

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Internal communication and technological development

A project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master's degree in Multilingual Communication

Faculty of Arts and Communication

Université Catholique de Louvain - University of Ottawa

March 24th 2026

Supervisors: Fabrice Dhume (UCL), Marie Oelgemoeller (UOttawa)

Author: Antonella Iallicicco

Declaration of honour**Dissertation/Individual Final Project****Faculty of Philosophy, Arts and Letters, UCLouvain**

I hereby declare that this is an original and personal work, that all referenced sources have been fully cited, regardless of their origin, and that the use of artificial intelligence tools complies with the general instructions published by UCLouvain and available at the following address :

<https://cdn.uclouvain.be/groups/cms-editors-p1/portail/reglement/Consignes-ChatGPT-versionetudiante.pdf?itok=SebXXm87> (French version)

I am aware that failure to cite a source, to cite it clearly and fully, to announce in a specific section at the beginning of the dissertation the use I have made of artificial intelligence tools, or to use them in a manner contrary to the guidelines set forth in the institutional note, constitutes serious irregularities in accordance with the [Academic regulations and procedures](#) (Chapter 4, section 7, articles 107 to 114) within the University. In particular, I am aware of the risks of academic and disciplinary sanctions.

In light of the above, I declare on my honour that I have not committed plagiarism or any other form of fraud and that I have not used artificial intelligence tools beyond what is permitted by UCLouvain.

Last name, First name : Ialiccio, Antonella

Date : March 24th, 2026

Student's signature: 

Abstract

This autobiographical ethnographic study explores the relationships between workers' alienation, power, and resistance in contemporary organizational contexts. It seeks to bridge lived experience and critical theory in order to better understand how communication practices shape organizational dynamics. The thesis pursues a dual objective: first, to provide an analytical understanding of internal communication strategies and their impact on employee agency; second, to offer grounded recommendations for improving communication practices and approaches to resistance and change management.

Digitalization is treated not merely as a contextual background but as a central analytical dimension. Digital technologies are examined as socio-technical infrastructures that actively structure workplace experiences of control, mediation, and autonomy. They function simultaneously as instruments of managerial governance and as potential resources for employee agency and resistance.

Methodologically, the research adopts an abductive logic, characterized by iterative movements between empirical material and theoretical frameworks. Narrative accounts drawn from autobiographical experience were first described and contextualized, and subsequently interpreted through the lenses of critical theory, particularly Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives on power and alienation. Insights emerging from the empirical

material prompted further engagement with the literature, refining the analytical categories guiding the study.

Drawing on situated examples across diverse organizational and socio- cultural contexts, the thesis does not aim to propose universal models. Instead, it seeks to foster critical reflection on the mediation between technological transformation and workers' needs, recognition, and well-being. By emphasizing the central role of communication, the study advocates for more reflexive and sustainable approaches to digital transformation in contemporary organizations.

Acknowledgements

Ringrazio calorosamente tutte le persone che mi hanno supportata in questo percorso piuttosto rocambolesco e che ne hanno compreso il senso.

Questa tesi è dedicata ai liberi di spirito, agli autentici, a chi cerca il significato vero del viaggio. A chi osserva la realtà non solo per com'è, ma soprattutto per come potrebbe essere.

Un grazie sincero a Sofia, a Giovanni, a Chicca, agli amici del Belgio, della Francia e del Canada; grazie alla mia famiglia, che mi ha trasmesso uno sguardo particolare sul mondo.

“Con radici profonde, i rami si immergono nel cielo.”

Table of contents

Introduction	7
Literature review	10
Methods	14
Chapter 1 – The epistemological and analytical frameworks	17
Chapter 2 - Alienation and digital development	27
Chapter 3 – Power and resistance in digitalized workplaces	39
Chapter 3.1 - Communication strategies inside organizations and <i>voice</i>	49
Chapter four: employees’ voice and digital transformation	51
Conclusion	60
References	62

Introduction

The analytical framework of the study shows how the technological development occurring within organizations can prove both necessary and challenging, for managers and employees alike. Management often implements modifications and procedures which can be unsustainable for workers. Employees consequently express resistance to change in multiple forms, from individual attitudes to group-level reactions and official reporting. In hyper-capitalist contexts, managers strive to understand how to increase productivity, implement new technologies and at the same time, preserve the enthusiasm of employees to avoid confrontations. On the other hand, workers often experience *alienation*, and, to different extents, the impact of the managerial *hegemony* (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019).

The dialogue between existing theory, case-studies and personal experience stands at the core of the study. During my experiences as an international student, I was able to study in several universities and work in various contexts across four different countries – Italy, France, Belgium and Canada. As the contexts where I studied and worked were changing, I was naturally led to make observations and reflect upon my experience as a whole. Thoughts, impressions, reflections were registered in a personal journal, which remains my primary source for this study. The main focus of my reflections was the role played by communication in mediating conflict, especially in situations where the balance of the environment was unstable. I had the chance to witness and be part of processes of change inside universities and workplaces, where students and workers were trying to stand up for themselves and let their voices be heard. Unsuccessful acts of resistance were the

most relevant for this study: valid counterexamples which show the consequences of inefficient communication strategies. Various articles exploring these aspects were analyzed and confronted with the above-mentioned experience, as the analytical framework provided a solid point of reference.

The value of internal communication as a fundamental tool to improve workers' satisfaction (and lives) is considerable. According to Kalla (2005), internal communication is defined as "all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organisation" (p. 304). Karl E. Weick (1969) maintained that organizations come into existence and are reproduced by communication processes. Leadership communication (i.e., communicative interaction between managers and coworkers) is regarded as a vital part of digital internal communication. Thus, rather than drawing a distinction between internal communication and leadership communication, the latter is here considered as a vital, if not the most important, part of internal communication (Andersson, Heide & Simonsson, 2023). Drawing from these theories, the study presents internal communication as both an instrument to control employees and as an opportunity to foster dialogue and sustainable change inside organizations.

As regards the method of inquiry, auto-ethnography was preferred in that it allowed for a deeper understanding of organizational dynamics; first-hand experience is in fact rich in details and "feels more direct". Another interesting aspect is the modernity of the experiences presented in the study. The "working-studying span" covered is in fact a five-year-long period, from 2021 to 2026.

The present study aims to explore the following research question: how can internal communication practices mediate the relationship between organizational digital transformation and employees' perceived autonomy and voice?

Literature review

The literature review is articulated around three different themes. The first aims to outline the theoretical framework of the study, which is inscribed in the tradition of the Critical Theory and draws from Marx's and Foucault's theories. The second theme expands and completes the literature on *hegemony* and *ideological control*, by exploring employees' *resistance* as a constructive approach to change, against the backdrop of the technological development. Finally, the third theme analyzes the role played by management, its relationship with power and focuses on finding a mediation inside organizations, through efficient strategies of communication.

First theme: epistemological/analytical framework and real case studies

The main analytical framework of this research paper is inscribed in the tradition of Critical Theory, in that relations between managers, employees and advancing technologies are analyzed critically, with a specific focus on workers' perspective and *voice* (Morrison, 2014). The epistemological framework follows Marxist conceptions of *alienation*, a condition for which "[The worker] does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels

outside himself” (Marx, 1961, p. 37). Furthermore, Gramsci (1971) , defines *hegemony* as “The ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production” (Pag. 12). These mechanisms are still very present in actual workplaces, especially the *hegemony* of the managerial sphere, which can be translated in the field of Organizational Studies as *ideological control* (Peters & Waterman, 1982) or as *concertive control* (Barker, 1997). The latter corresponds to the creation of self-managing work teams, which allows organizations to reduce layers of supervision, promote more flexible production practices, and arguably increase the speed of production. The historical passage from Fordism to post-Fordism (and later to Toyotism), was in fact characterized by a crescent necessity (for managers) to include workers in decision-making processes thus subtly convince them to overwork and produce more and more (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019).

The first part of the present study delves into the above-mentioned literature, as well as into case-studies which show examples of *managerial control* and *alienation*. In particular, drawn from the author’s personal experience, the examples of the firm Y, the fast-food chain or the academic environments, strengthen and confirm the pre-existing literature, providing new insights into the notions of *control* and *alienation*. In the next section, I will introduce the literature of resistance to *hegemony*.

Second theme – Power and resistance in the workplace

Workers can create spaces of resistance inside organizations. Although it is perceived as a threat by the management, resistance can yield, in the long run, beneficial changes (Goldberg, 1999). For the characterization of *change*, Lewin's concept of unfreezing-moving-refreezing, theorized in the 40s. This three-step implementation of change is in fact what often recurs in organizations and it consists in three phases: preparing the ground, implementing change and then reconstructing a new equilibrium. Foucault's discursive analysis sees communication as a constitutive and foundational element of any organization. Communication shapes organizational beliefs, power structures, and realities (Foucault, 1970). This study merges the practical and solution-oriented approach of Lewin with Foucault's discursive lens to critically assess power relations, the level of *subjugation* of workers (strongly connected to managers' *hegemony*) as well as the efficacy of workers' strategies of communication to make resistance efficient.

