

# DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AS A SOURCE OF CREATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY: BUILDING A CLIMATE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CREATIVITY WITH DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

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## ABSTRACT

Article suggests that deliberative democracy enables creative climate for organizational development connecting organizational creativity and digitalization together. Deliberative democracy processes deliver a solution for organizations to benefit digital transformation in creative ways. Three factors of digitalization, organizational creativity and deliberative democracy have different roles in the equation but when connected they create a functional opportunity for the use of digital possibilities. Developing digital era provides endless opportunities and advantages for people and organizations but along changing times comes also challenges and unexpected consequences. Rapidly developing digital technology is leading the way in connectivity, interaction and opening novel ways to offer services and design products. Along digitalization people's needs and demands are following the path of developing digital solutions. In these changing times, organizations are confronting a new era where technology is showing the way of new organization culture with the characters of transparency, participation and immediate responsiveness. Success requires the need for keeping up with the pace of digital development and foreseeing future possibilities and anticipating coming consequences. Creativity functions as a partner with digital technology enabling new discoveries from digital sources. Organizational creativity applies divergent and diverse approaches for the development of unique, novel and useful solutions for the greater performance of organizational operations. This article identifies deliberative democracy as potential option for creative development processes. Article concludes by recognizing the interconnectedness between considered concepts.

Keywords: Digital technology, Digital transformation, Organizational creativity, Organization development, Deliberative Democracy.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Digitalization has brought a technological change to individuals and societies that is affecting nearly everyone, nearly everywhere. The development of computer and internet technology has created a digital transformation that is affecting comprehensively our way of operating and interacting. (Reddy & Reinartz, 2017.) Digital transformation reaches us everywhere, it influences our way of living, working and even our relation to others. Among its reachability, technological infiltration brings drastic changes which require energy for adaptation and the resilience to conquer the fear of change. (Bajer, 2017.) The diffusion of digital technology and the internet is breaking boundaries in work and life where barriers use to exist. The interconnectedness of everything through digital technology is a feature of shaping more complex reality, where everything is affecting everything. (Lanzolla & Anderson, 2008.) In a changing world public sector and business actors cannot rely on traditions that have once proven successful when technological development is changing the demand and supply all the time. During digital change people's relationship with their mobile devices and online networks has grown stronger, as they are handling social interactions with friends and family, professional relations to work and to different institutions through digital means. Behavioral changes and growing expectations for digital interaction raises demand for service providers to adapt and adopt to the digital era. (McNutt, 2014.)

Due to its intrusive nature, digital transformation is offering benefits to a wide sector of users, from organizations to customers, individuals to societies. Digitalization is shaping organization's operating culture and moving organization boundaries between sectors. Changing work culture promises greater efficiency and effectiveness through the integration of new technologies. (Reddy & Reinartz, 2017.) Many times, technological solutions act as the driver for change and for the nature of constant development and newness they can also be seen as a major source of innovation as they enable the easy creation and testing of new solutions. (Bekkers, 2012.) Creativity allows us to change the shape of the future, by looking at events from multiple perspectives we are able to recognize possible consequences and forecast future scenarios (Robinson, 2011). Creating new knowledge or doing something for the first time may provide this critical understanding and advantage over the surrounding challenges that is needed for future sustainability. (Woodman et al., 1993)

In this article deliberative democracy is proposed to offer a creative climate for the development of organizational operations and services. Digitalization provides rewarding content for creative development with its endless possibilities and constantly developing features. Creativity within organization is about people, but also about the whole environment, so in creative development it is needed to consider holistically the whole operation environment with all of its actors and dimensions (Amabile, 1988). Deliberative democracy aims for the informed decisions and creation of solutions that are the production of justified and well considered reflection and debate between relevant parties. This way deliberative processes provide a pleasing climate for the exchange of ideas and opinions, therefore creating a development-friendly surrounding. (Habermas, 2006.) Digital technology with its constantly developing characteristics functions as perfect platform for creativity, offering unexpected solutions and opportunities for organization's benefit. Deliberative democracy delivers

a solution for organizations to benefit digitalization in creative ways. In deliberative processes people are able to share knowledge, build ideas and come to commonly accepted conclusions. This paper suggests that deliberative democracy enables a required climate for creative organizational development connecting organizational creativity and digitalization together. The following chapters will provide an understanding about the ongoing digital transformation with its demands and opportunities. An explanation of creativity, the meaning of the concept and the features included are described in Chapter 3. Article is concluded with the description of deliberative democracy and to the suggestion of deliberative democracy building a favorable climate for creative work. The theoretical approach enables the reader to reflect the relation between introduced concepts and the functionality of the deliberative process for the creative development.

