Smart Working: Rethinking Work, Releasing Energy

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Successful organizations are more and more characterized by their ability to abandon now inappropriate organizational patterns and create working conditions enabling to meet, at the same time, new business targets and the emerging needs of people. The traditional criteria for organizational design must now be supported by new principles—such as emerging collaboration, autonomy and flexibility in the choice of work spaces and styles, talent enhancement, responsibility and widespread innovation. Actually, as the concept of knowledge economy and knowledge work spreads, the creation of value for a company is no longer linked only to the physical presence of the workers in a given place and for a certain period of time, but rather to their ability to generate innovation and do their job regardless of the time and place in which they live.

The development and diffusion of digital technologies able to support communication, collaboration and social network creation, along with the increasingly pervasive dissemination of powerful and easy-to-use mobile devices, can facilitate and support companies in this paradigm shift. However, the creation of what can be called a Smart Working system requires a joint redesign not only of technological levers, but also of organizational and managerial levers, which can be grouped into three basic categories:

- **Bricks**, or the physical layout of work spaces;
- **Bits**, or the ability to exploit the potential of digital technologies to rethink the virtual work space;
- **Behaviours**, in terms of work style and organizational policies, top management culture and peoples’ behaviours.

The School of Management of Politecnico di Milano, in Italy, has developed a permanent research centre—the Smart Working Observatory—to monitor and interpret this phenomenon, and to outline the possible directions for action. In its first year of activity, the Observatory has involved a variety of actors:

- 65 Human Resource Managers, to understand the prospects and benefits associated to “flexible” work in terms of time and location, and analyse the strategies and initiatives for reviewing the “concept” of physical work space according to principles of collaboration, openness, flexibility and wellbeing of the workers;
- 88 Chief Information Officers (CIOs), representing Italian companies of medium to large size, through surveys and direct interviews, to understand investments and the development prospects of digital technologies in Smart Working domain, such as Unified Communication & Collaboration, Social Service & Community, Applications and Mobile Devices, Cloud Computing;
- 80 Managers and Executives of Business Lines, to analyse the trends and need for improvement of work patterns and styles in terms of culture and management & employees’ behaviours, policies and organizational rules, physical work space (office) and virtual work space (ICT tools);
- 1,000 subordinates (employees/managers/executives) of medium to large companies (with a number of employees higher than 10) aged between 16 and 65, through a survey made in collaboration with Doxa (an Italian market research company) to analyse their ways of working and related satisfaction, as well as the use and impact of ICT tools on their performance.

The Smart Working Observatory aims to gradually extend the context of its analyses from the Italian to the European level. In order to accomplish this goal, the organisers of the developmental workshop want to establish some partnership with leading European universities with the aim of:
• Constructing a network of researchers and a permanent community of interest around the broad topic of smart working;
• Achieving a critical mass in order to apply for the funding opportunities made available at national/European/international level;
• Establishing joint research initiatives (e.g. a European survey) to collect European data on the topic of smart working;
• Promoting dialogue and collaboration between the researchers and the practitioners interested in the topic of smart working;
• Becoming a permanent point of reference for innovating the way work is organised in the European countries.

The developmental workshop will allow to clarify the results achieved so far by the Observatory and to discuss the strategies that it is possible to implement in order to achieve the aforementioned objectives.