Lewin's three-step model—Unfreeze, Change, Refreeze—provides the procedural backbone for understanding organizational change, while Foucault's notion of discursive power plays a fundamental role as an interpretive tool. Foucault helps reveal the underlying norms and discourses that shape behavior, as Lewin's framework guides the practical steps from destabilizing the status quo to consolidating new practices. In this way, Foucauldian insights enrich the analysis of power without replacing the operational logic of change management. Among the many factors which can lead workers to oppose resistance, there

are technological advancements, when they are conducted unsustainably. This section explores the above-mentioned theories through the analysis of real case-studies and the author's personal experience. In the next section, I will introduce the relationship between the digital transformation and employees' *voice*.

Third theme – Employees' voice and digital transformation

The digital transformation of the last decades has deeply impacted workers' performances as well as lives. During the era of the Fordist model, in fact, the distinction between personal and working life was clear; nowadays, as Thomason and Francsak suggest in their studies (2022), it is not the case anymore. Furthermore, inside organizations new technologies are implemented without the workers being fully trained and aware of the consequences, such as, an increased managerial control (Sivunen & Laitinen, 2020) or the substitution of workforce with machines. It is interesting to notice how workers' attitudes towards the technological evolution change depending on the *voice* they are allowed to have inside of the company. Morrison (2014) defines it as “[...] a discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to bring about improvement or change” (Pag.174). When employees are not allowed to openly express opinions, they can develop feelings of rage (Rosenberg, 2018), which do not open healthy spaces of communication. Instead of resistance, workers experience and put in place “psychological reactance” (Brehm, 1966). This final section of the thesis will explore

the tension between the digital development and workers' voice through real-life case-studies. The conclusion aims to propose a framework for possible strategies of communication to be implemented in situations of "change" and "resistance".

Methods

This study adopts a critical autobiographical auto-ethnographic approach to explore how internal communication practices mediate the relationship between organizational digital transformation and employees' perceived autonomy and voice. Auto-ethnography situates the researcher's lived experience as a legitimate site of inquiry, connecting personal narratives to broader organizational and political structures (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Chang, 2008). This research is grounded in a critical epistemological stance informed by Marxist, Foucauldian, and critical organizational communication traditions.

Auto-ethnography was preferred as an approach in that it allowed for an in-depth analysis of how digital technologies and internal communication practices are lived and negotiated. The self is used as a lens of analysis rather than the object of study, aligning with critical perspectives that locate power at the level of everyday experience.

In this study, the author takes both the role of the analyst and that of organizational actor, with experience across multiple digitally mediated organizational contexts. Positionality is treated as an analytical resource that enhances reflexivity and transparency rather than as a source of bias to be eliminated. This research, therefore, follows an abductive qualitative logic, characterized by an iterative movement between lived

experience and critical theory. Pierce (1931–1958) defines abduction as “The process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea”. In this study, in fact, empirical data inform pre-existing theory and the literature of *change*, in a dynamic dialogue which illustrates the evolution of the strategies of communication over decades, in various working contexts. The abductive strategy is functional in that it allows for a constant switch in perspective: it situates the researcher in an interpretive “in medias res”, where meaning emerges through iterative movement between theory and empirical observation rather than through linear deduction or pure induction. The personal analysis presented in this study stems from a collection of observations made throughout the years in various contexts: a fast-food chain in Belgium, two multinational companies in Italy, five different universities across Europe and Canada (along with the case-studies drawn from scientific articles). These reflections were the result of a 5-year period of field notes, retrospective diaries and memories. The autobiographical reflections are supported by both a strong analysis of real case-studies as well as by a reported interview with the author’s mother ; the latter, in particular, offers interesting insights into the relationship between working conditions, technology and autonomy.

Another crucial aspect is that this study does not aim for statistical generalizability but for analytical transferability. Ethical considerations include anonymization, reflexivity, and careful handling of organizational details. Those aspects were carefully considered while presenting real-life experiences: organizations were deliberately kept anonymous and the formal interview with my mother (chapter 2) reported as a narrative account, in accordance with the editing rules of autobiographical ethnography. In fact, as Ellis (2004)

explains: “Autoethnographic texts often include reconstructed dialogue, scenes, and characters in order to convey the meanings of lived experience.”

By combining critical auto-ethnography with organizational communication theory, this study demonstrates how autobiographical data can illuminate digital transformation as communicative and ideological process.

Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) were used as writing and conceptual support tools, primarily for language refinement, structural feedback, and brainstorming. All theoretical interpretations, analyses, and final formulations remain the author’s own responsibility.

Chapter 1 – The epistemological and analytical frameworks

This thesis project presents a theoretical framework which can be inscribed in the tradition of Critical Theory, in that the dialectical relationship between management and workers in organizations is a crucial point of my analysis. In this sense, the analytical lens through which this relationship is codified is Neo-Marxist. Humphrey (2018) describes Neo-Marxism as deeply rooted in Marxist key concepts such as *forces of production* (all the means necessary to produce) ; *relations of production*, represented by the system of workers' rights and property; the *labor theory of value* - the management does not reward workers with the full value of their work, thus it extracts a profit, the *surplus value*. Although the basic concepts of Marxism and Neo-Marxism are the same, the latter introduces new paradigms – or deeply modifies the older ones. For instance, *dialectics* is no longer considered as the opposition of conceptual opposites (the boss against workers), but it encompasses many different levels of struggle. This means that the “fight” is not centered around economy, but it also encompasses social, cultural and ideological aspects. The concept of *reproduction* is more interpreted as the reproduction of socio-political forms of domination than the biological reproduction per se. Another new concept is *the last instance*, the idea, not universally followed by the anthropologists, that economic practice determines the relations between other spheres, thus being the underlying causal element in determining other aspects of a given society (the political, religious, etc..) that dominate the society as a whole. (ibid.).

The main aspects of Neo-Marxism highlighted in this research project are related to *alienation*: workers ‘feelings of *powerlessness*, *meaninglessness*, and *sense of self-estrangement*’ (Braverman, 1974; Heinz, 1991). As described by Marx, *alienation* is the condition for which “[The worker] does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself” (Marx, 1961, p. 37).

Seeman (1971) argues that in modern times *alienation* presents five features: *powerlessness* (ie., lack of control), *meaninglessness* (ie., the inability to comprehend the relationship of one's contributions to a larger purpose), *normlessness* and *isolation* (ie., when norms or codes of conduct do not effectively guide behavior toward personal goals), and *self-estrangement* (ie., when work becomes a path for satisfying merely extrinsic needs rather than a means for expressing one's potential).

These theoretical aspects are very actual, as I observed in several occasions in various workplaces and universities. A few years ago, I worked for a corporation, which, for the sake of practicality, will be called Y. Empirical experience was collected and analyzed over a period of five months and registered in a diary. The job consisted in working for the export department of the company. Every employee was assigned to the linguistic sub-department of belonging (in my case, the French-speaking section). During my onboarding, it became apparent that there were significant similarities between working in the kitchen of a fast-food restaurant and as an export employee at Y. Employees were supposed, in fact, to follow a strict procedure, to stick to it in the shortest possible amount of time and finally, to

deliver as great a result as possible. The objective was two-fold: on one hand, increase the number of new customers we could gain through telemarketing procedures and on the other, sell as many fastening products as possible. The amount of stress was huge: the pressure to find new customers in time was almost unbearable, as much as the quantity of information to retain to be able to make profitable deals, all peppered by the constant supervision of the managers. In fast-food chains, the mechanism is precisely the same. While working in the kitchen, each employee was part of a chain of people working to produce burgers. Each of them had a specific task: the most experienced were the people dealing with the first link of the chain, the heating of the bread; consequently, the bread was given to those who dealt with the sauces and finally, the burgers were filled with all types of meat by those at the grill. The fast-food manager was always there, checking whether workers were able to deliver burgers in the “right” amount of time (using, for this purpose, a chronometer).

These situations, though incredibly similar, present some crucial differences. In the case of Y, the *ideological control* was much stronger. *Ideological control* refers to the corporate development of a system of values, beliefs, and meanings with which employees are expected to identify strongly. (Mumby & Kuhn, pag. 47). Workers’ identities were tightly connected to the goals and values of the company for which they worked (Casey, 1995). Whenever they spoke, my colleagues at Y interpreted the company as “their own house” which they had “to make grow bigger”. Some took the job so personally that they almost felt offended whenever the firm was being criticized. They were not even remotely interested in fastening products, nor had they any tangible connection with the “big picture” (that is, the company’s results), but many elements compensated this lack of passion. The sense of

identification was in fact nourished by the fancy private events the firm would promote during the holidays, during which workers were given recognition as well as sophisticated technological gifts, in superb locations such as the ancient town theatre. Travels around the globe to sponsor the firm were organized and “won” by the best employees; everyone had to come to the firm fully dressed up, in elegant attire, as the export department was supposed to be a higher-class environment. Another aspect which alimented this sense of belonging was rooted in the nature of the relationship with customers. Every export employee had to take care of their personal list of “affectionate followers”, engage them daily as if they were “dear neighbors” to spend time with (precisely like on social networks). These lists had to be made longer possibly every day and gave the employees a certain sense of personalization, as well as of autonomy. If the whole process of finding potential regular customers could be summed up, though, it would appear very clear that the level of employees’ autonomy was very low.