### **Digitalization as endless source of imagination**

To be able to understand the vast variety of digital possibilities, it is needed to have a holistic apprehension of this multidimensional concept. Digital transformation, or digitalization holds multiple explanations without one true definition. Digitalization can be understood as aims for the organizational effectiveness by reforming existing operations with exploiting the benefits of digital technology. Also characteristic of the concept is that digitalization integrates the use of digital technology to multiple levels in society and businesses offering multidimensional opportunities for use. Digital transformation can also be explained as a use of digital tools and applications, to the transformation of products and services into their digital equivalents. One explanation describes the concept as a widespread use of digital technology in organizations, countries and societies. Among the use of digital solutions, the concept also consists of multidimensional effects associated with the utilization of digital technology in many levels of society and organizations. (Parviainen et al., 2017.) With the use of online tools and social media applications digitalization holds enormous possibilities for the public sector for example in the engagement of citizens to the governmental decision-making and service designing. (McNutt, 2014.)

Along the development of digital technology, possibilities in organization's information communication technologies (ICT) have developed from the broadcast paradigm to communicative paradigm and all the way towards the ubiquitous engagement of digital technology. (McNutt, 2014.) The ubiquitous engagement of digital interconnectivity is reaching people and building networks based on people's interests. Through the digital connectivity, technology is enabling and facilitating new type of content creation. These Web 2.0 technologies offer new reachability and accessibility to people and services. (Lanzolla & Anderson, 2008.) For the customer digitalization is seen as greater transparency of administrative decisions and processes. Easily available information lowers the knowledge asymmetry the between expert and customer, same time bringing stronger participation to the customers leading to the benefit of better and more convenient services. (Reddy & Reinartz, 2017.) The creation of new or reinventing existing operating models requires new approaches on thinking and doing. Reinvented models need to be designed from the technology perspective for the full utilizing of digital possibilities. Ability to change existing mindset and learning to be creative is a crucial and challenging demand for the successful adaptation of change. (Reddy & Reinartz, 2017.)

Digital change is happening fast and staying ahead of changes demands fast responses and immediate recognition of opportunities. Forecasting and reacting to change demands flexibility and ability to withstand risk taking. (Reddy & Reinartz, 2017.) The successful adaptation of digital transformation in organizations is about fundamental changes to the organization's operative, cultural and administrative operations. Among technical actions digitalization contains the demand and willingness to learn away from familiar along with readiness to welcome new practices. (McNutt, 2014.) Through the holistic use of technological advantages digital transformation promises value for society. With greater participation, information sharing, experimenting and effective re-arranging of work methods digitalization offers possibilities for current and future public administration challenges. (Reddy & Reinartz, 2017.) Value for organization can be competitive edge over others or the capability to withstand abrupt changes and crises (Rochet et al., 2008). Among possibilities comes also the presence of challenges, with digitalization three critical issues are information management, privacy and security. Challenges are true, however, issues mentioned are still simply a new manifestation of known problems that reveal themselves in a digital form. Still, it is needed to state that digital transformation contains many aspects that are needed to overcome before the total inclusion of digital technology. Digital divide presents a new type of exclusion that is shaped by the required skills and interests associated with digital technology and the accessibility to digital services and connections. The digital divide has a worrying feature that sets parts of society in the matter of people and places away from its services when the whole ethos of digitalization is about the opposite. (McNutt, 2014.)

Digital change serves us the opportunity to design our work, services, products in a way that exploits our true potential as humans and empowers to use our unique abilities and skills. Technology's ability to take charge of certain tasks and procedures free humans of these often dull and repetitive actions. Partnering with technology allows people to free their mind for more creative use, as complex problem solving and social interaction that machines are not able to master. (Bajer, 2017.)

