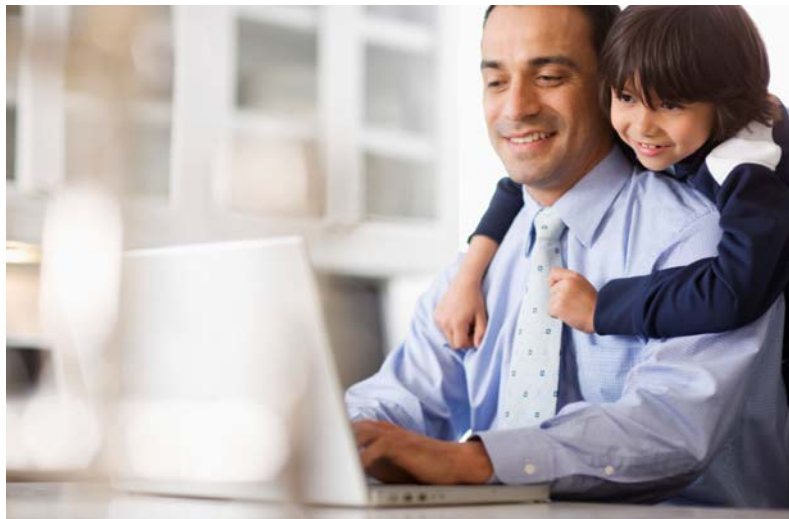


How work changes in the Hybrid Age

An interview with Roberto Panzarani President, Studio Panzarani & Associated; Professor, Government and Innovation Technology, Catholic University of Rome



"The future of work is a blank sheet yet to be written" commented the Nobel Prize winner **Amartya Sen**, attending an award ceremony at the last Frankfurt Fair. The health emergency acted as a catalyst for some transformation processes. Large multi-nationals like *Google* and *Facebook* have already announced that for more than **50% of their workforce working in the office will become a distant memory**.

Prof. Panzarani, smart working is the phenomenon with the greatest impact, certainly not the only one, in which institutions and companies will have to deal with?

The well-known economist **Amartya Sen** uses a metaphor that is certainly effective and correct. The "**blank sheet**" regards Italy and began even before the pandemic broke out. The processes of **digital transformation** and the **digital economy** had already exposed some historical delays in our country. The lack of investment in innovation and technological infrastructures that we have accumulated over the past twenty years have come to head, generating great suffering for small and medium-sized enterprises that remain the backbone of our production system. The phase of great change imposed by the health emergency then made the picture even more complex. It is enough to say that up to last March, around half a million people operated in a *smart working* regime, while last May they became more than six million. Towards the end of 2020, official estimates say about eight million people operated in a *remote working* regime. The Public Administration was also drawn into this "forced change". There was no material time to face a change of pace that would require gradual training steps, starting from school education; everything happened without adequate planning. Now we will have to run for cover to trace an evolutionary path and finally open a prospect of reconstruction and growth, to a country hit by the emergency.

With respect to the prospects that will open up after this phase, what scenario is making way for a universe of work that is changing structures and profiles, as it was not the case since the industrial revolution?

We are probably not facing a revolution, like the one brought about by the Fordist methodology in workcycles. The strongest leap we are experiencing is in the environment of production, the redesign of spaces, the theme of rights and new emerging inequalities. Having created the factory as a "topos" of production, the method and approaches had remained for more than a century.

Today, key aspects regard the context, connections, infrastructures, quality of the communication and exchange networks, which will affect the vision of development and the conception of work's future.

Towards a new "age of rights"

The "sacredness of the office" as defined by the famous James Hillman has set. The focus is shifting from the formal fulfillment of the task to the quality of the service. In his upcoming book (The new paradigm: why the future of capitalism is communal) he talks about the epochal transformations that are affecting productive organizations. What will happen to millions of workers in Italy and around the world?

