

National Plan of Recovery and Resilience and Digitalization of Public Administrations: New Opportunities for Old Challenges for Social Work

Anna Zenarolla^a

Abstract

The object of this paper is to encourage contemplation on the opportunities and problems the contemporary digital era presents for social work. Due to the rapid adoption of digitalization in Public Administrations mandated by National Plan of Recovery and Resilience and National Social Plan 2021-2023, it is important to keep in mind a number of theoretic and methodological tenets in order to avoid reducing social service digitalization to a purely technical issue and to make the most of the opportunities it presents for social work in order to successfully adapt to the specific approach and intervention goals. The reflection is based on observations made while monitoring the creation and implementation of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region's Informational System for Social Services (ISSS) and the digitization of the Cartella Sociale, used by social workers across all the region's social services. The paper highlights the significance of considering ISSS not just as a tool for gathering information describing reality but, more importantly, as a tool for its users to advance their knowledge and build relationships with their client and one another. Due to this, it suggests concentrating the informational tools and systems on social workers' daily tasks and developing them with their direct and ongoing engagement.

Keywords: informational system, digitalization, community of practice.

1. Introduction

The article's goal is to encourage contemplation on the opportunities and problems the contemporary digital era presents for social work. This subject is not brand-new. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have

^a Department of Human Studies, University of Trieste, Italy.

Corresponding author:
Anna Zenarolla
E-mail: anna.zenarolla@scfor.units.it

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received a lot of attention since they first started to proliferate in social services organizations. However, the COVID-19 epidemic's rapid acceleration of ICT's adoption, the workplace, and the incredible digitalization of public administration mandated by the National Plan of Recovery and Resilience, as well as the Unitary Informational System of Social Services introduced by article number 24 of Legislative Decree 147/2017 and relaunched by the National Social Plan 2021–2023, demand that this issue receive urgent attention.

Due to the rapid adoption of digitalization in public administration, it is important to keep in mind a number of theoretical and methodological tenets that may accompany it in order to avoid reducing social service digitalization to a purely technical issue and to make the most of the opportunities it presents for social work in order to successfully adapt to the specific approach and intervention goals.

The following analysis is based on our experience in supporting the creation and implementation of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region's Informational System for Social Services (ISSS) and the digitization of the *Cartella Sociale*, used by social workers across all the region's social services. After a brief description of the process, the paper will concentrate on a few methodological issues that became apparent during it and are considered crucial for other similar experiences.

2. The context of reflection

The construction of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region's Information System for Social Services (ISSS) and the digitalization of *Cartella Sociale* (CSI) date back to the end of the Nineties, even though some experimentations had been realized at local level before (Zenarolla, 2013). Some municipalities introduced informational systems to document and account for the activity of social services. The idea of a regional ISSS has received a relevant methodological and technical impulse by the experience of the regional centre of documentation and analysis on children and adolescents, promoted by the national law 285/1997. From this experience arose the idea of a more comprehensive and systematic informational system, aimed at supporting the activity of social services at municipal level. This idea has been reinforced by the national law 328/2000. So, at the beginning of 2000 a regional management committee, composed by representatives of the Regional Department for Social Policies, of the municipal Social Services, of the company in charge for supporting regional development of Information Technology and of the company in charge for supporting and monitoring, the regional planning of social policies started to work for the development of ISSS on a regional level.

The first critical issue the regional committee faced, regarded which data and information the system would have to collect. There was a contrast between the collection of data and information which were useful for service management or for service government, data and information addressed to satisfy local or regional informational needs. The previous experiences have highlighted the necessity to overcome ISSS that were often self-referential, redundant, unfit to interpret social characteristics and phenomena and unable to provide data and information useful for planning and organizing social services. The second critical issue regarded how to engage administrations and practitioners in the ISSS construction. They were tired of answering to regional and national data collections, addressed to satisfy requirements perceived as unimportant and in particular which were useless, unfit for their informational needs and unable to support them in planning and organizational activities. Social workers, moreover, were reluctant to move from recording case activity in paper files to using IS. Many of them perceived digitalization as an intrusion in their activity, which would have threatened their freedom, autonomy and discretion as well as obstacle to their face-to-face relation with the client. They considered recording procedures too rigid and standardized, in contrast with their narrative and descriptive approach to document. So, there were a lot of ethical and methodological challenges regarding the relationship between social-worker and the client; client privacy, confidentiality and consent; practitioner competence in using ICT; records and documentation; and collegial relationships.