### **The importance of creativity in organization setting**

Look around and you will see objects that are results from creative processes. We see products from technology, fashion to constructions, all being results of creative achievements. Creativity is all around us, there is no question about it. (Runco, 2015.) Defining creativity though presents multiple challenges due to its complex, dynamic, multifaceted and pluridetermined nature (Soriano de Alencar, 2012). For its complex nature creativity can often be found with numerous definitions (Amabile, 1988; Mumford & Gustafson, 1988; Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Kozáková, 2013). With its multiple aspects, creativity can be stated as a complex phenomenon, without a clear singular definition. Single conceptualizing even possesses the danger of narrowing the divergent and diversity respecting nature of creativity and therefore affecting its potential. (Runco, 2008). After an analysis of 90 creativity related peer-reviewed articles Plucker, Beghetto and Dow (2004) came to a conclusion to propose a following definition for creativity:

“Creativity is the interaction among aptitude, process and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context.”

Understanding the appearance of creativity and the emergence of innovations has become a necessity for organizations in the current age of globalization and constant change (Agars et al. 2008). Creativity pursues to increase human capacity to take greater benefit from the surrounding opportunities and strengthens resilience toward change and unexpected situations. (Soriano de Alencar, 2012.) In organizational creativity, individual and organization are two interdependent actors. Individual creativity being the most crucial element but in itself insufficient for organizational achievements. Whereas organization features can act as the most crucial determinants of an individual creativity. (Amabile, 1988.) Adaptation to change is the necessary requirement for the successfulness of organizations and companies that can be powered by the urge of creativity and imagination to accomplish something new and original. (Soriano de Alencar, 2012; Cummings & Oldham, 1997.) Public sector benefits creativity as an option to change working methods and service delivery by improving processes, streamlining services and providing better customer satisfaction. All in all, public administration is surrounded with increasingly complex societal challenges where legal, political and economic issues together with bureaucratic procedures are all in an intertwined relation. (Kozáková, 2013.)

Global competition and technological development are few factors raising the need for rethinking of services and procedures. (Cummings & Oldham, 1997.) Creativity has been acknowledged as an important social resource within the rapidly developing social and technological challenges (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988). Digital technologies hold the potential to innovations by enhancing creativity in workplace (Oldham & Da Silva, 2015). Focus of the workplace creativity being in the production of new and useful ideas usually within organizational products, services, processes and procedures (Egan, 2005). Characterized for the technological innovation is that the creation of novel ideas doesn't happen in isolation but in a common interaction and willingness to co-operate, link, share and test ideas. The involved learning process contains the sharing of knowledge, experience and information between relevant parties. (Bekkers, 2012.) Understanding about the surrounding phenomena opens new possibilities for creative use from the point of different knowledge, skills and abilities. (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988.) With the development towards more participative, open and collective solutions (McNutt, 2014) digital technology provides direct access to information, enables the engagement between related people and has qualities to enhance better support and feedback. In the quest of original and useful products, practices and procedures digital technology holds strong potential for organizational creativity through its unique features of endless possibilities (Oldham & Da Silva, 2015).

### **Making creative group interaction**

The highest level of creative performance is achieved with creative personalities but only with an environment that allows them to accomplish their full potential. Three key features rise from the organization environment that nurtures creative behavior. Features of job complexity, supportive and non-controlling supervision and stimulating co-workers facilitate work context to reach the emergence of creativity and creative

development. (Cummings & Oldham, 1997.) Knowledge creation characterizes the mission for any organization or community working for their existence and development of performance. Actions behind every function and service or product development within an organization includes the important aspect of content related knowledge and information but also the knowledge about the included structures, processes and the whole organizational culture. (von Krogh & Geilinger, 2014.) The potential of group creativity has been identified as an important resource for organization effectiveness, but successful group creativity and innovation implementation requires sufficient understanding about the complex interaction between multiple actors within group. (Nijstad & De Dreu, 2002.)