Age of Rights is a famous title by **Norberto Bobbio**. I state him, because I believe that a new age of rights for workers is opening up. Moving on from the emergency phase, it will become of fundamental importance to put every single player in the company organization at the center, redesigning protections, rights and even duties. **Smart working will have to be redesigned**, probably we will move towards a **mixed form of flexibility**, with respect to which trade unions and trade organizations will have to monitor, with intelligence, balance and an open mind. Moreover, we have already seen that being able to carry out one's duties from home, can result in a multiplier of inequalities, and it will therefore be necessary for the company to ensure the appropriate tools for each worker, in order to perform the tasks assigned to them in the best possible way. Another delicate aspect is that of **"control"**, which first of all the leaders must get used to, adopting the logic of results, abandoning above all the old Fordist legacy, linked to direct observation and the measurement of time spent, rather than the actual recording of quality of work performed. When I speak of a **"new paradigm"** I mean the need to affirm a **capitalist model based on collaboration**, which will become decisive, not only in the field of new economic balances, but also in the horizon of dynamics and personal as well as working relationships.

In Italy, in just over a century, we have gone from 70 billion to 40 billion hours worked. From the assembly line to the network, not only numbers have changed, but also codes, languages, skills. The concept of work has nothing to do with the vision that industrial "modernity" had given us. How should we equip ourselves to support this strong change of pace?

What is changing is the quality of work. We know that **artificial intelligence** is attacking all those repetitive activities, which do not require an intellectual input. Advanced software is now able to carry out research, not to mention, the use of **big data**, which is based on a large processing and calculation capacity currently widely used to enhance the forecasting, analysis and reading of events. We are facing a metamorphosis that requires a response to the height on the part of companies and institutions. A recent report invites a cautious optimism that machines will not cancel work, but will help create new horizons, and it all lies in knowing how to grasp them. Therefore, the future must be looked at with confidence, even if we will have shocks. Companies continue to look for around 300,000 technicians in Italy, who are not available on the market, because no one cares to create suitable training courses. **The 4.0 revolution** that is so much talked about, unfortunately remains unreachable under these conditions.

It is estimated that about 400,000 jobs have been lost, there are 300,000 workers on layoffs, as well as two million unemployed and 13 million inactive. We are the country with the lowest female employment rate (57%) in Europe. With the serious decline in GDP (-10%) in 2020, the abrupt slowdown in investments and consumption (-19%) what does all this imply for that part of the country that wants to become and must become a "builder of the future"?

The latest figures from the office if the **Confcommercio** speaks of the **disappearance of 390,000 companies**. We should see what will happen at the end of the layoff freeze in March, while layoffs continue to arrive very slowly and repayments are slow and uncertain. The decline in GDP for 2020, plus the slowdown in consumption and investment are something unsustainable. These are old talks connected to our inability to invest in the human factor and in some strategic areas. Healthcare is a prime example, like training, and the capacity to create work, which is very low. There are countries like **Sweden, Norway, and Spain**, where science and technology parks have been created that have favored job creation. The desert of some Southern areas and of the female workforce is disconcerted. This is a strategic error, because statistics tell us that women graduate earlier than men, with better grades as well as having great entrepreneurial skills. The challenge is in the reconstruction of the country, as declared by our President of the Republic.

Investment in labor of the future will be decisive, if we do not lay the foundation for an economic model that is adequate enough to be the thrust that comes from the "fourth revolution", and consequently, we will have no progress.

Digital learning education: culture and method

This first 2021 issue of KPMG Periodical focuses on the model of digital learning education. Can we explain the meaning of this new horizon in the time of emergency?

What I would like to underline first of all, is the great physical fatigue of employees and **managers** at the end of such a hard and difficult year. We are in fact forced to stay in front of the computer for more than eight hours a day, and we cannot think of prolonging our stillness in front of a screen, practicing digital learning, conceived as the exact replica in digital format, of materials and tools that already we are used to handling in the daily routine: slides, brochures, reports. In this difficult "suspended time" of the pandemic, many emotional and cognitive resources have been put to the test by the emergency. As **Antonio Scurati** wrote in an article recently published on the Corsera, we must try to remain lucid in this difficult winter. In order to do this, we must commit ourselves to clearing our minds of the cognitive fog of hateful resentment and begin to lay the foundation for an effective reconstruction, putting effective and innovative digital learning models, ideas, methodologies into place. Only under these conditions can the profound change in the intellectual mosaic concerning the production chain at all levels of the company be transformed into an intelligent revolution in work.