To overcome these difficulties, the regional committee decided to adopt a bottom-up approach to ISSS and a work methodology based on the participation of social workers to its construction. Recurring meetings to discuss and to decide ISSS features with restricted group of their representatives were conducted as well as meetings with social services directors to decide how to introduce tools and procedures defined by the restricted group in local organizations of social work. Moreover, meetings opened to all the regional social workers were realized to describe and share decisions and instruments, as well as training sessions at regional and municipal level to explain and test the instruments with the practitioners. As described below, the community of practices appeared as an helpful instrument to encourage social worker's participation.

In order to make the ISSS useful, not only for the regional level but also for the municipal level of social services, it was decided that the digitalization of *Cartella Sociale* (CS) would have been the first step of the process. CS, in fact, is the main professional instrument used by social workers to register the interventions they plan and implement to take care of people with social needs. It is important not only for single social workers, but also for social work

directors because contains data and information related to social services recipients and interventions which are crucial for planning and organizing social services at local as well as regional level. As analysed below, the digitization of CS adopted a client-centred design that reflects the phases of social assessment and personal planning, and focuses on its characteristics, needs and interventions defined in relation to its situation.

Whit these methodological attentions it was possible to contrast social workers resistance and to foster their use of CSI. Furthermore, in these years great attention has been paid to update information technology that support the system, to develop connections with other information systems and data bases, and to make CSI layout more user-friendly.

3. Using an analytical framework

It is imperative to provide public administration and social service digitalization with a conceptual framework that emphasizes the approach used to apply ICTs, the goals and objectives pursued, and the potential consequences and implications for all users to prevent it from being reduced to a purely technical issue. The Internet establishes a network of networks where various software and applications can function, adding a new degree of social and human interaction to the hardware that enables the operation of various machines and gadgets.

On the contrary, digitalization develops far too frequently because of people being fascinated by innovative technology and the benefits of their uses. These undeniable advantages run the chance of being utilized mechanically, which improves a performing method, if they are not inserted in an appropriate framework. As a result, it is crucial to integrate any new technology into an existing theory or framework (Chan & Holosko, 2016).

Under the strain of the new managerialism and its emphasis on the use of performance monitoring and data collecting with the goals of assessing efficiency, reducing costs, and enhancing transparency, ICTs have been implemented in social services in Italy (Evans & Harris, 2004; Johansson, 2012; Parton, 2009).

Additionally, three key approaches—the accountable method, the encyclopaedic approach, and the strategic approach—have been used to construct the ISSS. The accountable approach views the ISSS as a tool for gathering and analysing a small collection of data pertaining to the cost of social services, users, and employees to plan social policies. The encyclopaedic approach views the ISSS as a tool for monitoring all social services by gathering a wider range of data that includes the structural and organizational aspects of

social services, as well as the quantity and demographics of both customers and employees. In the end, the strategic approach views the ISSS as a tool for accounting the input and output of social service activities through the gathering of information and metrics related to supply and demand, quality, efficacy, and efficiency. The top-down model, the feedback or bottom-up model, and the interactive model were created because of these three approaches (Mauri, 2007). Additionally, all three models were implemented using a centralized methodology, ranging from the national to the local level.

Contrarily, based on our experience, the ISSS method would be relational and operative. According to our methodology, the ISSS is a relational flow, which is a flow of interactions between people within an organization and people from various organizations that collaborate. It concentrates on the social worker's activities, which relate to connections with clients and their families as well as those with people in both internal and external organizations. According to this viewpoint, an informational system is 'a network of relationships between various topics that participate as senders and recipients in the generation, diffusion, and use of signals important for health. It can be identified by the "presence of three connected components:

- a circular link between subjects is different from the classic hierarchical one because everyone in the network system is both a producer and a user of information;
- information that moves rationally throughout the network;
- devices which mediate the contact between persons without conditioning them and promote the formation and circulation of relationships" (Prandi, 1988, p. 66).

The daily labour of social workers nurtures another crucial aspect of the informational systems. Due to its propensity to provide significant, accurate, and up-to-date data, this source serves as the primary informational source for informational systems.

The SISS engages in informational activity by gathering information or producing information that, when disseminated to one or more recipients, elaborated, archived, and analysed, or managed to make decisions, may produce an informational impact, which is a cognitive shift that may eventually result in a real change (Nigris, 1999). The material to change into information through appropriate modalities and tools of data collection and processing represents daily activity and its informational potentiality.

