Introduction to the special issue

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The publication of David Harvey's *The Enigma of Capital* in 2010 reminds us yet again of one of the great paradoxes at the heart of late modernity: capitalism can only survive into the future so long as it destroys the very things that ensured its success in the past. According to Harvey, the experience of the most recent global financial crisis (GFC) also confirms that, in transforming itself, capitalism pays scant regard to prevailing moral

and legal institutions. In light of this, we are misguided to hope that capitalism and management can ever be ethical and regulated.

Capitalism, ever evolving and ever destroying its past, has produced major changes in the organisation of work in the last few decades that have shaken old relations and expectations. Internal labour markets in large firms have been greatly weakened; layoffs and restructurings have become far more frequent than in the classic post-war era; production is increasingly structured in 'value chains' rather than in vertical hierarchies; outsourcing and offshoring are now seen as normal, breaking the mindset of vertical integration; work at all levels is often organised in teams; and workers are commonly invited to participate in shopfloor decision-making.

These changes violate many principles of 20th century management, especially the Taylorist emphasis on tight control and limitation of initiative and creativity. Management texts tend to present the new world as a great advance for workers, with more opportunity for self-development, greater choice, more diversity, more involvement.

These shifts also present challenges to critical theories that assume the conflict between management and workers must continually increase, and that control must become ever tighter. Critical theorists have responded by pointing to clear downsides: the obvious increase in insecurity, and the stagnation of wages since the 1970s. They have also claimed that the rhetoric of teamwork and participation has little to do with the lived reality of workers, that it merely seeks to legitimate an increase in stress and speed.

The crisis of 2008, in which financial institutions trampled on ethical principles long held even among capitalist leaders, has brought the problem of ethics to the foreground once again. The idea that there may be something like a moral sense at the heart of the economic activity has reemerged as a crucial issue.

These are the ideas and convictions that brought us to initiate a stream dedicated to the new forms of (work) organisation and the transformation of work in an amoral and lawless world, at the seventh Critical Management Studies conference held in Naples (Italy) in July 2011. Indeed, an obvious manifestation of these features of capitalism in the critical literature is our abiding interest in the transformation of work practices. These cover a wide range of now familiar arrangements (e.g., flextime, teleworking, virtual teams, community of practices, etc.); many of which have led to the emergence of new forms of organisation that are focused on the creation and management of knowledge (e.g., learning organisations, communities of practice, network organisations, etc.). These transformations are well-understood in terms of their technological, organisational, and spatial implications but we wish to broaden this critical research tradition to include ethical and cultural considerations. The aftermath of the global financial crisis thus provides us with an opportunity to pause and consider the inherent instability of the broader moral and cultural context in which such transformations occur. We sought to test Harvey's pessimistic view by posing the general question: Can capitalism ever be ethical and regulated and, if so, what do we dare to hope for in terms of the moral status of the reorganisation of work?

In general, we invited participants to consider how the moral basis of inter-personal conduct in the workplace and beyond is disrupted by the destabilising effects of late capitalism and what responses are possible. We wished to build on but also go beyond established notions in CMS such as resistance, collusion, subordination, and

domination by mobilising original theories and/or methodologies that extend or critique neo-institutional, regulative, radical and post-modern perspectives.

The contributions published here, like the discussions we had in Naples, address the complexity of the issues of control and autonomy in the context of such new forms of organisations, but also [mainly] the need for adopting and developing normative positions and references that help to position our analysis of new forms of work organisation on a more general arena assessing the dimensions of social justice and identity. These questions are at the heart of the five texts we are pleased to publish here. They all propose critical keys for addressing this normative dimension, on different levels.

In a first contribution dedicated to the study of high performance work systems (HPWS), Della Torre explores its influence on workers' well-being in a skeptical view. As for others new ways of organising work, HPWS are expected to increase workers' commitment, satisfaction and well-being and, consequently, business performance. Drawing on an original survey of existing theoretical and empirical studies in the field, the author analyses the traditional opposition between supporters of the 'empowerment thesis' and supporters of the 'intensification thesis'. The results show that internal tensions relative to the application of the new work practices and methodological difficulties encountered by researchers explain the uncertainty of the results obtained in the literature. This contribution raises important issues in line with a critical agenda, among which the need for a closer attention to the context in which the practices are introduced and the devising of multi-approach and multi-method research designs.

Adopting a similar posture questioning the traditional opposition between control and autonomy, Koskina explores the managerial control mechanisms used in a small Greek contact-centre by focusing on social relations. Far from depicting authoritative control mechanisms, the author perfectly shows the complexity of the *relationship* of control where inter-personal conduct may create a paradox that serves both management and employee needs in a conflicting yet complementary way. In particular, it shows how management achieves social cohesion through fraternal strategies by giving responsible autonomy aiming to secure moderate employee commitment.

Exploring ethical dilemmas in other call centres, Csillag et al. also involved in very critical investigation, starting from the shop-floor level and aiming at observing and analysing the individual and collective strategies operators develop in order to 'survive in the modern sweatshops'. Drawing on 80 in-depth interviews, the author finally contribute to identify possible leadership patterns connected to reducing emotional burden, reframing the situation and practicing moral imagination as a potential way out of the 'emotional and ethical trap'.

Following this ethical thinking and contributing to the performativity debate in critical management research, Xhauflair and Pichault question the ethical sense of flexicurity. The authors build on the study of an employer's alliance (i.e. a group of employers teaming up to hire and share workers) that failed in addressing its mission. Questioning this failure, the authors describe the way a supporting third party function, named terceisation function, may help the process to succeed and the alliance to evolve towards a more balanced and sustainable flexicurity scheme.

Finally, this special issue has the privilege to welcome two essays critically addressing implications of new forms of work organisation. Hurd questions the normative discursive dimension associated to the discourses on the transformation of work. Through

deconstructing the taken-for-granted assumption of the 'transformation of work', she explores whether new forms of work may constitute examples of an emancipatory transformation of work. Meacheam points a major paradox of NFWO, arguing that the flattering of organisations led to impoverish the support offered to senior managers, what finally damages private lives of this 'modern workforce'.