Another example of a similar strategy of *ideological control* could be found in Fleming’s study (2007) of a firm called Sunray, a call-center company which promoted freedom of expression of sexual preferences. On paper, the company culture was eager to promote alternative lifestyles and open acceptance of gender identities and sexual preferences. Sexual relations among co-workers (all young people in their twenties) were encouraged, as well as a culture of “fun” and “alternative style”, all the employees coming to the job fully dressed up and ready for “the sex market”. The HR department was eager to promote this “culture of fun” to make a boring and plain activity, such as call-center work, more interesting and fresher. As some workers observed when interviewed by Fleming:

“Well, to ‘succeed’ at Sunray you are basically gay, have to be really ‘alternative’ and Sunray likes people who have different colored hair and who are into [in a sarcastic tone] ‘being themselves’ or you’re just a complete loser. Now I’m not too sure which one we fitted into, but basically, we are plebs. Just plebs.” (ibid.) These employees acknowledged that the firm had implemented a very successful strategy: encouraging workers’ “alternative styles”, an expression to cover the reality of shallowness of their personalities, in order to enhance productivity and avoid any type of confrontation. The reality of work did not, in any case, change: employees remained call-center operators, with the same paycheck and working conditions, no matter how successful they were at their job.

The same could be said of the firm of which I could collect empirical information. At Y, no one dared confront the management directly. Y is located in Italy, a country where salaries tend to be very low, especially in the third sector. At Y, the fact that the wages were extremely low, even for people with considerable experience, was hidden by the *ideological control* of the firm (the fancy parties, the gifts, the “social position” of employees). It was therefore necessary for me to find a second occupation, in the weekends. When the management was informed of it, I was immediately called upon by the managing director’s office to discuss the matter. The manager ordered that I should abandon my second occupation, given my willingness to invest time and energy in Y. The reason was less formally related to safety (possibilities of getting injured in the weekend activity), than to the social implications of my choice. At weekends, in fact, my occupation was serving at a restaurant: it could not have been socially acceptable for the firm to keep such a “lower class” employee, or worse, for the employees of Y to have dinner at the restaurant where I could be

on shift. The *ideological control* of the firm did not contemplate my honest and firm reaction, which consisted in a polite yet firm explanation of the system of inadequate payments at the firm. I was consequently mobbed until I left the firm. Whenever directly confronted, the management felt challenged in its power. My colleagues' fear was palpable: they immediately understood that their role in their "beloved house" was much weaker than they had previously assumed.

In fast-food chains, the *ideological control* is also present, but to a minor extent. What is lacking, is the "social importance of work": people working in fast-food restaurants do not hold high social positions, they are "blue collars". Although there is no "social pride", many colleagues were considered more popular as they were faster while working on the chain. Managers praised these workers openly; I myself felt a surge of pride whenever the kitchen supervisor told me that I was "promoted" to the first task, the baking of bread – thus giving me the difficult responsibility of setting the "working rhythm" of the entire chain of production. This sense of pride was also alimented in that I was one of the few women working in the kitchen. This "promotion", though pleasant and encouraging (it was a new occupation in Belgium, a foreign country), yielded no further financial benefits. Many colleagues, especially the ones who had been working in fast-food restaurants for several years, experienced high levels of *alienation*. They did not find any meaning or purpose in their activity, except for the mere paycheck at the end of the month. *Meaninglessness* and *self-estrangement* were therefore overly present among employees. It is possible to confirm that these feelings were shared at Y, the activity at the export department being monotonous and strictly supervised by the management. *Isolation* was also a feature on the workplace:

whenever managers were confronted by my asking for a rise in the payroll, they immediately discredited me and many co-workers refused to speak to me again, in case they could be associated with my opinions and claims.

My experience in the catering field is extensive and it encompasses several countries: Italy, Belgium and Canada. The *alienation* experienced over these past ten years attained extremely high levels, especially during summer jobs, which are considered to be among the worst in terms of levels of stress and anxiety experienced by workers. Several times it became necessary for me to stand up for my rights: from lack of payment, to mistreatment and humiliation, the conditions at which I was working were at best decent. These experiences, as harsh as they were, had me reflect upon workers' conditions in the Western world. I came to the conclusion that it is urgent to reframe the discussion of power imbalances inside corporations. A deep reflection on working conditions, on social responsibility, as well as on socio-economic aspects of work should become a priority.

As *alienation* and *ideological control* are overly present in contemporary working environments, I noticed that many universities strive to prepare students for jobs which require high tolerance to stress, by pushing them to their limits. At the same time, these institutions fail to train students in critical thinking or in deeper understanding of reality. Giroux (2014) affirms that "Under neoliberalism, higher education is increasingly defined through market values, reducing universities to training grounds for the workforce rather than spaces for critical thought." My travels led me to explore the concept of "university" across Europe (thanks to study experiences in Italy, France and Belgium) as well as in Canada. Every university presented different, specific features. One particular experience had me reflect

upon the extent to which universities are nowadays “adapting to the real world”. It is possible to consider universities as corporations and students as workers (Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004): “Universities are increasingly adopting corporate practices and market-oriented logics in response to global competition and declining public funding.” Consequently, affirming that there is a certain *ideological control* inside of these “firms” does not appear absurd. My empirical observations of academic environments were also supported by other students who shared my opinions. Inequalities and injustices were perfectly tolerated, in the name of an underlying, hidden “mentality”, which led students on one hand to feel uncomfortable, but on the other, to control each other for the least sign of weakness. This mechanism is defined by Barker (2003) as *concertive control*: “[it] occurs when workers develop a shared set of values, norms, and rules that guide their behavior and, in doing so, create a system of control that is often more powerful and pervasive than traditional managerial supervision.” Once again, whenever I spoke up against evident injustices (related to racism), my attitude was deemed “arrogant” by one of the teachers because, according to them, “their own very authority” was being challenged, while the sole objective of my protests was the preservation of my dignity. This happened when I asked a teacher for further information as regards the open position of research assistant for their specific project. My intention was not to apply for the position, but the teacher assumed I was interested. Instead of asking me whether I could be genuinely intrigued by the possibility, they directly pointed out that, because of my nationality, I could not be able to complete the tasks satisfactorily. The project was centered around French linguistics and idiomatic expressions. To convince me that I was not “the perfect fit for the job”, the teacher listed a few idiomatic expressions

in French that I should be able to recognize and classify, stating that it “would prove too hard for me to do the work”. When I replied that I knew all of them, and that I was able to classify them, the teacher did not seem to care. In any case, they did not request my CV nor a letter of motivation from my side. What is also interesting to point out, and even more frightening, is that this happened in front of all the other classmates, during class. I waited to see whether anyone would speak up against evident racism, but no one did. The *ideological control* was so strong that students were not even aware of the gravity of the situation. Of course, I was not French, of course, I could not measure up to the “standard”, in spite of the fact that my marks were not only equal but even superior to those of my peers. I sent an email to the teacher (unfortunately, a key figure in the department), explaining, not without any rage, my point of view, trying to remain in any case as professional as possible. The teacher hid behind his role, stating that, since they were the scholar, they and only they could assess whether someone was able to work with them. I replied that the problem was not the power they held, but *how* they administered it. He remained vague and did not answer satisfactorily.

To conclude – *alienation* (in all its declinations) and *ideological* and *concertive controls* – are transversal and common in corporations, regardless of the self-assumed social position of workers. As Max Weber (1904) points out, in precapitalist societies people worked to live; nowadays the opposite is truer and as a consequence, work has become invested with all kinds of symbolic value, levels of prestige, and psychological motivations (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019). At Y as well at Sunray, beauty, status and symbols were universal values used to make injustices socially acceptable; in fast-food chains, speed, precision

and dedication were exalted as “moral qualities” to enhance workers’ productivity. At a certain university, the choice not to speak of important issues and to preserve the *status quo* was evidently the best policy.

Chapter 2 - Alienation and digital development

The connection between *alienation* and digital development is very deep. The advancements made by corporations and organizations are at the same time beneficial and problematic. A specific case study perfectly illustrates this dichotomy. Trond Haga (2022) analysed the impact of the digital development on a Norwegian firm (for the sake of practicality, it will be called “the yard”) over a period of fifty years. The firm was, until the ‘70s, a specialized shipyard for the construction and completion of very large crude carriers. After the petrol crisis in 1973, the company was left with no option but accept new offshore assignments. This phase lasted until 2020, when the market swiftly geared towards sustainable sources of energy, such as wind, sun and hydroelectric power. The yard, consequently, had to change its strategy once again, by diversifying its production and combining in and offshore activity. The two main changes were therefore associated first with the 1973 crisis, which led to the opening of offshore activities and later, in 2020, when the management decided to adapt to “greener” materials and systems of production.

The first change had a significant impact on workers’ perceived level of *alienation*. Haga’s study focuses on the evolution of the role of *pipefitters*, responsible for working with the pipes inside of carriers. Before the crisis in 1973, pipefitters were responsible for the production and the installment of pipes. They were divided into teams with mixed levels of expertise; experience was essential to the completion of the activities, but no strict formal competence was required. It took 45 months for an unskilled worker to become skilled. There was not any rigid hierarchy: foremen (the responsible skilled workers on the area) were

assigned each fifteen pipefitters. The work procedure could be divided into three main steps: the first phase included planning and measuring; the second phase was the preparation of pipes in the pipe shop; and finally, in the third phase, workers dealt with transport, rigging, and hook up. Pipefitters were responsible for all these activities: they were granted a significant amount of freedom during the accomplishment of the tasks. Employees were expected to solve eventual problems and mistakes by themselves; the foreman's help was very rarely needed. As one of the pipefitters stated, "It was really pipefitting—pipefitting from A to Z." (Haga 1993:169). Workers felt they had control over their work, they could clearly see the final result as they were also responsible for the final stages of production. Foremen were responsible for the quality checks at the very end, but overall the organization of tasks was very democratic. The level of *alienation* was, therefore, very low.

