BETWEEN REALITY AND APPEARANCE:
THE CHALLENGE OF THE EFFECTIVE CHANGE

Special Issue for WOA 2017

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Change processes within firms and organizations represent a particularly attractive field in which to investigate the relationship between reality and appearance. How could we not evoke the famous words of the novel "Il Gattopardo" by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa?

Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi!
(For everything to remain the same, everything must change!)

The idea of change between reality and appearance may assume different meanings. We can depict at least three different situations:

- the deliberate change is consistent with the entrepreneurial/managerial orientation, it also reflects values and beliefs that are dominant in the specific context, but it cannot be fully implemented, due to widespread phenomena of inertia and resistance (functionalism);
- new organizational forms are introduced without implementing the related practices, thereby determining a superficial change; this is due to a conscious choice of entrepreneurs/managers under institutional pressures (institutionalism);
- the implemented change is consistent with the deliberate change, yet it represents only an apparent discontinuity if compared to the status quo ante; entrepreneurs or managers may be more or less aware of this (critical perspective).

As for the social sciences, the study of the relationship between reality and appearance finds its roots in the critical functionalism, as Gouldner introduces the notion of apparent (mock) bureaucracy to explain those situations in which neither managers nor workers acknowledge work rules that are imposed from outside (Gouldner, 1954). But it is with the neo-institutional theory that the issue is deepened, in order to explain entrepreneurial and managerial decisions that are aimed at achieving or improving legitimacy. Within this perspective, a major role is assumed by studies on *decoupling*, which became more fashionable in the last two decades (Oliver 1991, Fiss & Zajac 2004, Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2009).

To debate issues concerning the effectiveness of change process it is necessary to clearly state the goals we pursue and to define what side(s) of effectiveness are considered. In the light of the above-mentioned perspectives, an effective change does not necessarily match with a suitable change. Indeed, it may be that a real change, in which new structures and practices induce new behaviours, is undesirable and unexpected; whereas an apparent change, that is a superficial one, is quite desirable and expected.

This special issue aims at developing a wider and deeper awareness of the complexity of change processes in firms and in organizations. Possible research questions may concern (but they are not limited to):

- May an "apparent" change be considered effective? Can it be considered a rational response?
- May a "real change" be a way to conceal the willingness of maintaining the status quo ante?
- How is change processes' effectiveness influenced by competitive pressure?
- To what extent does an "apparent change" impact on customer satisfaction?
- To what extent does an "apparent change" impact on employee satisfaction?
– What is the role of culture in determining an apparent change?
- What is the role of cognitive processes in determining managers' and employees' perception of "apparent" vs. "real" changes in organizations?"

The special issue welcomes contributions from a wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Both conceptual and empirical contributions are encouraged.

Details of the process

Papers will respect editorial indications (the new version will be available on the website – www.impresaprogetto.it - since January 2017). They will go through the standard review process of the Journal (http://www.impresaprogetto.it/contributors-guidelines).

Please, note that the deadline for submission (both in Italian and in English) is fixed at 31st March 2017.