>• Organizational goals and meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative issues in smart-working</li> <li>• Motivation, engagement, and meaningful work</li> <li>• Construction of meaning and personal identity</li> <li>• Sense-making, meaning-making, and sense-giving</li> <li>• Giving sense to careers: subjective careers</li> <li>• Meaning, emotions and wellbeing</li> <li>• Digital transformation and meaning of work</li> <li>• Meaning, ethics, and moral values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alone or together? Trust in technology as a meaning-making process</li> <li>• Automation and meaningful work</li> <li>• Pulling the plug: anti-determinism in an age of digital dependency</li> <li>• Organizational culture and meaning in organizations</li> <li>• Negotiating meaning: participation and democracy in organizational meaning-making</li> <li>• Finding and sharing meaning in different organizational contexts (e.g. family firms, SMEs, large organizations, MNCs, social organizations, hybrid organizations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determinism and anti-determinism in the age of digital technology</li> <li>• Philosophies of management, research approaches, and meaning in organizations</li> <li>• Techniques for revealing meaning in organizations: text analysis, topic modeling, clinical interviews, and the like</li> <li>• A quest for meaning: organization studies in dialogue with the arts and humanities, anthropology, history, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and religion studies</li> </ul>
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## WOA ORGANIZATION

One of the take-away messages of the last WOA editions was that organizational scholars need space and time in order to build a shared understanding and discuss in-depth about the

multiplicity of organizational phenomena and challenges that digital technologies imply. Therefore, as a novelty for this year's edition, the Workshop Program will be articulated in two new types of sessions. We kindly invite scholars to submit to:

**1. PAPER SESSIONS (SHORT PAPER → FULL PAPER):** Short papers presenting completed research - including theoretical, methodological, findings, and discussion and contributions sections – may be submitted in such a session. Starting from this year, authors of short papers accepted to present in a paper session, should upload a full version of the paper so that the track chairs can circulate them among the authors presenting in the same session.

**2. WORK IN PROGRESS SESSIONS (ABSTRACT → POSTER):** Abstracts about work in progress, research ideas or early-stage works eliciting feedback, must be addressed in this session. Indeed, this session is suitable for idea exchange and open discussion of research projects and ideas in an early phase of development. Starting from this year, authors of abstracts, accepted to be presented in a *work in progress* session, are invited to produce a printed copy of a poster that presents the research in progress. Posters will be on display during the whole conference and there will be dedicated sessions to present and discuss.

**3. PANEL SESSION:** Proposals about relevant topics on which it could be interesting open a shared discussion can be suggested for evaluation to Scientific Committee. These proposals have to indicate: the topic, the motivation of its relevance, the indication of 3/4 scholars and professionals able to deepen it.

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES, REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES

### *First phase*

Short papers (Paper session) and abstracts (Work in progress session) must be submitted electronically via EasyChair by the deadline February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Contributions will be double-blind reviewed.

Short papers should comprise 3,000 words including graphs, figures, tables, and references. The submission must include a Title page and a Main document, to be uploaded as separated files.

Abstracts should comprise 250 words and should include:

- Purpose
- Design/Methodology /Approach/Intervention
- Results
- Limitations
- Research/Practical Implications
- Originality/Value

Notification of acceptance will be communicated by April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Proposals for Panel Session can be sent by May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

to

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with the object WOA 2021 – panel session proposal

### ***Second Phase***

Full paper should comprise approx. 7,000-8,000 words. Please do not forget to indicate the name/s of the author/s, affiliation(s) and email address (es) at the top of the full paper before uploading it on EasyChair (deadline: May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021). Authors are also invited to bring printed copies of their papers to be shared with the audience the day of the presentation, so that they can receive more detailed comments and feedback on their work.

Posters are short printed presentations displayed on large boards (100 x 70 centimetres; portrait format). Individual posters will be clustered in thematic work in progress sessions by the Program Committee. Since the aim of this session is to generate a dynamic discussion among presenters and the audience, at the beginning a facilitator will lead an introductory round in which each presenter introduces her/his poster with a brief statement about objectives and (expected) results (approx. 3 minutes each). It follows a brief informal discussion (questions, comments, etc.) and then the audience members will have the possibility to go through posters and interact with presenters. Presenters of the posters are kindly asked to bring handouts of their poster to the session for interested visitors.

