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Call for papers for a Research in the Sociology of Organizations Volume on:

**Digital transformation and institutional theorizing:  
Consequences, opportunities and challenges**

Editors

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**Call for Papers**

Digitally-enabled institutional arrangements, such as new organizational forms, are increasingly changing the rules of the game in many industries and fields. Consider the following examples: Platforms, such as TripAdvisor, restructured entire evaluation systems in the tourism industry – moving from an expert-based model (based on an episodic, standardized review by professionals) to a crowd-based model, that is continuously harnessing and aggregating consumer’s evaluations (Orlikowski & Scott, 2014). Despite meeting resistance by regulators, Uber and AirBnB gained legitimacy for disrupting, disintermediating and reconfiguring the delivery of taxi and accommodation services (Bauer & Gegenhuber, 2015; Mair & Reischauer, 2017; Cusumano et al., 2019). Organizations in the diamond industry have begun to mobilize support for a transparent, blockchain-based model of tracking diamonds from production to end-consumer in order to weed out conflict diamonds (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2017; Seidel, 2018).

Although lagging behind other research fields, such as information systems research or the technology and innovation management literature, institutional theorists are increasingly attentive to the role and impact of digitalization (Davis, 2016; Deephouse et al., 2017; Hinings et al., 2018; Hinings & Meyer, 2018; Powell et al., 2016). There is no doubt that digitally-enabled institutional arrangements permeate and reshape industries and fields, challenging power structures and meaning systems. This presents a significant opportunity for institutional theorists to probe further into how actors leveraging digital technologies can *transform the very ways in which institutions are created, complemented, threatened or destroyed*.

For instance, Powell et al. (2016) demonstrate how actors use social media technologies in the early stages of institutionalization processes. These technologies aid ventures, bloggers or activists alike to introduce novel ideas into a field by circumventing traditional stakeholders,

reaching large audiences and making their ideas understandable and easily adoptable (see also Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017; Hannigan et al., 2018, von Hippel, 2017). In a similar vein, the cultural entrepreneurship literature (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019) began to examine how ventures using a digital platform, such as crowdfunding, results in legitimacy spillovers (i.e. individual outcomes encourage or discourage audiences to support similar projects; Soublière & Gehman, 2019) as well as in open negotiation of appropriate norms driving ventures' actions (Gegenhuber & Naderer, 2019). Etter and colleagues (2017) make the case that social media plays a critical role in the formation of social judgments, resulting, however, in increasingly fragmented and multi-vocal audience judgments (see also Glozer et al., 2018). Conversely, however, Kornberger and colleagues (2017) indicate that rating mechanisms in various platforms fuel homogenized social evaluations. Lindebaum, Vessa and den Hond (2019) also suggest the need for further theorising on the rapid rise and implications of algorithmic decision making in organizations and for organizational studies more broadly (see also Shrestha et al., 2019).

Using this early work as a vantage point, we envisage this Volume as an invitation to think about the interplay of novel digital technologies and institutional processes, including processes of institutional emergence, change, institutionalization and de-institutionalization. We see this as encompassing new, platform-based organizations that disrupt existing institutional processes (e.g., Uber, Spotify, TripAdvisor); organizations that are well established in digital innovation and thus are part of ongoing institutional processes (e.g., Amazon, Google; Microsoft); and organizations within established fields that are subject to digital innovation and are dealing with changing institutional processes (e.g., banks, telecommunications, retail) (Davis, 2017; Hinings et al., 2018). We therefore call for empirical (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods) or conceptual papers addressing 'digital transformation and institutional theorising', encouraging different levels of analysis and inviting papers that make integrative and innovative contributions to a range of topics and themes, such as:

#### *Institutionalization mechanisms and processes*

Novel digitally-enabled institutional arrangements, that is a bundle of legitimate practices, values and actor constellations intertwined with digital technologies, may rearrange institutionalization mechanisms such as inter-organizational monitoring (e.g., Tolbert & Zucker, 1996), theorization (e.g., Strang & Meyer, 1993), and interest group advocacy or resistance (e.g., Lounsbury, 2001). This raises the question: how do novel digital institutional

arrangements based on technologies such as social media, blockchain, artificial intelligence, or algorithms, reconfigure institutionalization mechanisms and processes? For instance, how does leveraging social media affect (de-)legitimation processes of a new venture? How does the interplay of ‘new’ arrangements (e.g., social media) and ‘old’ institutional arrangements (e.g., traditional media) mediate these processes?

