Societal and Political Dimensions of Openness: Innovation, Strategy, Organization

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Opening organizational processes and structures seems to be a more and more central to a contemporary approach to management and organization. In the last decades, this approach changed dramatically from the vertically organised and closed silos of the grand R&D organizations of the 20th century to a collaborative, joint, user-led, indeed, inverted firm that characterizes platforms (Benzell et al., 2023). Where once all resources were allocated internally and spillovers cast as the antithesis to successful competition today's managerial tenets include pre-emptive generosity, contributions to public goods, and the integration of consumers in production processes.

Organization studies and social studies at large invite both scholars and practitioners to open their ways of thinking and acting. Open innovation (Chesbrough, 2012; Bogers et al, 2017), knowledge flows across communities and organizations (Haefliger, Von Krogh and Spaeth, 2008), open research and inquiries (de Vaujany and Heimstädt, 2022) all contribute to a new principle of openness (Splitter et al, 2023) that drives strategy and leadership (Hautz et al. 2017).

Opening is a spatial invitation. It is a call to create more permeability in organizational boundaries or even, to overcome them to potentially let in new actors, techniques or experience. It is also a deeply temporal claim. Any lived pasts or dreamed and anticipated futures should be likely to enter into the organizing process. Open organizing is a deep, resonant, fluid mode of collective activity. While spatial dimensions appear in topics of new work and how offices are structured, more virtual dimensions drive the opening or the reversal of openness in strategy, such as the flow of knowledge and experience on one side, and the inclusivity of decision making on the other side (Haefliger, 2019).

As shown with this thematic issue of the JOCO, openness carries wider implications that touch upon social and political spheres. Our approaches to coordination, allocation of resources, our views of value and business models, are deeply renewed by this move. Crowds are more expected to feed the innovation process, and even to disrupt it. Likewise, citizen and open sciences are more and more expected to enrich and sometimes, part with traditional ways of doing research. Emergent technology also stimulates the imaginative transformation of present conditions into future visions of disruptive openness. Artificial intelligence prospects a world where the machine will be able to generate innovation beyond human ability (Faraj et al. 2018) and blockchain technologies promise to facilitate an integrated worldwide data warehouse where any format of data can be shared and understood by any device over any network (Jacobetty and Orton-Johnson, 2023). Immersive and augmented reality technologies promise to transform the way we work and interact by translating into our daily environments objects, people, and places that are either distant or do not yet exist (Dincelli and Yayla, 2022). These promises transcend institutionalized boundaries between physical and virtual realities, humans and machines, markets, states, professions and communities, to convey the idealized image of a technocratic world that will be free, open, progressive, even transcendent.

This has also multiple consequences for work practices and ways of organizing them. Work itself can now happen openly from anywhere at any time (Cnossen et al., 2021). People can now be remote workers or digital nomads. Their work is not anymore an activity bounded within an organization, a recurrent and routine here and now. It is more and more an open, fluid and ambiguous temporality. And novelty as part of a product and service can now happen anywhere, anytime. The recent algorithmic phenomena and models in our society promise to establish radically new forms of organization based on automation and decentralization such as peer-to-peer knowledge communities, AI-powered holacracies and decentralized platform ecosystems where code becomes the 'law' (Lessig, 2000) and knowledge and practices pertaining to traditional fields of expertise are subverted, transformed or even abolished (Burrell & Fourcade, 2021; Zuboff, 2019). Innovation, in particular, has changed dramatically in the platform society. Multiple actors involved in innovation processes operate across organizational boundaries within interdependent relations which bring together multiple forms of organization; Consequently, when success or failure occur in such systems, measuring and attributing performance becomes an uncertain or highly debated endeavour (Shipilov and Gawer, 2020).For our democracies and our societies which have largely relied on productive activities on the here and now of a place (for employees, for customers, for citizens…) and of clear-cut organizational forms, this has for sure radical implications which will be explored in the thematic issue.

While business may or may not be perceived as core to society and democracy, a number of fundamental changes linked to openness in innovation and strategy may translate to impact the societal and political spheres more and more. The promise of Castells' network society take the everyday and mundane forms of communication

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platforms such as WhatsApp or X and civil discourse shapes and is shaped by the corporate decisions around application programming interfaces. Who gets to influence a democratic discourse with nudges and advertisement? Who gets to program extensions and modifications of programs used to share news or scientific findings?

Traditional media have been gradually losing their role as public-opinion makers to social media, which have been long described as an emerging global agora for collective decisions (Castells 2015, Etter et al., 2019). Yet the last decades of public scandals regarding ignorance and manipulation have suggested that the idealized visions of openness in social media co-exist side-by-side with polarization, social division and erosion of democratic institutions. Similarly, emerging technologies which promise to emancipate in the future have been shown to enslave, constrain or even humiliate human dignity in the present. Activists take on platforms they accuse of abusing workers by manipulation and surveillance and consumers protest against algorithms that store their preferences and use them for and against them to optimise service delivery and pricing. The gig economy where everyone can work at any time and any place has become a daunting place for mental health (e.g. Petriglieri et al., 2019) and expanded surveillance increasingly links political views with employment opportunities and discriminatory business practices.

We may be under a grave risk of underestimating influences that emerge from points of view fundamentally opposed to democracy and human rights, in fact facing alternative truths we may be swayed into worldviews that are murderous and disrespectful of any human rights and freedoms. If openness turns to an indiscriminate endorsement of any idea as long as it comes with money and resources, then openness is likely to hurt democracy and end it.

Is the inverted firm becoming the inverted democracy? Does a society increasingly draw on resources from the outside and does the openness of a society pose risks that are critical for its sustained openness and sustainability? It appeared always as unquestionable that closed societies tend to lose out, on global trade, culture, and the opportunities for their citizens. What are the downsides of openness for a society and have we understood these downsides in times of increasingly fast and uncontrollable knowledge flows?

In organizations, openness does not appear to seal its own fate as far as we know. While irreversible in the short run, open strategy holds the potential for changing paths and pivoting to new and extended purposes for the

organization with the inclusion into decision making of stakeholders beyond the owners. To deal with the paradoxes of openness, we thus suggest a renewed attention to temporal and spatial dimensions (see also DeVaujany et al.,2023, this journal, Ungureanu, 2023). For instance, what is the relationship between idealized visions of future open worlds and the ongoing trials and errors through which openness is experimented in our present's organizations, communities and institutions? How are ongoing processes of spatial and temporal strategizing shaping current institutions and organizations? Specifically, as we strategize about new socio-technical arrangements, how are we moving towards aspirations for a better world or getting re-sucked into old forms of organizational power, control and surveillance? To celebrate local diversity, how can we continue to study socially situated work practices while acknowledging globalization and virtualization trends? Most importantly, which are the guideposts that we, as individuals and as collectives, might follow as we traverse an increasingly complex world made of social, technological and environmental challenges? What are the capitalist safeguards and how do such safeguards translate to democracies and society at large? While bankruptcy laws protect citizens we have little in store to protect failing governments and institutions if openness overflows and turns against them. We hope this issue inspires further and wider thoughts in social sciences as to the ends and risks of openness with a pragmatic and critical eye.

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