Nature of knowledge is divided into tacit and explicit knowledge, some of it being related directly to expertise and professional skills and some coming through experience and experiments. Through the sharing of knowledge this intangible asset that people possess can be transferred to others and as a whole build the organizations knowledge base for the effective creation of future products, solutions and processes. Organizational information and expertise lies in the processes and structures as internal knowledge but also as in external sources as social networks and in written documents. The use of diverse knowledge sources enables gathering of new perspectives and combining information into new knowledge. (Carmeli et al., 2013.) Setting goals for creative outcomes has been noted to result in more creative results and divergent thinking than actions without specific suggestions for creativity. Promoting creativity as meaningful and important factor therefore influences positively to creative outcomes. (Egan, 2005.) With challenging and complex tasks employees are able to exploit their full talent and are obligated to seek divergent approaches at the request of the best solution (Cummings & Oldham, 1997). Divergent views and different skills are proposed to bring multiple perspectives and the potential of constructive conflicts to the group's creative process. A holistic view can be achieved by exploiting multiple approaches from different professional backgrounds, knowledge, skills and abilities all promoting the creativity of the group. Task characteristics dictate the required magnitude of diverse knowledge and skills that are applied to the group. Broad discussions of a variety of topics link diverse ideas and thinking models, adding new dimensions to the discussion that favor creative thinking. (West, 2002.)

The challenge of diversity is to maintain safe and integrated work climate between group members. So that group possess sufficient amount of diversity for potential creativity but without threatening members trust on sharing views and opinions and the ability to communicate and work effectively as a group. (West, 2002.) Stimulating work culture towards a creative climate encourages a change for adaptive and effective organization that confronts change as continuing possibility rather than an inevitable crisis. Building creative climate means affecting the beliefs, values, norms and strategies that influence inside the organization culture. (Brophy, 1998.) Supportive leadership enables necessary work conditions for employees and shows concern for wellbeing, shares feedback from achievements and promotes participative decision making and open work culture. Interaction between co-workers contains the possibility of raising awareness about dealt issues within group but also functioning as positive competitiveness between group members. (Cummings & Oldham, 1997.)

**Building a climate for organizational creativity with deliberative democracy**

Previous chapters provided a general understanding about the possibilities and dimensions related to the digital transformation and the use of technology in organizational setting. The full utilization of digitalization comes with certain requirements, but it also provides multiple opportunities for organizational development. Creativity pursues to seek and exploit those rising opportunities that digital change serves. Organizational environment has a strong influence on work creativity and along with people the whole surrounding forms a climate where positive outcomes can be expected (Amabile, 1988). In order to support creative thinking and doing article proposes a suggestion from deliberative democracy, for the building of creative climate for organizational development.

Deliberative democracy aims for the production of sustainable and objective decisions and idea development. Outcomes are achieved by viewing information from multiple perspectives in processes where decision are made in a respectful and mutual understanding. (see Dryzek, 2001; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Vartiainen, 2009; Nabatchi 2010.) Open reflection and debate between the presented opinions and arguments form the general acceptability and reasonability of the outcomes (Dryzek, 2001; Habermas, 2006). Deliberative processes pursue toward the creation of holistic view from the discussed issues. The aim is achieved by applying all the necessary information and experiences related to the matter combined with an adequate evaluation from multiple perspectives. Outcomes of the decision processes represent optimal solutions possible with a given time and available information. (Munno & Nabatchi, 2014.) Principles of deliberative democracy form the acceptability of the outcomes and therefore the legitimacy of the process. Final opinions are formed in a mutual understanding between participants where the use of all the available information, opinions and experiences constructs the base of decision making. The principles of transparency, openness and equal participating enables the sharing of knowledge and opinions without constrains and the fear of judgement. (Sprain & Gastil, 2013). Collective reflection of issues, environment and work processes is a key feature for developmental work, where open and safe interaction is one of the first requirements for successful dialogue (Lantz & Brav, 2007).

