



“Smart Work”: (toward) a new paradigm of work organization? An interesting lesson for Italian (changing) work pattern

by Amedeo Tea

Introduction

As it is known, the nature of work has profoundly changed in the past 20 years, thanks to information and communication technology (ICT) that are innovating the same work processes. Recently, also in Italy, the need for change (*rectius*, revision) has led to the introduction of smart work or “lavoro agile” (see, for example, the draft of the legislative proposal so-called *Collegato Lavoro of Legge di Stabilità 2016*) driven by the same changes regarding employment, decision making, communication and collaboration. In short, we are starting a new phase of Labour Law that has to follow the Work’s Transformation.

Smart work culture

Smart work is independent of time and place: the typical variables such as office place, work conventions or work hours are irrelevant rather than network, collaboration processes, which optimize work and its output.

A global study (see, *Cisco Connected Technology World Report*, 2010) concerning the expectations and behaviours of workers demonstrates some data:

- 60 percent employees believe they do not need to be in the office to be productive;
- 66 percent of employees desire work flexibility;
- 66 percent of employees would accept a lower-paying job with more work flexibility than a higher-paying job with inflexibility;
- 45 percent of IT professionals are unprepared or struggling to make their workforces more mobile and distributed.

Does the Smart Work (culture) represent a (new) paradigm of work organization shift? According to professor Thomas Kuhn a paradigm shift is a scientific revolution that occurs “...when scientists encounter anomalies which cannot be explained by the universally accepted paradigm within which scientific progress has thereto been made” (see, T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, University of Chicago Press, 1962).

Some disadvantages have been outlined by commentators for the smart work in comparison with the old centralized work culture:

- a physical gathering of workers at a central location will result in higher efficiency and effectiveness;

- smart work may displace economic activity among communities;
- smart work dissolves the traditional command-and-control principles of organizational working;
- smart work will raise costs because workers may require additional resources and workplace services;
- smart work may diminish an organization's identity and visibility because of its distributed nature.

Favourable conditions of smart work

The constant change of many factors such as climate change, new technology, global economy causes transformations in terms of decisions, organizations and pattern of work. The diffusion of smart work (culture) goes in this direction and follows these conditions:

- pervasive technology: rapid spread of broadband infrastructures, cloud-based services, ecc.;
- distributed ways of working are raising the level of exchange and innovation ;
- a (new) sense of space that enable people to work regardless of location;
- new work methods and models: for example the neuroscience, design, and gaming are influencing organizational processes;
- shared services that impose a new modes of economic activity;
- a new generation of workers likely to connect;
- a convergence of global crises i.e. government debt, urbanization, energy and climate change.

Smart Work transformation process: an historical perspective

It's very important to contextualize the smart work transformation process in an historical perspective. Firstly, in the Industrial Era the way to organize work was the centralization of workplace: i.e., the baker sell bread, the employee works at his desk in his office. The advantage was that workers placed in a central location (*married to location*) were more productive than before. According to Henri Fayol (see, *Administration Industrielle et Generale*, Heni Fayol, July, 1916) and Fredrick Winslow Taylor (see, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, 1911) the Industrial Era was based on a radical control and control mechanism. Consequently, the psychological and organizational approach to work limited very much the potential of innovation and information exchange. The second step was the enforcement of ICT: it has been introduced a mechanism that replaced a traditional models of work: PC, mail, fax that enhanced the speed and quantity of communication.

However, the "bridge" toward to smart work is the telework that consists in a working remotely from home. The relevance of telework consists in a new way of work which relies the productivity and its well-being. It also applies to the important theme of coworking (space) thanks to internet connectivity.

Through Work 2.0, the space is not represented by physical (or geographical) pattern, but is represented by multifunctional environments with an intensive online activity and a strong network collaboration.

Finally smart working is an evolution of work in which infrastructure, data, services and application are fully cloud-driven.

Synthesis of Knowledge Era

industrial era	ict era	telework	work 2.0	smart work
centralist model radical control asset-centric silos	email fax pc internet mobile phone	co-working telecommute satellite offices	video collaboration tools telepresence	irrelevance of location and time trust and intrinsic motivation cloud

Advantages and benefits: an useful lesson for Italy

Smart work culture produces several benefits in organizations and in communities. The advantages for the organizations are:

- facilitate and attract a new generation of workers;
- grow competitiveness;
- facilitate effectiveness and efficiency;
- optimize resources toward a flexible environments (green operation);
- improve collaboration;
- reduce expenses and favours innovation and collaborative decisions;
- cut the cost of workplace resources

For example, with reference at the smart work in Amsterdam, it should be stressed that since the Smart Work Centers were launched, the current municipal footprint of 200 office buildings has been reduced to 120 with a decrease in the desk-to-worker ratio from 1.3 to 0.7.

How the Smart work increases community's incentives:

- facilitate community and social inclusion;
- stimulate exchange and collaboration among public and private institutions;
- increase energy efficiency of buildings;
- reduce pressures and cost of transportation.

Closing remarks

In conclusion, smart work could still be an excellent strategy to meet the pressing demands being put on the world of work, especially in our country. In fact, we can easily imagine how different benefits could definitely help our labour system, especially in the reduction of labor costs, as well as to decrease the stiffness of our labor market.

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