It's true that 'creating, disseminating, and utilising knowledge in a continuous, rational, and functional way has evolved into a way of life. This indicates that the ISSS is systemic, not delegable, functional, long-lasting, but also continually opened and rethought because our working methods are

regularly modified to reflect changes in the needs of the health system' (Prandi, 1988. P. 66).

For this reason, it is essential that ISSS serve as both a management information system and a directional information system. Directional and management dimensions cannot be separated from one another. If we divide them, the informational system runs the risk of not being implemented because the informational flows are not fostered with regularity and persistence, or sectorial informational subsystems, devoted to particular issues, will be built, but with a level of complexity that's too high for being easily and continuously implemented.

The directing level and the management level must remain connected if we want the ISSS to create informational flows regarding demand and supply at the same time to assist planning by the central and local governments.

Social workers are not bureaucrats, despite being housed within bureaucratic organizations. Social workers are semi-professionals; they have professional autonomy based on the skills attained through a particular study and training program. Therefore, they may be regarded as low-level government representatives who deal directly with specific residents and who use a great deal of discretion when allocating resources or enforcing laws (Lipsky, 1980). They must constantly decide whether to apply the rules and how these should be understood in a particular situation. As a result, they are less reliant on organizational structure and more on their vocation. Additionally, social services organizations are loosely tied (Orton & Weick, 1990), which indicates that interpersonal links within the organization are weak. They are neither predetermined nor predicted as a result. It could be challenging to establish responsibilities and processes in this type of organization using the evidence that the ISSS has asked. However, the ISSS must also permit some freedom. Additionally, social work is multidisciplinary and centered on teams and working groups. All the contacts pertaining to this uniqueness of social work must be reflected in ISSS. As a result, ISSS cannot simply be a database or a data warehouse that compiles information from other databases. If it were this way, it would merely be a tool for archiving data with a high likelihood of errors in data registration, failure to record current data, and failure to have data available when needed. According to our methodology, the ISSS aims to establish an informational system that relates various informative processes both within and across companies, rather of gathering data by moving it from one data base to another. ISSS links data flows rather than transferring data. This indicates that the data are the property of their creator and continue to flow in the way they were produced. By doing this, each data creator maintains ownership of the data and accountability for its accuracy and dependability.

4. Building instruments of reflectivity

Pathways to the digitalization of social service documentation tools and information systems are thought to require an emphasis on reflexivity (Schön, 1993), which they must support and encourage. It is vital that these systems and tools enable their users to critically evaluate their own work, both in-context and ex-post. Reflectivity is what gives practitioners the ability to resist lapses into automatism and performance and to view their intervention within the larger framework of the organization and policies in which they are embedded.

Tools for information recording should serve as ‘a means by which social workers critically reflect on the ‘social’ dimension of their job’ (Bradt et al., 2011, p. 1374) for social work in particular. To maintain the three focus that distinguishes their intervention (Gui, 2008) by directing it to address the user, his or her context of reference, and their organization contextually, they should therefore assist them in reflecting on the individual process of taking charge and the context in which it takes place. In this regard, the registration tools should be set up similarly to how the care plan is defined, which may be “compared to a path that has multiple ‘gates’ that one must always pass through to change directions. Caregivers must recognize these gates, select which caregivers and organizations will best support each change in course, and then choose the appropriate course of action. The various phases of plan execution are thus linked together by the caregiver’s progress along this route” (Payne, 1998, pp. 169-170). Therefore, the social file’s computerized organizational structure should replicate these “gates”, outlining a set of cognitive and methodological procedures that the caregiver must take before moving on to operational and documentary tasks. For this reason, it should include not just areas for recording but also choices and avenues that lead the operator to inquire about the user’s circumstance and method of coping.

This configuration of the computerized social file enables the integration of operability and documentation, allowing them to feed off one another. Operability in the process of becoming is deposited in documentation because doing so provides it with helpful stimuli and indications to move forward, and documentation is enriched by operability by drawing data and information. The computerization of the social record can aid in enhancing the close linkage that already exists between documentation and operability. “A theoretical model’s comparison to actual occurrences within a helping process enables a critical assessment of crucial processes, including causal linkages, event reading, working hypotheses, and meaning attribution. Thus, the relationship between the processes of aiding and documentation is one of pattern selection and content and meaning restructuring. Documentation, which is a selective representation of the helping process, highlights the relationship between the

part and the whole, between reality and its representation, and even though it can be described as a simplification of a complex process, it stimulates problematization of the helping process” (Bini, 2003, pp. 73-74).