After the 1973 crisis, however, things changed dramatically. Haga states that the first feature which was deeply affected by the crisis was the time of production. In order to cut costs, in fact, the company had to reduce drastically the project execution time while implementing new technologies. As a consequence, construction activities had to start before the product was fully designed. Professional management became suddenly crucial. From a democratic setting, the structure increasingly became more hierarchical. Managers possessed important information which was only partly shared with employees. Furthermore, new, strict rules of quality were introduced, another reason behind the newly acquired importance of managers, who had to make sure everything would be in place at any step of the production chain.

The yard also introduced a practice developed during the offshore period, for which customers paid for flexibility with suppliers at the same time as a “mixing and matching” staffing practice (Moorkamp 2019). The first meant the creation of a significant number of temporary positions to lubricate the work process. Customers’ expectations became therefore of the utmost importance: the financial stability of the firm depended on the flexibility of its schedules. The most relevant feature, however, was the proportion of the new projects: the new offshore activity consisted mainly in big projects, for which a significant number of workers was necessary. The procedures became thus more fragmented, with each employee being assigned a specific task; as they were not supposed to follow through the entire process of production, employees experienced high levels of *alienation* due to feelings of *meaninglessness*.

After 2020, the second, significant change had a positive impact. The new, sustainable projects were smaller and more manageable; many of the characteristics of the large offshore projects—such as heavy customer presence, high-complexity products, high-quality requirements, demanding steel qualities, and complex project organization—seemed to be reversed. Ongoing digital transformation would soon remove the information monopolies, and distribute the information to the end user who needed it (Haga, 2022). Pipefitters were once again accorded a significant amount of freedom and responsibility.

Haga infers that, while the pipefitters in the pre-1973-crisis period received enough information to plan and carry out the work from a technical drawing, there was now a need for significantly more information to carry out a workpiece. As Haga underlines, with digitalization comes online access to the 3D model, work orders, ordering transport and

lifting, notification of status, and digital communication with specialists. The expanded access to information not only enabled a return to an old work regime, but it also opened new forms of work organizations (Haga, 2022).

Blauner (1964) with his pioneering work highlighted the link between the technological development and *alienation*. The first mechanization and industrialization of the craft work, Blauner claimed, led to increased alienation (Haga, 2022). In fact, he argues that with the mechanization period and later, with the assembly-line era, the level of alienation remained considerably high. It is also crucial to take into consideration the external pressure to conform to the epoch's requests: from the changes prompted by markets, to the trends and social sensibilities which shape customers' behaviors. Managements, workers and even unions are not necessarily ready to deal with changes of this proportion. As Haga shows with his case-study, however, the access to information seems the most important factor during the technological transition from a fragmented to a more comprehensive work structure. During the offshore phase of the yard, in fact, external factors contributed to the lack of sharing important information, which consequently led workers to experience alienation. With the introduction of new communication technologies, the experience at work became strikingly more similar to the pre-1973 phase.

In conclusion, Haga shows, on one hand, how technology may be profoundly beneficial, enabling humanity to increase the variety and volume of our consumption. However, he also underlines that the ongoing transformation will likely remove jobs and thus leave people behind. Some researchers argue that people with the right skills and education

will experience better times, understood as having meaningful and interesting jobs (Brynjolfson & McAfee, 2014 from Haga, 2022).

Alienation is experienced, as described by Kupfer in her outstanding *Work appropriation and social inequality* (2021), across all levels of employees' expertise. The existing literature mainly focuses on "blue collar's" alienation, as it is the most visible, due to tangible conditions such as low status and pay, social isolation, turnovers, high work intensity and the prevalence of monotonous tasks (ibid). What is less analyzed, perhaps, is the level of alienation of medium and high skilled workers.

As Kupfer states, medium-skilled employees work is difficult to define. Medium-skilled employees are described as having neither managerial responsibilities nor uniquely simple tasks such as typing in data (ibid). Mirchandani's findings illustrate Kupfer's argument that digitalization blurs the boundaries between skill and deskilling — call-centre work is cognitively complex yet formally undervalued. Her book, *Authenticity Work in the Transnational Service Economy* (2012), focuses in fact on the transnational call centers in India and the impact of transnational labor on employees. Indian candidates face significant discrimination during the preselection, based on the "westernness" of their English accent. As the majority of customers, in fact, are from the United States or from England, employees are expected to easily adjust their accent to their customers' to make profitable deals. The author, however, states that it is not merely a matter of accent: it is much deeper than this. Call center operators, during their onboarding period, have to choose an alternative name, supposed to sound more American, or British, so as to make sure that clients can address them easily. Furthermore, they are expected to quickly adjust their speech to the customers'

and at times, even to impersonate the role the western hierarchical mentality attributes to Indian people – that is, the Eastern, passive servant ready to help and be of use. What is also relevant is the fact that Indian call-center operators need to work at night to comply with their American and English customers' needs. Whenever it is daytime in India, in fact, all existing or potential western customers are sound asleep. This implies that Indian operators are deprived of their normal routines as well as of the possibility of having regular lives with their families, only to meet market's expectations.

Technology in Mirchandani's work greatly impacts workers' well-being, as they are completely alienated, even from themselves. My personal experience, at Y, provided me with insights in the role played by technology in my feelings of alienation. All export employees at Y, regardless of their level of expertise, were supposed to work for three hours every day as "telemarketers".

Telemarketing consisted in three main phases: browsing lists of potential customers, finding out about their interest (in Y's case, potential customers were other companies which could need Y's products) and finally, contacting them by phone to assess their "market net" and sell products. These three steps were regulated by an ad hoc software, which calculated the amount of daily time left to dedicate to telemarketing sessions. Every browsing operation, every call as well as every break was accurately monitored. Whenever an employee was not on a call or available for one, the management could immediately notice their absence by accessing the telemarketing software. Managers and employees alike could immediately spot the "missing telemarketers". On one hand, this feature was justified on the grounds of practicality : knowing whether colleagues in the same language sector

were on or offline could prove beneficial in the event of a difficult situation (a tough customer, lack of information, or a simple need for support from colleagues). However, the sinister aspect of the matter was the universality of this *digital knowledge*: through the software, it was possible to observe every employee's telemarketing on or off status. Needless to say, some *naïf* and younger employees, blinded by golden yet empty prospects made by the management, were glad to provide further information on their colleagues' presence or absence. This was all orchestrated in the spirit of *concertive control*, which led employees to regulate and control themselves as regards "break time" – in short, they reduced it to the bare minimum to avoid problems.

Another occupation which gained momentum, especially during the pandemic of COVID 19, is home delivery service. This is another good example of a profession for which the required level of skills is deemed "low"; in reality, however, employees' proactivity, autonomy and organisational abilities need to be aligned with those of VAT workers. To better assess the level of alienation of this category of workers, I interviewed my mother, a "shopper" – a worker who delivers shopping orders placed on an application called, for the sake of practicality, W. She works in Italy. I asked her several questions related to her occupation during a formal interview. The following section reports the interview using a narrative approach, in line with the requirements of an autobiographical analysis.

First of all, she explained how the W application's system works in detail. W hires shoppers through an on-call intermittent contract, with a maximum income of about €4,800 gross per year (€3,800 net). Once you are accepted, W sends you a starter kit — a company credit card and branded cooler bags. The app is mandatory for all shoppers. Each worker has

a personal “availability” page, where they can indicate when they are free to work. Availability is granted based on a performance score called “bravura.” This score depends on punctuality, customer satisfaction, and order completion rate. Those with higher scores can select their preferred working slots earlier (Saturday evening), while others must wait (Sunday evening), which means fewer opportunities. When orders appear on the “order board,” shoppers can choose whether to accept them. Refusing or missing orders negatively affects your score. If an order is too far away or not profitable, the system automatically judges whether it’s worth taking. Support is provided through online chat; speaking to a real person is rare and only in urgent cases. The app controls almost every aspect — from payment to navigation — and determines compensation based on distance and the size of the order.

My mother pointed out that she started working for W about four years ago, right after the COVID lockdown, which brought about positive changes. Unions, in fact, have become very active in negotiating improvements with W — for example, higher reimbursements for fuel, better pay compared to the early days, and fairer rules about how performance affects our score. At first, some workers were unfairly penalized for things outside their control, like traffic or delivery zones (ZTL areas). The unions pushed to change that. They also introduced the option to open a VAT number, so now people can earn more freely if they want to become independent contractors. All the improvements came from union pressure, not from the company itself.

Furthermore, what attracts workers at any age is the accessibility of W application. My mother, at first, was nervous. She was not used to working extensively with technology.

The application, though, is very intuitive — anyone can learn to use it, even people who aren't very tech-savvy. The interface is simple, and you can call the customer directly if there are any issues. The shocking part of the job, my mother underlined, was the lack of direct supervision. W doesn't hold meetings or briefings. She explained that only union meetings were held from time to time. Many workers, after short periods trying, leave the job. People are hired regardless of their age and they mostly work alone.

