

ASSI CONFERENCE 2018

Companies and organizations in an historical perspective

Bocconi University, Milan

20-21 December 2018

Call for papers

Organization is the result of a conscious effort to create channels of authority and communication in the productive activity of the company, as well as in the allocation of resources and the evaluation of their performance.

The organizational challenge typically emerges when a company achieves a certain quantitative threshold in terms of size, turning the need for organization into a key issue. Below this threshold, the internal dynamics of a company and the relationships among the actors which operate inside it are usually spontaneous, and don't require formalization. In more recent times however, within the contemporary global and technological environment, small companies also face the issue of adopting an appropriate organizational structure.

How much does organizational design matter for a company? Can an inappropriate organization react promptly to changes in strategy?

Evidence proves that there isn't an organizational formula which works for all companies over time and space. The best organization is the one able to mobilize, in the most efficient way, the resources of a company. Since the 1950s, for instance, industrial sociologists have demonstrated that Taylorism is not an organization of production that works for all sectors. It used to be the best way to manage the mass production of standardized products, but not the most efficient way to manage manufacturing in, say, the chemical and metal industries, or the production of big single pieces such as in the shipbuilding industry.

In the same way, a form of enterprise which gathers unrelated activities under the same roof can be at the origin of heterogeneous results according to the different kind of control exercised by headquarters.

Even though organization became an issue around the time of the Industrial Revolution, organizational matters were certainly not irrelevant in the life of large pre-industrial companies such as banks, trading companies, and arsenals.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that organization goes beyond the single company and includes also alliances among different companies aimed at controlling a market (cartels), networks and groups of enterprises, and geographical areas, as in the case of the industrial districts in which the production of a good is achieved through a sophisticated horizontal and vertical division of labor.

We ask that proposals have the “black box” -- represented by the relationship between companies and their organization-- at the center of their analysis, considering, for example, topics such as the genesis of an organization, the critical tangles of the connection between corporate strategies and organization, the successes and failures of organizational forms, the role of immaterial determinants in defining the organizational design, the relationship between the entrepreneur and the organization, the creation and resilience of managerial capabilities, or the interaction between formal and informal organization. Contributions related to any industry, geographical area, and historical period are welcome.

Conference languages will be English and Italian.

Proposals of no more than 400-600 words together with a CV should be sent to: segreteria@assi-web.it, by September 20th, 2018. Decisions will be sent by October 5th, 2018.

For proposals that are accepted, the author(s) will be required to send either a paper of 7,000-9,000 words, or a long-abstract (approximately 1,500 words) of the presentation by November 30th, 2018.