Innovating means "crossing different worlds". This assumption formed the theoretical basis for the implementation of the leaning tour, which Studio Panzarani has adopted for many years as an alternative training model to traditional schemes. Today, however, it is precisely the "journey" that is denied: how do you train an "innovative mind?"

As I theorized in the essay "**The journey into innovation**" (ed. Guerini ed.), committing to bringing companies and managers **to places where the future is anticipated** constitutes a training, pleasant, engaging moment, especially outside the traditional schemes. I took many colleagues *managers and entrepreneurs* to visit the most varied business areas, to get to know classic places of innovation, such as **Silicon Valley, Bangalore Valley, Israel**, but also cities in evolution, particularly interesting for the application of technologies to infrastructure for connection and use of services. I immersed myself with them in contexts where there is a real space for that *serendipity*, a catalyst for research and exploration, which together with education and creativity are essential components of innovation. **Learning is nurtured by an emotional aspect**, which is often sacrificed in the digital dimension. This is why I argue that the virtual will not be enough to cultivate an innovative mind. It is therefore easy to predict that *webinars and video conferences* will not be able to satisfy the thirst for knowledge and continuous updating, that businesses and employees need. Furthermore, there is a **tacit knowledge**, which cannot emerge when people confront each other remotely. *Apple's spaceship and Facebook's residential village* were designed with a very precise ratio, which remains valid and which will re-emerge when this phase of forced isolation is finally overcome.

«Humbition»: how leadership changes

The perspective on leadership is changing and it is imposing itself in a very strong way. Is there a real space for "alternative" professional figures with respect to the dominant thought?

If we do not change our attitude, there can be no future. *Humbition* means humility and ambition, but also *sustainable leadership*. That is, having an accurate awareness of one's abilities, skills and readiness in recognizing one's mistakes, opening up to the ideas and suggestions of others. Being ready for the contradiction without necessarily focusing on oneself, using one's skills and knowledge to connect to others in the best way, generating responsibility, trust and a positive attitude in collaborators. Humility is a vital ingredient, which therefore allows us to shift our concentration from self to us, combining organizational skills, quality of research and clarity of command. *Humbition* is the fulcrum of changing work, in a universe of participation that evolves in the dimension of risk, of growing uncertainty, described by the laws of chaos and complexity.

Without strengthening our adaptive capacity, talking about Humbition risks becoming unreachable. The role of major consulting players takes on a social responsibility profile from this point of view. What training must be put in place?

Adaptive enterprise was for the associate studio that I have been directing a mantra at. since the early years of activity. Darwin taught us that it will not be the strongest species that survive, but those **that will best adapt to new times**. The emergency of recent months has made us rediscover the role and function of the State, together with a vision of the Public Administration that must be able to express, in its employees, officers and managers, the culture of **civil servant** which is a **way of being**, as well as than a *professional status*, decisive for changing pace.

We remain on the front of the Public Administration, which seems to be heading towards the digital turnaround, at least judging by the latest data released by Minister Dadone that speak of an administration just a click away. Do you think we are at the right time for a real change?

Technology is a commodity that we can now take for granted. It will not be enough to buy a computer to overcome the excessive bureaucratization, if we then digitally replicate the proliferation of documents, forms, practices, stamped papers. We need a real change of mentality. Countries like Estonia have been able to do it very well and are among the **leaders** in Europe. Today in some countries, citizens see effective **streamlining of practices and a real possibility of universal access to services**. The intervention in training and consultancy terms of large companies, can therefore be decisive for developing a high sensitivity in each employee, bringing out the strategic function of a truly innovative Public Administration, in a technologically advanced world.

“What you are able to do counts more than what you learn”. Giuseppe Italiano, professor at LUISS, in an interesting interview published by Il Messaggero talks about the perspective of what is called “Job Ready”, a tool used by Google and some international giants. Should this trend worry us?

I don't think so at all. Google has implemented this initiative especially because today there is no training course for the creation of some technical profiles necessary for companies. It is clear that these are "buffer" initiatives, ready for use that cannot question the role and function of the University, much less structured study paths. The excessive gap between school work and universities, worlds that we in particular have not encountered, create these paradoxes. **Job ready** will not be the **definitive solution**, however it helps not to waste physical and intellectual energy, important and precious in a constantly evolving world of work.