My mother went on explaining the autonomous nature of the job. At the beginning, she wished she had colleagues around for safety and reassurance. At first, she also felt ashamed — people might judge you for doing what they see as a “low-status” job. Over time, the shame faded because contact with supermarket staff and clients made the work more human. Still, that sense of solitude remained as well as the need to push yourself to learn and adapt quickly. The pay, as she argued, did not match the level of effort and skill required.

For guidance, mainly at the beginning, she called on to the Support Service quite often to ask questions. She stated that it was necessary to be proactive, as assistance was granted only to those who would actively seek it. She added that the application was designed to solve most problems automatically, provided that the workers internet connection was stable.

In spite – and because – of the centrality of internet, the connection with customers is, according to my mother, generally good — as customers are polite and often grateful. Technology doesn't really prevent communication with them; in fact, some interactions can be fostered by new technologies and in any case, when during the “shopping phase”,

interactions with shop assistants can be really pleasant. The delivery of goods, especially to loyal customers, is fulfilling and satisfying.

For the above-mentioned reasons, my mother feels that her job has meaning. Customers are genuinely happy to receive their groceries, especially elderly or busy people. However, most shoppers see it as a temporary job — something you do when you have no better options. For many, it feels like a defeat, not a career. It is rather a “new” job in Italy, part of the growing service economy. Reflecting upon it, it is important work — helping people who need it. But the pay per order is inconsistent, so the sense of purpose often gets lost in exhaustion. Shame is a constant presence: many shoppers avoid wearing the green W shirt or badge. W focuses on advertising through branded bags rather than improving how workers feel represented.

Another interesting aspect related to the centrality of the internet is that the company feels invisible. Not only is the application the instrument, it is also the very “boss”. If you perform well, you will get more orders; if not, you are gradually excluded. Notifications are constantly there – anxiety grows whenever the little twinkling sounds stop coming. Organization and consistency are everything. W does not provide training; one learns by doing. My mother had to figure out logistics on her own, like using carts or handling heavy items in buildings without elevators. Working full-time, one becomes psychologically dependent on the app — waiting for new orders feels like waiting for oxygen. People sometimes make fun of this job, and perceive it as “easy”, but it is stressful and physically demanding.

When I asked my mother how the “score system” worked, she explained that, at the very beginning, it feels thrilling, as it naturally increases — one gets this rush, almost like receiving likes on social media. When the app celebrates you with digital confetti or good reviews, it is addictive. Positive ratings make you feel proud; negative ones crush your motivation. It is a bit like being on Facebook — every rating feels like social validation. Over time, you realize it is indeed a psychological trick: the worker feels free and in control, while actually being trained to behave in certain ways.

My mother described the changes that could be implemented to improve working conditions at W. First, it would help workers to have a physical location where shoppers can meet once or twice a year — to share experiences, ask questions, and talk to managers. Right now, human connection is very limited. The system isolates workers on purpose: no community, no exchange, no way to organize collectively. Employees are just pieces in a machine that does not require them to express themselves.

Another aspect to be improved, she stated, was the relation human being-machine. On one hand technology and the internet are essential, but on the other workers can become dependent on them; it is impossible to work efficiently and be independent from technology. It’s a form of subordination disguised as convenience.

My mother’s experience as a delivery woman, the Indian call-centres analyzed by Mirchandani, the export firm Y share another crucial feature: all rely on employees’ adaptation to ideological and communicative norms that erase individuality. Workers internalize the gaze of management and technology, disciplining themselves to appear

constantly available, polite, and efficient. This constitutes a new, digital form of alienation — one that is voluntary yet deeply coercive. This type of control is described in many works: Foucault (1977), Barker (1993) and Mumby (2019).

As observed in *The Pastoral Power of Technology. Rethinking Alienation in Digital culture*, article written by Giritli Nygren and Gidlund (2012), Foucault analyzed the development of the Cristian Church and observed its gradual assimilation into state apparatuses. The State, according to Foucault, should be seen as a modern matrix of individualization—a new form of *pastoral power*. Foucault argues that pastoral power is reproduced by human beings themselves; the human being turns himself into a subject. It is a form of power whose ultimate aim is to assure individual salvation in this world. It is not merely a form of power that commands, it must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock. It is a form of power that does not look after just the whole community, but each individual in particular, during his/her entire life. It is a form of power that cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it. Giritli Nygren and Gidlund (2012) argue that pastoral power has once again found a new way of distributing individualizing, and subjectifying power - this is what we call the *pastoral power of technology*.

If *alienation*, *ideological* and *concertive* control as well as the pastoral power of organizations and companies are such strong features, the logical question follows: how do workers respond to these forms of control?

Chapter 3 – Power and resistance in digitalized workplaces

Foucault proposes a renewed conception of power that is particularly insightful for this analysis: this conception lies in the governmentality concept and goes beyond traditional power theorizations that focus on the central state and sovereignty, which Foucault considers “Too large, too abstract and too rigid” (Rose et al., 2006, p. 87). He rejects a “Unified view of the state for one of a network of institutions, practices, procedures and techniques in which power as strategic relations circulates” (Willcocks, 2004, p. 257). Discourses are simultaneously sites of domination and resistance and involved in the deconstruction and reconstruction of organizations (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011).

Leclercq-Vandelannoitte claims that Foucault encourages the concept of *power-knowledge*, which means that power produces knowledge, and discourse and knowledge have power and truth effects. Power generates consent, draws on knowledge that transforms individuals into disciplined subjects, and generates change, resistance, and discontinuity, because power relations are multiple, heterogeneous and conflicting (Knights & Murray, 1994). This conception implies that power is dynamic and permeates the social body, so “Power must be analyzed as something that circulates ... that functions only when it is part of a chain. It is never localized here or there, it is never in the hands of the some.... Power is exercised through networks” (Foucault, 1976, p. 98). Foucault finds no relations of power without resistance (Jermier et al., 1994). There is a strong political dimension. Political activity (through power-knowledge relationships) is ‘the focal process through which organizations are constituted, stabilized and transformed’ (Knights & Murray, 1994, p. 38).

Leclercq-Vandelannoitte underlines the difference between dialogical studies, which focus on the constructed nature of people and reality and emphasize the potential disunity of any discourse, and critical studies, that consider domination and identity situational and mobile. The relationship between power and knowledge is therefore the intersection of several factors: *discourse*, that is, the main narration of the organization, the way relationships among workers, roles, tasks are defined through explicit and implicit communication; *subjectivity*, the personal relationship of workers with power and *control system*, the institutionalization of power.

The Foucauldian approach thus avoids the binary opposition of Management versus employees. Figure 1, drawn from Leclercq-Vandelannoitte's article *Organizations as Discursive Constructions: A Foucauldian Approach* (2011), shows well this fluidity of power:

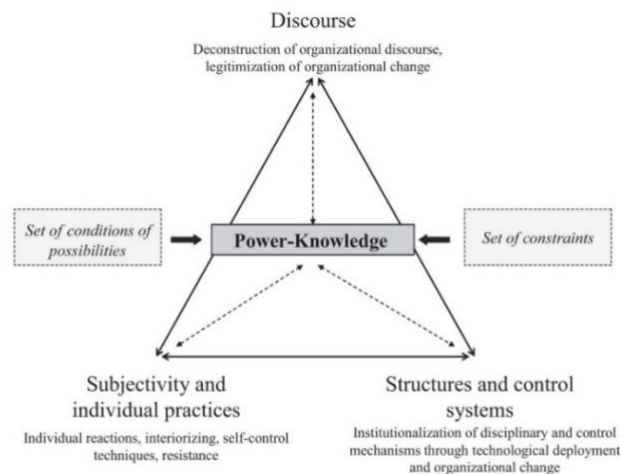


Figure 1. Conceptual model based on Foucault's thinking

Information technology can be positioned as part of a process in which both technology and organization are redefined through the involvement of discursive practices

and power–knowledge relationships. Power–knowledge thus may be ‘the key concept in Foucault’s philosophy of modern technology’ (Willcocks, 2004, p. 258). Social relations are instantiated and mediated through technology, and organizations become cohesive and stable because of the way they are intimately bound with the technical (Willcocks, 2004). The examples of the firm Y and my mother’s job as a delivery woman strengthen this position: technology is often the first channel of mediation between management and workers, and in extreme cases, it takes the very shape of a “boss”. As showed in the previous section, power very often takes the shape of *concertive* or *ideological* control, as it is discursively used to promote certain narrations inside of organisations. Power leads workers to comply with the rules, the requirements of the firm, and it is internalized; workers regulate themselves, judge their own work and their colleagues’ based on the internalized conception of “appropriate” or “inappropriate”. They can react in a variety of ways, by complying with the rules, criticizing or approving the system, accepting or opposing change. Foucault’s analysis shows that the conception of power is complex, it can not be reduced to a unidirectional vector, ideally, from the management towards the employees, but it is instead the interaction of the above-mentioned elements (Figure 1).

As Mumby (2005) shows in his research, there is a dialectical relationship between *power* and *resistance*. Resistance and power are interlinked as there is no need for power without resistance and vice versa. Rather than view power as a relatively fixed and one-way relationship, a dialectical view investigates struggles over meaning among individuals and groups within shifting relations of power (Fleming & Spicer, 2007). Some scholars choose to focus on the role of power and control, others romanticize resistance by overestimating its

potential for change. But as Mumby and Ashcraft claim “A dialectical approach examines the inherent tensions and contradictions between agency and structure, between the interpretive possibilities that exist in every discourse situation and institutional efforts to impose or fix meaning” (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004, p. 53).