Quality decisions and solutions are dependent on members willingness and motivation for an engagement. The requirement in a deliberative process is that well informed participants share knowledge in a mutual respect without holding back any critical information. Knowledge sharing forces to evaluate one's opinions and changes in opinions are common during the process when information is evaluated from multiple perspectives. (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2002.) During the process individuals gain new knowledge in the dialogue between participants when information is flowing from different perspectives and from multiple issues. (Munno & Nabatchi, 2014.) All the presented arguments should be well justified in order to provide an understanding for other members for the reasons behind opinions. Increased knowledge and open discussion produces a broad understanding where collective outcomes can be produced. (Habermas, 2006.) Deliberative processes contain learning, changes of opinions, unanimous and most importantly differing opinions, where participants are challenged to produce collective solutions (Carson, 2011). Exchange of perspectives

and respect of differing opinions in an open dialogue enables a climate for the critical reciprocal change of thoughts (Nabatchi, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Article has provided an overview of three concepts. Digital transformation and organizational creativity hold such multiple dimensions, one explanation being their complex nature, that short definition of the concepts is not eligible to explain all the strengths and weaknesses that these concepts withhold. As told, digital technology opens up numerous possibilities for organizational and service development with its constantly developing qualities. It is a character that reinforces the need for creative designing of services and operations but also raises the demand for creative counteractions toward the side effects that digital change brings along. Opening possibilities in productivity and knowledge production to citizens and employees, along with affects following the use of ubiquitous mobile technology digital technology enables the rise of unpredictable experiments and solutions. Successful solutions as Netflix and Uber are an example of creative insight behind the development of digital technology that has met the demand of work life or society (Parviainen et al., 2017). Along with developing service operations and with the growing requirements for technological skills, knowledge, devices and connectivity comes also new learning demands for citizens and employees. Appearing needs should be foreseen in order to maintain fluent service delivery and for the avoidance of unnecessary malfunctioning and risks in performance. The infiltration of digital technology is an inevitable change which organizations need to conquer for successful operation. Creative thinking and the support for inventive interaction support that successful organizational change (Egan, 2005).

Many of the features in current organizational changes revolve around developments in information technology and alterations in information systems (Dunleavy et al., 2005). Taking hold on change requires not only the imagination to think in new ways but also the skills to adopt the outcomes of creative action. Understanding and exploiting a holistic approach in development enables that need for thinking differently but also acting differently. (Robinson, 2011.) Broad perception from multiple knowledge sources enables the outcome of new knowledge and insights, which leans on the wisdom of many. The basic idea of working collectively relies usually on the belief that many are smarter and more capable than few. Aiming for high-quality decisions in group collaboration contains multiple perspectives and arguments for and against resulting in a unanimous conclusion. Group decision-making gathers members cognitive diversity on knowledge and expertise into an intelligence that is also referred as collective wisdom. (Landemore 2012.) This is where deliberative democracy comes to enable creative climate for future developments and decision-making. Through collective reflection comes learning that builds new ideas and creation of novel methods and processes for organizational use (Kira & Frieling, 2007). Ability to comprehend complex characteristics of the surrounding environment enables the opportunity to create something new. Thinking creatively and combining existing knowledge gives rise to unique ideas. Supportive environment for creativity is achieved by allowing experimenting and supporting participative knowledge sharing climate. (Mitleton-Kelly, 2011.) Characters of transparency, openness and equality in



deliberative processes build reciprocal appreciation to the group along with the sense of safety to express one's opinions and respect of others. Neutral facilitators guide group discussions, keeping topics within predetermined topics and assure pleasant climate for group's interaction and equal exchange of opinions (Felicetti et al., 2012).

With its principles, deliberative democracy contains numerous confluences with the features supporting organizational creativity and especially with characters described among creative group interaction. Deliberative democracy is focused towards collective and unanimous decision-making where the diverse group of people form choices based on existing knowledge in a process of learning from each other from an exchange of versatile knowledge and opinions (Carson, 2011). Setting the target towards creative outcomes participants are able to direct their collaborative effort for the creation of new and unique. For creative development, the process needs to be guided with a precision that supporting characteristics can be fulfilled. Article provided an introduction to a theory focused approach for creative organizational development by the use of deliberative democracy principles as a basis for group creativity. Future research should be focused on the execution of creative development by deliberative processes so that the suitability of deliberative democracy for the creation of creativity promoting climate could be empirically proven.

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