Because of this, the computerized social file should provide the operator with information on which to ponder and on the basis of which to make judgments, in addition to leading him along the route of taking charge and compelling him to pause his attention at crucial points in the process. It is crucial that its structure permits both the addition of new information that complements or replaces the existing information as well as the retrieval and reuse of previously deposited information. Therefore, it is crucial to guarantee an archiving function that enables both *ex post* reconstruction of the user’s care pathway and *in itinere* recovery of those portions of it that are necessary for following phases. To achieve this, its design should incorporate archiving techniques that not only allow information to be stored but also to be retrieved and processed in order to advance the care project, assuring through application collaboration mechanisms the capability of utilizing data from other information systems.

Knowledge is created by more than just the accumulation of data and information; it also involves retrieving that data and information in order to articulate, integrate, compare, and relate it to other data and information through a reflexive and interpretive process. According to this viewpoint, the archive serves as a valuable resource of information to encourage the operator’s reflexivity as he assumes control because it enables him to retrace events, behaviours, and attitudes, link them to other information flows that feed the ISSS, and situate them within a larger body of data and information. By continuing to “produce information and data capable of influencing and orienting professional action and the action of planning and management of services” (Bini, 2003, p. 84), recent technologies enable the construction of archives capable of supporting such processes. These archives are not of ‘accumulation’, but of ‘use’ (Bini, 2003).

Information must be recorded with their potential use in mind, in a methodologically valid and shared manner, for the archive and the links between the various information flows of the ISSS and the computerized social record to function. Through processes of digitalization of tools based on comparison and sharing, it is necessary to consider and make as compatible as feasible the needs, practices, and languages of all practitioners who may have to utilize them. The relationship between various practitioners “must, evidently, be included in the techniques of structuring the archive, categorizing documents, and retrieving information” (Bini, 2003, p. 83).

5. From the logic of procedure to the logic of the project

Thirdly, it is crucial to pay attention to the logic that should underpin the digitalization of social service tools, specifically the processual logic of taking charge.

Taking charge refers to a certain method of assistance provided to the person that results in a project that, after a multidimensional evaluation of the person's need or issue, specifies the objectives for resolving it and the steps to take. This procedure aims to start a dynamic of change in the individual and his or her environment. The direction of this dynamic is only partially predictable because it reflects how the individual and his or her environment respond to the set of interventions that the social service will be able to activate in relation to them. The service system or other local actors may provide these interventions. As a result, it is a complex process that can be lengthy, linear, and continuous depending on the number of interventions that can be activated, the number of subjects that can be involved, and the variety of emotions that can be produced in the individual. Modern technologies are better able to capture this complexity in its entirety of components and the dynamism of its evolution than paper recording techniques, which sometimes struggle to do so. The modern technologies are particularly well suited to support the procedural logic that underlies taking charge because of their flexibility and interconnectivity (Moruzzi, 2012), which makes them a useful tool in preventing that logic from being supplanted by the procedural logic typical of the bureaucratic culture of public administrations.

The administrative-bureaucratic logic depicts a performance-based aid in which a service is offered in response to a request. Because it focuses on the specific procedure and the specific operator asked to carry it out on behalf of the user, it is inflexible and unidirectional in logic. On an informational level, it results in the visualization of a flow that replicates the administrative process that goes along with taking over, segmenting it into stages that correspond to the accomplishments anticipated by the method.

On the other side, the project logic represents process-based support, which results from an assessment exercise meant to trace the causes of the user's demands and identify the resources to attempt and solve them through a path of change with the user. This is a flexible and multidirectional logic because it focuses on the response that the individual produces and the various resources that the practitioner mobilizes in his or her direction. On the level of information, it results in the tracing of a flow that is articulated into stages whose succession is not always linear but instead has forward and backward motions, which may even cause them to overlap.