Resistance is analyzed by scholars in its multiple facets: from the open, *real resistance* described in Marxist theory to the *decaf resistance* made of *cynism* and *misbehavior* (Contu, 2008). Ganesh et al. (2005) called for work that explicitly theorizes or documents pathways between relatively individual and more coordinated forms of collective resistance. In any case, the mainstream literature is aimed at fighting resistance, as the vast majority of articles are titled “Overcoming resistance to change” – it is enough to type “resistance to change in organizations” on Google Scholar to clearly notice it. The underlying assumption of this “literature of resistance” is that employees tend to resist the necessary modifications in procedures and methods. Other scholars, nonetheless, believe this is not necessarily true. Dent and Powley (2002) found that people actually embraced workplace change nearly twice as often as they resisted it. In fact, their study, conducted on 945 incidents, showed that overall, interviewees made 1.9 positive statements about change for every negative one. The authors argue that the very concept of “resistance to change” is detrimental to the success of change efforts.

Another misconception, according to Goldstein (1994), is the intrinsic nature of organizations. According to the traditional literature, in fact, resistance is a temporary phenomenon of a system which naturally tends to equilibrium (Dent & Powley, 2003). Goldstein (1994), on the other hand, believes that organizations have an innate tendency to

change which is sometimes suspended by the temporary condition of equilibrium. Why do employees prefer this temporary state of “stillness” instead of embracing change? Goldstein argues that this occurs when workers find more extant positive values in equilibrium than in the state of change. According to this perspective, resistance is not merely an act of “opposition”, but it becomes a preference towards values, procedures, and ideas that provide a certain benefit. Therefore, Goldstein turns the traditional model upside down and focuses on the importance of meeting workers’ needs.

Another interesting point of view, Dent and Goldberg’s (1999) has that people do not resist change, per se. People may resist loss of status, loss of pay, or loss of comfort, but these are not the same as resisting change. The authors argue that employees may resist the unknown, being dictated to, or management ideas that do not seem feasible from the employees’ standpoint (1999).

The discussion around the conception of *resistance* is still very actual. In his article, *Still Challenging “Resistance to Change”*, Dent (2022) claims that concepts of non-equilibrium systems, emergence, and chaos theories seem much more apt than the steady state systems thinking that was so apt in earlier, more stable times. This puts the idea of change and resistance to change in a somewhat new light. What has changed, in fact, is the recognition that while people may find change uncomfortable and/or distressing, workers are far more willing – even eager at times – to change rather than to be changed. As traditional hierarchies have weakened and the more networked qualities of interdependency and authority relations have become more dominant, the meaning of change itself has

switched from less of a top-down directed activity to a negotiated, emergent, collaborative model. Dent thus further elaborates the ideas of the article written in 1999.

A concrete example of the above-mentioned aspects can be found in the research conducted by Courpasson, Dany and Clegg (2012). The first example is the case of Bank (a fictive name), in France. For this research project, the authors collected data over three years, with employees and managers alike. Bank was analyzed during a period of dramatic changes due to several external deregulations. An atmosphere of uncertainty and suspicion about ongoing managerial decisions was reigning. The workers' negative response was triggered by the board decision to punish managers in a smaller, rural area; the newly acquired Marketing department was in fact imposing strict market rules to any branch, regardless of their location. Some managers, who had been working for 15 years and were a point of reference at Bank, were risking their jobs, as they were deemed "unproductive". These managers worked in rural areas where the profits were expected to be naturally lower, but the Marketing staff did not acknowledge this crucial aspect.

The employees' resistance was organized in three steps: *enclave insurgency*, *temporary realignment of power relations and accommodation*, similarly to Kurt Lewin's model *unfreezing-change-refreezing* theorized in his 1947's paper "Frontiers in group dynamics: concept, method and reality in social sciences; social equilibria and social change". This model consists of three main phases: *unfreezing*, the disruption of balance; *change*, the implementation of modifications to the existing structure and finally, *refreezing*, the final step, when the general management accommodates the implementation.

In the specific case mentioned by Clegg and Courpasson (2012), the first phase of the “resistance” was *enclave insurgency (unfreezing)*, which consisted in gathering and organizing the branches around the leader, Max, one of the most powerful managers in the firm. Max organized a series of discussions that led to the writing of a report. He had it signed later by all enclave members and then gave it to the top managers, without informing the head of the sector. As Max put it, in fact: “We were stronger and they knew it.” In a sense, they were so confident in their power that they showed that they did not need to use the hierarchical channels to make their claims credible (Courpasson, Dany and Clegg, 2012).

Upon reception of the report, the top management felt it was being challenged and that the “revolts” should be repressed. This particular phase was delicate, because it signalled a *temporary realignment of power* (the second step of the procedure, Lewin’s *change*). It was only *temporary*, not supposed to break the “social structure” of the firm in the long run; on the contrary, Max underlined that the insurgency was supposed to bring back a more just and balanced peace.

Due to the precision and the seriousness of the claims put forward by the insurgents, the CEO could not dismiss the situation and decided to create a task force made up of ten people – seven from the branches and three from the Marketing department. In the meantime, a 30-page report on work equality circulated among the employees. This final step could be called *accommodation* (Lewin’s *refreezing*), which corresponded to a new order stemming from the mediation between the “insurgents” and the top management.

The task force was supposed to shed light on the internal dynamics of the firm. It became clear that the Marketing department was too rigid to accommodate the differences between the various branches. There was a huge lack of willingness to mediate and find compromises from the Marketing department. The logic guiding the Marketing department was strictly related to the rules of the market, no account was given to the traditional rules of the firm. The CEO recognized that Max was right in trying to preserve the spirit of the firm. In the end, Dan, the chef of the Marketing department resigned and Max was appointed as CEO.

Another example of “productive resistance” can be found at Agro, a French agro-chemical company. In the Research and Development department, fifteen managers openly opposed new Marketing logics, which were imposing unsustainable changes. The researchers analysed the interviews – with employees and managers alike - realised over a period of three months.

The trigger of the “resistance” was a decision made by the central R&D committee to stop a five-year-old project (called AMX) led by project manager Henri. Interrupting the project meant not giving funds to the researchers. As Karl, the leader of the insurgency, explained: “If certain people think that along scientific process has not demonstrated results ‘early enough’ for its capacity to become a ‘profitable product,’ then we better grasp what ‘early enough’ and ‘profitable’ are, so as to avoid future misunderstandings.”

Karl’s message introduced competing values—the durability of science and how quickly a scientific endeavor becomes a marketable product:

We felt that our bosses were not interested in the content of the projects. The only thing that matters to them was that projects generated cash. I remember a meeting where a guy from Sales and Marketing was criticizing R&D people for not caring about the general interests of the company and for “having fun with their projects” (Courpasson, Dany and Clegg, 2012)

The resisting enclave eventually comprised 13 project managers from several countries and Karl was considered the spiritual guide of the resistance.

A 17-page report was written by all the managers. The serious and heartfelt document was sent to the R&D vice president (who was also chair of the R&D committee). It pointed to the difference in visions and calendar between researchers and marketers. The report also highlighted the necessity of cooperation between these two departments to reconcile the R&D process. In the meantime, it was established that part of a “hidden budget” would be used to finish the project. Authority was thus bypassed. As one of the managers affirmed:

You know the best part was the last messages, the last exchanges, when we knew something happened, that it was possible to resist, to demonstrate we could do better for the good of us all. I know it looks pretentious, or preaching religious stuff, but that’s true. We not only saved a deserving colleague, or corrected a flabbergasting unfairness, we put something in motion. We can say “no” in this company, and that encouraged me enormously to do my job even better. And we kept on having irregular

exchanges; we were friends, eventually, even if I have never met the English guy. Can you imagine that? (Courpasson, Dany and Clegg, 2012)

Elton (the boss) knew the culture; he had an R&D background, had been a lab manager, and knew that R&D people were capable of “making a mess in the company if they wanted.” The *accommodation* phase was rocky, but in the end, Elton admitted that the R&D report was very valid: “The report was extremely professional. I mean, there were plenty of reasons to believe that they were in a very constructive mood, but I felt that was strange, knowing those guys. We started a weird process to wonder whether they were right. You know that’s pretty destabilizing, when you see competent guys, sending messages, writing notes, being seriously involved in their stuff. You cannot be impervious to that, let alone contemptuous of their cause.” The *accommodation* phase was concluded successfully, with the acknowledgment of the importance of the R&D department and the reframing of marketing goals and expectations.

These two examples, Bank and Agro, clearly show how efficient communication strategies, codified in precise steps, can mediate between employees and managers, against the backdrop of technological advancements and new technological advancements. The “resistance” becomes more an act of protection of status and, at times, of the job security itself.

Chapter 3.1 - Communication strategies inside organizations and voice

In the previous chapters of this study, internal communication played a crucial role in shaping relationships inside organizations. In fact, as Kalla (2005) states, integrated internal communication encompasses “all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organisation.” This broad definition highlights the importance of communication processes not only as channels for information exchange, but also as mechanisms through which organizational actors construct shared meanings, negotiate roles, and coordinate action.

