

Sociologia del lavoro – Special Issue 160 (2) 2021
**MANAGERIAL CULTURE AND WORK IDENTITY
IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS**

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Deadline for abstract submission: **15/12/2020**

Context and Objectives

This call aims to collect theoretical and empirical contributions on the effects of reforms in education systems on knowledge workers in this sector.

Actually, in the last decades education systems – in Italy as well as elsewhere in Europe – have been deeply changing, with long-lasting consequences on their “organizational fields” [Powell and DiMaggio 1983]. It is a still ongoing process, usually influenced by the paradigm of New Public Management (NPM) [Hood 1991], that is deeply affecting political, cultural, economic, and technological contexts in which individual and institutional agency is embedded. Anyway, NPM-based practices have been conditioned by path-dependent institutional and organizational features, thus producing patchy processes and outcomes [Gunter *et al.* 2016]. Notwithstanding such differences, two common factors can be identified, as they are often associated with education reforms throughout Europe: first, the idea of having education systems closer to labour market needs; second, the inescapable demand for the introduction of market logics into the governance of schools and universities.

On the one hand, education reforms have been aimed to improve the link with the economic system. Producing an easily employable “human capital” has been set as a goal. On the other hand, a competitive market with education systems has been more and more structured, via tools like the pluralization of curricula, assessment practices, quality management and its designated bodies, project-based and competitive funding.

As education organizations has been more and more defined as a business, workers in this sector act within complex systems, where actions and attitudes are influenced not only by legal principles, but also by economic principles of affordability, efficiency and effectiveness. As already happened in the business world when the paradigm of Total Quality Management caught on, NPM principles in education imply changes in responsibilities and goal attainment – for the middle management as much as for street-level bureaucrats.

In this frame, competitiveness is more and more focal in the professional agency of education workers. Teachers, professors, researchers, managing staff are required to conform to competition rules and standardized criteria defined by quality insurance organizations. Teaching and researching is now coupled with requests for an active participation into the organizational success of one’s own institution. Workers’ adjustment to new roles may come very variably, between acceptance and resistance.

Whatever the value judgment and opinion on such “managerial culture” is (as explored by a rich literature [see Burrell 2001; Baccini 2010; Gambardella and Lumino 2015; Marra 2018]), we are persuaded that the tool-box used by the sociology of work can be helpful to disentangle relevant and under-explored dimensions of this issue.

Actually, changes in the regulation of education systems have been both redesigning organizational fields, and creating new rationalized myths [Meyer and Rowan 1977]. The managerial model, that characterizes education organizations in many countries, shares features with a widespread culture in the organizational field of post-industrial business: it is based on specific principles of rationality, as well as on a strong ideology [Kunda 1995], as it is required that its guiding principles are accepted and internalized by every member of the organization. Discourses on self-realization, ideas of merit and rewards, concur to locate agents within a field of aspirations and wills they have to internalize. This call aims to collect contributions focussing on how education workers react to the above-mentioned processes, with a special attention on jointly-constructed understandings used by education and research workers to represent their social and working conditions.

In particular, this call aims to collect contributions that can answer the following questions:

- is there a tension between the managerial culture and the work ethic of school and university workers?
- how workers' individual and collective identity is affected by the making of new organizational models?
- what kind of strategies are enacted by relevant actors to adjust wittingly, formally or tactically to the new organizational models?
- Is there any isomorphism in such strategical choices?
- How the resistance to such models is expressed?

Conditions and deadlines

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