### *Emergence of novel actors and agency*

Corporations, such as Apple, Amazon, Google/Alphabet, and Facebook are powerful actors providing and controlling critical infrastructure of a digital economy (Cutolo & Kenney, 2019; Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2015). It is in these infrastructures, in which many processes of institutionalization take place. Hence, how does their infrastructure impact institutionalization processes? How do these actors make use of their dominant positions to affect these?

Another aspect is that institutional theory posits that professions such as law or medicine are critical arbiters in enacting institutional arrangements. What does artificial intelligence mean for the boundaries and positioning of traditional professions (Barrett et al., 2012)? How do existing players (e.g., experts) within organizations cope with the growing importance new actors such as external crowds and users (Ansari & Munir, 2010; Lifshitz-Assaf, 2018)? And additionally, who are the arbiters in a digital economy (e.g. (data)analysts, programmers, bloggers)?

We know that software, such as an ERP system, infuses and reinforces a corporate institutional logic into organizations (Berente & Yoo, 2012). Going further, and building on the rich literature of socio-materiality (Leonardi & Barley, 2010; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008), how can we account for the emergence of new (digital) actors or the displacement of other actors by artificial intelligence? And furthermore, how can we theorise non-human forms of agency in institutional contexts?

### *Fields and their infrastructures*

Fields (exchange or issue fields) and the respective field infrastructures are essential to understanding the emergence and diffusion of novel institutional arrangements (Zietsma et al., 2017; Hinings et al., 2017). New organizational forms, such as digital platforms and their ecosystems often seek to become arbiters of a subfield within a field (e.g. Apple and Android within the mobile phone industry). How can an understanding of fields inform understandings of digital platform ecosystems (Jacobides et al., 2018; Ozalp et al., 2018)?

Digital platforms also enable more loosely coupled forms of cross-field collaboration, or emerge at the intersections of fields or between fields, intermediating in different ways to traditional boundary organizations (Randhawa et al., 2017). They may be used to pursue a range of goals, both for-profit and for the production of social good (Logue & Grimes, 2018). As such, how may such novel digital institutional arrangements change understandings of negotiation processes within fields, and the interaction and mutual dependence between and across fields and subfields (Furnari, 2016; cf. Soublière & Gehman, 2019)?

### **Organization of the Volume**

We invite all authors interested in contributing to this RSO volume to submit a short paper for the EGOS track (Sub Theme #23: “Digital Transformation and Institutional Theory”, convened by Gegenhuber, Hinings and Logue). While a submission to the EGOS track is not necessary for consideration in the volume, we understand the EGOS sub-theme as the key avenue for developing papers. Papers to the volume will be subject to a peer-review to ensure high quality contributions. We expect that authors submitting to this volume are available to serve as reviewers too.

#### *Timeline*

January 2020	Deadline for short papers (for more information see <a href="https://www.egosnet.org/2020/hamburg/General-Theme">https://www.egosnet.org/2020/hamburg/General-Theme</a> )
July 2020	EGOS sub-theme
<b>October, 1st 2020</b>	<b>Deadline for submissions of all papers to the Volume</b> Allocation of peer reviews
December, 30 2020	Deadline for sending back reviews of submissions, with editorial guidance
March, 1st 2021	Deadline for re-submissions of papers to the Volume, final editorial decisions
July, 2021	Publication of the Volume

### **Submission**

The length of the manuscript is 8.000 – 10.000 words, including all references, tables, figures and endnotes. Submit the manuscript to [digitaltransformation\\_rso@leuphana.de](mailto:digitaltransformation_rso@leuphana.de). Send two PDFs – one version with the authors’ names and one version for blind peer review.

For further questions regarding the EGOS track and the RSO volume send an e-mail to [gegenhuber@leuphana.de](mailto:gegenhuber@leuphana.de)

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