Within the field of corporate communication, scholars have traditionally emphasized the strategic dimension of these processes. Van Riel (1995) conceptualizes corporate communication as a managerial instrument through which different forms of internal and external communication are harmonized in order to support organizational relationships. In this perspective, communication becomes closely linked to issues of identity, strategy, and access to resources, including human resources. Management communication, in particular, is understood as a means through which organizational leaders interact with employees and other internal actors, thereby influencing commitment, coordination, and organizational alignment.

In this context, the notion of employee voice becomes particularly relevant. Van Dyne and LePine (1998) define voice as “a voluntary and constructive behavior through which employees express ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions intended to improve the

functioning of the organization or group.” Employee voice therefore represents a communicative practice through which workers can participate in organizational life, articulate concerns, and potentially challenge or reshape existing practices.

When considered in relation to the dynamics of alienation and resistance discussed in the previous chapters, internal communication and employee voice appear as potential mechanisms of mediation within organizations. Rather than eliminating structural tensions altogether, effective communication strategies may create spaces in which conflicts, concerns, and experiences can be articulated and negotiated. In digitally mediated workplaces, these communicative processes are increasingly shaped by technological infrastructures, which can simultaneously enable new forms of participation while also reinforcing managerial control. Recognizing this ambivalence is therefore essential in order to understand how communication may contribute to more reflexive and sustainable organizational practices.

Chapter four: employees' voice and digital transformation

In the previous chapters, *alienation*, *resistance* and *power* were analyzed as key concepts, through a Foucauldian discursive lens and against the backdrop of the ongoing technological development of organizations. The first part of this study was dedicated to illustrating various examples of alienation, across different typologies of workplace. The focus was placed solely on employees' frustration. Empiric observations collected over the years as well as scientific literature had me reflect upon the role played by middle managers, as well as their mental health conditions.

In the article "Identity regulation as organizational control: producing the appropriate individual", Alvesson and Willmott (2002) argue that managerial control increasingly operates through processes of identity regulation, whereby managers are encouraged to internalize organizational values, norms, and objectives, aligning their sense of self with corporate goals. The authors highlight how identity regulation may produce experiences of self-alienation, as individuals come to experience a disjunction between their lived sense of self and the organizationally prescribed managerial identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The forms of control are analogous to the ones theorized by Barker and Foucault (and well-illustrated in the previous chapters), *concertive* and *disciplinary*.

If managerial identities are themselves regulated and disciplined, managerial control cannot be understood as an expression of autonomous power, but rather as a mediated and structurally constrained position.

Furthermore, Courpasson and Clegg (2006) argue that contemporary organizational transformations do not dissolve structures of control, but rather reconfigure them, producing managerial roles characterized by constrained agency and heightened accountability. The authors show that managers are increasingly made responsible for performance outcomes while possessing limited discretion over strategic decisions, resulting in a structural tension between responsibility and authority (Courpasson & Clegg, 2006). Rather than occupying a position of sovereign control, managers operate within dispersed and multilayered power relations, where authority is fragmented and continuously negotiated (Courpasson & Clegg, 2006).

Empirical experience supporting these evidences, the firm Y (and its management) illustrates how the management was directly impacted and emotionally affected by the decisions of the board. The main middle manager (for the sake of practicality, M) had to make sure that a steady flow of money would at all times be coming from the business partners of the firm. In order to achieve this goal, made even harder by the constant turnover of employees, M fostered a spirit of competition and toxicity among the Export Department employees; the competition among colleagues was oftentimes mitigated, on paper, by a certain “politeness”, but in general employees (young girls aging from 18 to 23) were not aware of the trap they were bound to fall in – no matter how much one produces or how well on works, in fact, in Italy the wages stay almost the same and very rarely promotions are granted (and sadly, when they are, it is often not because of merit). “Bolder” girls were consequently encouraged to work harder and spy on their colleagues, to sell more and more efficiently and “beat the competition”. The situation was pretty ridiculous, with M being

constantly trying to “close the gaps” – as it is logical to think, many employees left the job because of the quality of the environment. M was clearly going through a burnout phase: his stress was almost palpable, it affected badly the whole department.

Another example of this alienation in “managers” can be observed at university. In many of the five institutions (across Europe and North America) I had the chance to study at, several teachers displayed unhealthy behaviors because of high levels of stress they were exposed to. They felt threatened in their authority any time a student would express their opinions in a constructive way and they admitted to being overwhelmed with tasks to be accomplished. The competition among researchers was fierce and led many teachers to burnout. This caused students to experience highly stressful phases more frequently – aspect I discovered by listening to my peers in various universities. Kinman (2001) confirms that “Academic work is characterized by high levels of occupational stress linked to workload, job insecurity, and performance expectations.” Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) claim that “High job demands and chronic work pressure contribute to burnout and reduce professionals’ capacity to engage positively with others.”

If on one hand the technological backdrop of this modern era helps employees and managers accomplish tasks more quickly and efficiently – thus spare time for more relevant activities – on the other it adds another layer of control. Mannevu (2018), in fact, argues that digital management discourses construct the manager as an entrepreneurial self, responsible for continuous self-optimization, adaptability, and performance enhancement. The article, “The managerial self in the digital age” (Mannevu, 2018), highlights how digital technologies intensify managerial self-surveillance, as performance metrics, dashboards,

and evaluative systems encourage constant monitoring and self-assessment. The author suggests that the demand for constant engagement and affective investment may generate forms of exhaustion and alienation, as managerial subjectivity becomes increasingly aligned with organizational performance imperatives.

This digitalized form of control was already analyzed through the example of W (my mother's job as a delivery woman). Employees are managers of their own job and technology plays the role of the "invisible boss", limiting or annihilating any form of human contact with the firm itself (or other colleagues). Another interesting example of this technological control I observed while working in fast-food chains. Middle managers were supposed to use a chronometer to make sure we would produce burgers at the "correct" speed. What struck my attention was the fact that managers themselves checked their own speed and tracked all their progress through the use of technology, and occasionally a "bigger fish" would come and check on them. A silent chain of technological control which left no room for doubts... Or weakness. The managers of the chains experienced high levels of alienation. They found no pleasure in what they had been doing, some of them for several years. I distinctly remember asking one of them about how he was feeling on the job, and he replied "Absolutely *nothing*".

Two situations had me reflect upon the quality of the communication strategies implemented in firms to negotiate terms of change. The first at the firm Y, when my second job was not tolerated and the middle manager threatened to fire me. To handle the situation, I immediately protested, in clear terms, bypassing the hierarchy – instead of talking to the middle manager, in fact, I directly went to the general manager, assuming that the middle

manager would not understand nor try to help. My communication skills were not efficient for several reasons : I acted on the impulse of the moment, not carefully planning things ahead. Authority was bypassed without a valid and strong “opposition”: I was a rather new employee at the firm, meaning that my connection with other employees was weak. Having no experience did not help either, my position at the firm Y was weak. Many other workers, as I understood later, did not appreciate the management style nor the middle manager’s attitude, but no one was able to complain or protest about these aspects. No one supported my claims whenever I pointed out that, at the very moment of the hiring, no document stating that I was not supposed to hold a second occupation was signed. Moreover, I underlined the necessity to keep the weekend job, in that the wage at Y was not sufficient to cover everyday expenses. The result was catastrophic: the middle and the general managers called upon me for a “meeting” where I was gently told that, because of my lack of respect for the company’s rules, my services were not needed anymore.

Another interesting experience was at a fast-food firm in Belgium. Most of the workers were students, from Belgium and mainly worked for pocket money. No one was satisfied with the working conditions inside of the company. Poor management which created pointless tension among the employees, while shifts were often not adequately distributed. The situation worsened until I decided to write an email to the general manager on my behalf to explain that, while some employees worked to pay for drinks at the weekend, others depended on that money to cover any kind of expenses, from rent to university fees. The answer was harsh and left no room for discussion. At that point, since all workers agreed on the terms, I proposed that we speak to a syndicate, but first, I would gather everybody’s

signatures to write a report. My colleagues' reaction was mesmerizing: no one was ready to take action. In spite of the level of stress at the restaurant, which attained extremely high peaks, everyone was only *talking* about, but not eager to actually *do* something. This situation had me reflect upon the mistakes I committed by assuming that all colleagues were ready to act, due to the difficult working conditions. First of all, the assumption that workers felt "strong" in the face of the manager because of the level of general dissatisfaction. Second, the communication strategies were inefficient because I bypassed authority without having the *real strength* to do it properly (differently from the example of Max at Bank mentioned in the previous chapter). Third, I overestimated people's willingness to collaborate and solve the problem.

In this following section, I propose a critical analysis of the strategies of communication which can be implemented to create constructive resistance, against the backdrop of the digitalization. Alain Savard in his work *Organiser, mobiliser, gagner* (2024), theorizes resistance as a practice of communication. Savard's work is radical in describing such strategies and explains through practical examples how to organize resistance to establish a more equitable working environment. He proposes a series of basic steps to manage the communication efficiently:

1. *What exactly is the goal?* Savard states that, very often, people organize protests or forms of resistance without really being aware of the objectives that should be attained.

2. *Who has the power to solve the problem?* It is not necessarily the “boss” or the “general manager”, the mediators could be several and unexpectedly competent.

3. *Which tactics could actually work?* Savard argues that the amount of “pressure” on the general management depends on the context and on the available tools.

