



Dissertation presented in order to obtain the degree of PhD in Political and Social Sciences

**ORGANIZING STRATEGIC DECISION:  
DECISIONAL WORK IN NEW WAYS OF WORKING  
PROJECTS**

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# SUMMARY

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Over the last decade, projects bearing the label of “*New Ways of Working*” have been developed and implemented in a series of third sector organizations. These projects are inspired by a management fashion that encourages companies to shift from a supposedly “old” way of working to a “new”. Promoters of the *New Ways of Working* emphasize the merits of “flexible” workspaces, of new information technologies, and of cultural and managerial reforms promoting, among others, employees’ autonomy, empowerment, and responsibility. Existing research on *New Ways of Working* has mostly investigated the effects and the consequences of these new workspaces and work practices on employees, managers, and firms. Conversely, the thesis intends to question the ways in which *New Ways of Working* projects emerge and take shape in organizations, by conceptualizing *New Ways of Working* as projects of organizational change that involve the making of a strategic decision and a translation process of this decision, shaped by the work of rational and political actors. Using a mix of qualitative methods, four empirical case studies were conducted in a processual, longitudinal, constructionist and abductive perspective. The first case study relies on the sociology of translation and on the institutional work in order to explore the processes of legitimation and black-boxing that underlie the design and the deployment of a *New Ways of Working* project in an insurance company. The second case study offers a coalitional approach of a University Faculty involved in a similar project and emphasizes the role of uncertainty and ambiguity in making sense of strategic decisions and indecision. The third case study views *New Ways of Working* projects as involving a consequent work of infrastructure design that induces temporal and spatial tensions and conflicts between the actors involved in the project. Through an analysis of the bargaining process taking place between two geographically remote sites of a media company, the fourth chapter analyzes how the design process of *New Ways of Working* is turned into a struggle for resources and power. Taken together, the cases reveal that *New Ways of Working* projects involve *decisional work* – practices and activities of “decisional entrepreneurs” that aim to translate, organize, and make sense of the strategic decisions taken to adopt or initiate *New Ways of Working* projects. Ultimately, *New Ways of Working* projects consist of organizing, legitimizing, and black-boxing strategic decisions through a bargaining process involving coalitions of actors, spaces, and resources, confronted with indeterminacy and temporal tensions.

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