

Emerging Technologies and Organizational Culture

Short Description of the Proposed Track

Emerging technologies, which we take to include artificial intelligence, data analytics technologies, social media and many more related platforms [1] now pervade every aspect of organizational life. These new forms of mostly digital technologies have unique characteristics that have the potential to fundamentally alter how organizations operate. Social media are characterized by a high degree of openness, involving distributed innovation agency encompassing a heterogeneous constellation of actors [2] with multiple and often incongruent goals, values, and expectations [3]. Open platforms are deployed in an exceedingly complex context, characterized by a plurality of technology, spatial and institutional affordances that shapes the use of these technologies and their outcomes [2]. Artificial intelligence is characterized by high levels of autonomy, in that it can remove humans entirely from both the generation and execution of tasks; and inscrutability in that AI procedures and outputs can become impossible to assess and understand by human actors [4]. These unique features means that organizational deployments of these kinds of emerging digital technologies are much more complex and challenging compared with traditional organizational structures and practices [5], requiring organizations to develop new mindsets, routines, and business models [6].

And yet the precise organizational impact of these technologies remains unclear: The technologies are of course defined as ‘emergent’ and are therefore expected to carry with them a high potential for change and indeed disruption. Beyond this baseline agreement however there is, as yet no consensus as to the meaning and effects of our and emergent technologies [7]. In an attempt to bring some order to these reflections many have settled upon a cultural appreciation of the problem. Culture is as a highly complex, intangible, and implicit phenomenon [8, 9]. Moreover, previous relevant research [9] noted that it consists also of several tangible and distinctive elements. Considering this and to be inclusive in our track we do not follow any specific description or definition of culture. In this rendering of the core issues, the emerging technologies that shape our lives and our interactions are regarded as cultural insofar as they, both, reflect and project our preferences, our ideals, and our identities [10,11,12,13,14,15]. Cultural resources [16] and organizational actors’ identities [17] have been shown to explain how organizations leverage such emerging digital technologies to organize their activity. This cultural understanding of our emerging technologies is of course now generally accepted. But it is not well understood, and it is (or should be) vulnerable to dissenting voices that are not always allowed the privilege of a fair hearing. For example, managerialist writers, commenting upon the issues surfaced by the continuing development of emerging technologies, tend to operate with an understanding of culture and identity that is singular in nature, and top-down in orientation [18]. In short, the preferred cultural appreciation of emerging technologies tends to take ‘the social’ out of ‘social media’.

In this conference track, the convenors invite contributions from scholars and from practitioners who would avoid the now familiar frameworks and prescriptions of/ for successful (cultural) change. Thus, we welcome contributions from those who would explore the way emerging technologies, variously, transplant, embed and/or supplant the familiar social and organizational conventions that are, too often, reduced to ‘culture’. We seek contributions which recognize the need to forge a constructive engagement with the important debates around technology development and organizational

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innovation. And yet we are keen to hear from those who remain willing to challenge the (cultural) categorizations that have been deployed to shape our appreciation of the challenges posed by emerging technologies.

Track main topics

We hesitate to provide a definitive list of topics for fear that this might diminish the exercise of the sociological imagination, and so, crowd-out alternative ideas and approaches. Nonetheless we seek, especially, contributions which in ‘problematizing’ technology, organization and culture consider:

- The extent to which conventional classifications of culture facilitate our appreciation of emerging technologies.
- Meaning of being a user in the context of emerging technologies.
- The extent to which current invocations of all things ‘digital’ are truly suggestive of transformative change.
- Emerging Technologies and the problem of identity.
- Culture, frames and the deployment of emerging technologies.
- Culture, change and digital transformation.
- The ‘great resignation’.
- Diversity in the context of ‘emerging technologies’ and vice versa.
- The problems and processes of agility.
- Theories of/ for emerging technologies; lesson learned from those who explored ‘new technology’ in the 1980s.
- Multi-level studies of technological development/ innovation and change.

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