Once this “action plan” is clearer, Savard recommends organizing small meetings with other colleagues (it could be two, three people at the beginning) to discuss the problem and the three above-mentioned points. The author argues that smaller meetings are an efficient tool when it comes to creating and building *trust*. This is because in a group of two/three people everybody’s opinion is really valued and taken into account; furthermore, it is easier to express a viewpoint in front of a couple of colleagues instead of speaking up in public in a hall full of strangers. During these meetings, Savard continues, it is paramount to consider several aspects:

1. *Thinking the problem through, without any emotions.* In order to identify the causes, the potential solutions and methods, emotions could be problematic, in that they could cloud participants’ judgement. Sticking to the pure facts is the best strategy.

2. *Resisting the impulse to act immediately.* Acting alone (as I did at the firm Y) on the impulse of the moment could prove more harmful than beneficial, especially to the protester. Exposing oneself directly without a plan places the resistant in a very vulnerable position which does not lead to the collective good.

3. *Finding colleagues who agree and empathize.* It should be someone trustworthy, who shares the same view, and with whom it could be possible to expand the “circle” of resistors.

4. *Not abandoning the “mission” in the event of setbacks.* Not every colleague will hold the same opinion. It is important not to give up in case several co-workers are not willing to participate.

5. *Recognizing those in power who could potentially drive change.* Would it be possible to approach the general manager directly? Which strategies would be the most appropriate and which would instead cause further problems? Who, inside of the organization, could take the lead in the resistance and why? All these aspects should be carefully considered, discussed and every voice should be heard.

The plan of action should be the product of these discussions made by small groups which progressively become larger. Savard argues, in fact that this is the best strategy to reduce fear and to engage workers progressively. New technologies can prove really useful in creating constructive resistance. Social media, polls and emails can create further engagement when used wisely and can foster the spreading of opinions (by keeping answers to polls and personal contributions anonymous, for instance). In the examples of Bank and Agro (in the previous chapter), the leaders of the resistance use these exact strategies to gather consensus to finally have formal reports signed by all employees.

The level of pressure to be exerted depends on the first reactions of the management as well as on the importance of the outcome. Savard recommends putting more pressure depending on the gravity of the situation. This can be achieved in a variety of ways: by

boycotting the activity of the firm, by deliberately changing routines or by taking control of the production chain and of schedules. This study does not seek to explore the opposition between managers and workers as “evil against good”, despite its clear Marxist premises. It acknowledges the fact that both categories, though in distinct ways, experience *alienation*, *concertive and ideological control*, and aims therefore at building constructive *dialogue* inside the discursive framework of a firm. In fact, while Savard’s analysis is rooted in traditions of collective mobilization, in this thesis his framework is mobilized less as a model of class-based struggle and more as a repertoire of situated practices through which actors seek to reconfigure power relations in concrete organizational contexts. From this perspective, mobilization is not primarily understood as a macro-political confrontation, but as a set of practical strategies through which workers and organizational actors attempt to regain voice, visibility, and leverage within existing institutional constraints.

Read through this lens, Savard does not propose a prescriptive blueprint for resistance, but rather highlights the importance of context-sensitive, adaptive, and mediated forms of action. This interpretation aligns with the broader argument of this thesis, which conceptualizes technology not as a neutral background nor as a deterministic force, but as a socio-technical space in which possibilities for both alienation and constructive mediation are actively negotiated.

These observations should not be interpreted as prescriptive recommendations for organisational practice. Rather, they highlight how communication processes within digitally mediated workplaces may open limited but meaningful spaces for the articulation of employee voice.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined contemporary workplace alienation through a multi-layered analytical lens, mixing theory, accounts and everyday practices to show how power, resistance, mediation are intertwined in digitally mediated organizational contexts.

The aim of this study is to prove that alienation in the digital workplace cannot be understood solely as a structural condition, nor resistance as a purely oppositional act. Instead, alienation, control and agency emerge as relational, dynamic and discursive processes, negotiated through communication practices and technological infrastructures.

Technology is presented not as a deterministic force which acts “in its own way”, but rather, as a space in which both alienation and possibilities for mediation coexist, and where workers’ voice can be encouraged and stifled at the same time.

This research, therefore, suggests that the digital transformation is not inherently empowering or disempowering for employees: its effects depend mainly on the way it is implemented and communicated within organizations.

For these reasons, rather than proposing a prescriptive model, this study aims to encourage a broader critical reflection on how internal communication practices shape employees’ agency against the backdrop of digitalization. The objective of this study is therefore two-fold: on one hand, proposing guidelines for better strategies of communication in implementing change; on the other, opening new spaces of reflection on the relationship between technology, power dynamics and communication.

The theoretical and empirical limitations of this study are mostly related to its very nature: if it is true that autobiographical ethnography is accurate in that it allows for deeper descriptions of reality, it is equally arguable that facts are presented from a certain perspective, which is, at times, very personal. Theory alone is not enough to acknowledge the plausibility of this author's standpoint, as much as personal insights are not the sole source of information for the pre-existing theory. This study attempts to provide new opportunities for discussion and reflection more than proving certain points or reframing existing theories.

This thesis sits at the crossroad of Organizational Communication and Critical Management studies and can provide useful insights for both fields. Future research could further explore how different models of internal communication shape employees' agency in diverse organizational and cultural contexts; another possible future study could be centered around the very use of technology – how it is implemented and used – in the light of the considerations of this study. Other interesting reflections could be related to the variety of leadership models, their subtleties and the way technology is used to shape workers' mentalities against the contemporary backdrop.

References

- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5), 619–644.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00305>
- Andersson, R., Heide, M., & Simonsson, C. (2023). *Digital corporate communication and internal communication*. In V. Luoma-aho & M. Badham (Eds.), *Handbook on Digital Corporate Communication* (pp. 18–33). Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- Barker, J. R. (1997). Discipline and team effectiveness in self-managing teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42(2), 396–429.
- Blauner, R. (1964). *Alienation and freedom: The factory worker and his industry*. University of Chicago Press.
- Brehm, J. W. (1966). *A theory of psychological reactance*. Academic Press.
- Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and monopoly capital*. Monthly Review Press.
- Casey, C. (1995). *Work, self and society: After industrialism*. SAGE.
- Fleming, P., & Spicer, A. (2003). Working at a cynical distance: Implications for power, subjectivity and resistance. *Organization*, 10(1), 157–179.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508403010001376>
- Foucault, M. (1970). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. Tavistock.
- Foucault, M. (1997). *Michel Foucault: Ethics, subjectivity and truth*. The New Press.

Ganesh, S., Zoller, H. M., & Cheney, G. (2005). Transforming resistance: Critical organizational communication meets globalization from below. *Communication Monographs*, 72(2), 169–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750500111872>

Giroux, H. A. (2014). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*. Haymarket Books.

Goldberg, C. (1999). Resistance and organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(1), 35–45.

Goldstein, J. (1994). *The unshackled organization: Facing the challenge of unpredictability through spontaneous reorganization*. Productivity Press.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. International Publishers.

Haga, T. (2022). Alienation in a digitalized world. *AI & Society*, 37(3), 1053–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-021-01289-5>

Heinz, W. R. (1991). Changes in the methodology of alienation research. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 11(6–8), 213–221.

Humphrey, J. (2018). *Marxism and neo-Marxism*. Routledge.

Jermier, J. M., Knights, D., & Nord, W. (1994). *Resistance and power in organizations*. Routledge.

Kinman, G. (2001). Pressure points: A review of research on stressors and strains in UK academics. *Educational Psychology*, 21(4), 473–492. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410120090849>

Knights, D., & Murray, F. (1994). *Managers divided: Organizational politics and IT management*. Wiley.

Kupfer, A. (Ed.). (2021). *Work appropriation and social inequality*. Springer.

Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, A. (2011). Organizations as discursive constructions: A Foucauldian approach. *Organization Studies*, 32(9), 1247–1271.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840611411395>

Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics. *Human Relations*, 1(1), 5–41.

Marx, K. (1961). Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844. *Foreign Languages Publishing House*.

Morrison, E. W. (2014). Employee voice and silence. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, 173–197.

Mumby, D. K., & Ashcraft, K. L. (2004). *Reworking gender: A feminist communicology of organization*. SAGE.

Mumby, D. K., & Kuhn, T. (2019). *Organizational communication: A critical approach*. SAGE Publications.

Nygren, G., & Gidlund, K. (2012). The pastoral power of technology: Rethinking alienation in digital culture. *Culture and Organization*, 18(1), 1–17.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2011.646962>

Peters, T. J., & Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In search of excellence*. Harper & Row.

Rose, N., O'Malley, P., & Valverde, M. (2006). Governmentality. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 2, 83–104.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2018). *Nonviolent communication: A language of life* (3rd ed.). PuddleDancer Press.

Savard, A. (2024). *Organiser, mobiliser, gagner, écosociété*

Seeman, M. (1971). The urban alienations: Some dubious theses from Marx to Marcuse. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 63(2), 213–218.

Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(3), 293–315. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.248>

Sivunen, A., & Laitinen, K. (2020). Digital transformation and employee control. *Communication Research*, 47(2), 123–142.

Thomason, B., & Francsak, J. (2022). The digital workplace and work-life boundaries. *Journal of Business Communication*, 59(3), 321–339.

Weber, M. (1904). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. Unwin Hyman.

Willcocks, L. (2004). *Foucault, power/knowledge and information systems: Reconstructing the present*. In J. Mingers & L. Willcocks (Eds.), *Social theory and philosophy for information systems* (pp. 238–296). Wiley. 1947