Information systems of two diverse types can be created using these two logics. One of them is the one that “concentrates on the logic of the administrative procedure demands the description of the reasons why and stages involved in carrying out the operation that ends when the obligation (the financial pay out, benefit, etc.) has been utilized by the person entitled” (Fazzi, 2006, p. 17). The other is the one that adheres to the project’s logic and adapts to the specificity it assumes in relation to the singularity of the user and the situation; provides and at the same time requests information to accompany the development of the project; stimulates the user’s cognitive activity of analysis, decomposition and connection of information, and solicits his or her abilities of intuition and deduction, as well as that “production of possible This logic, which is eminently relational in nature and neither technological nor procedural, is what defines the design of social services: [...] it is not an exercise in managerial engineering where a list of needs is matched with a list of related services. Instead, it is a human-to-human exchange. Understanding processes requires paying attention to the players involved, how they interact, and the outcomes of their collaborative efforts” (Payne, 1998, p. 108). It resembles a compass that guides the practitioner through the “adventurous voyage” (Folgheraiter, 1998, p. 390) of the assisting process, directing and re-directing them when they make a mistake or when a course correction is essential. To reflect and support a design based on relationality and the ability to take into account multiple contributions and adapt with diversified interventions to changing needs, digitization will need to encourage the development of computerized documentation tools. These tools will collect and make the information content produced by various sources of interventions available. In reality, “the ability to recover information to enhance a possible framework of knowledge of the individual history and of the numerous processes that shape the interactions with the social context of belonging” (Bini, 2003, p. 20) is crucial to taking control.

6. Improving communities of practice

Although the widespread adoption of digitization into all fields of people’s lives has significantly lessened the hostility and resistance that many social workers had experienced upon its initial introduction in the 1990s by viewing it as an external intrusion that caused social work to lose its true nature as a relationship with the person to reduce to a technical practice (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Tsui & Cheung, 2004), emphasizing predictability and controllability rather than contributing to the development of a responsive practice (Aas, 2004; Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; Burton & Van den Broek, 2009; Devlieghere &

Roose, 2018; Garrett, 2004, 2005; Gillingham, 2014; Hall et al., 2010; Parton, 2009; Pithouse et al., 2012; Postle 2002; Regan, 2003; Sapey, 1997), the transition from paper to computerized documentation still receives much criticism, still highlights many problems (Gillingham, 2011), and is considered an “obstacle to good practice” (Munro, 2011) of services.

The debate about how far the development of information systems and computerized documentation tools has been a real improvement for service organizations has been largely stifled by the assumption that it is good in and of itself (that it is something good in itself, as such), and it has the potential to increase the quality and efficiency of social work by measuring the results of social work interventions (Tregeagle & Darcy, 2008), create more transparency (Aas, 2004; Aronson & Smith, 2010) and be more responsive to the needs of children and families (Harlow & Webb, 2003; Hill & Shaw, 2011). But there is a lack of research that prove this potentiality and “there is an urgent need for further research to ensure that future IS can better meet the needs of a range of stakeholders within human service organizations and facilitate the delivery services” (Gillingham, 2011, p. 300). Therefore, it is essential that digitization processes be seen as social processes (Hirschheim et al., 1991) whose outcomes depend largely on how new technologies affect concrete activities and on the interaction between numerous actors trying to make sense of their own and others’ actions, i.e., the nature and traits of organizational culture within specific organizations (Parton, 2009). The ‘four P’s’ or people, processes, programs, and plans, are the essential components in successfully managing the implementation and development of information systems in the context of health care, according to Lammintakanen et al. (2010).

The relationships that form within the organization because of the introduction of new technologies are also highlighted as organizational factors to be considered for the successful implementation and use of the SISS and its tools (Garrett, 2005), particularly the relationships that form between those in managerial functions and those in operational functions. According to Burton and Van den Broek (2009), it is all too common for those who work directly with users and must use new technologies and feed information systems to be excluded from the development phase of these tools. As a result, these tools frequently fail to meet operational requirements and are seen as useful to others but not to themselves. As a result, operators get disenchanted with using these technologies and have little faith in the data and information they can gather using them. Worker skills and experience with using computers, perceived ease of use, utility of the data and attitudes about data are factors strongly related to practitioner utilization of data systems (Carrilio, 2007, 2008). Hence, it ‘is not only a priority, but an absolute principle’ to involve operators throughout the whole development of a SISS and its tools (Phillips & Berman, 1995, p. 99).

Indifference, hesitancy, and animosity are the best and worst outcomes of not involving practitioners, respectively (Gandy & Tepperman 1990, as cited in Phillips & Berman, 1995). This demonstrates the necessity of developing and implementing information systems and tools using a participatory approach that emphasizes engagement and communication with practitioners (Gillingham, 2011, 2014).

The community of practice is a particularly helpful instrument for encouraging social workers' participation in service digitalization procedures. The community of practice, which is geared toward fostering learning from experience, positions itself as a tool capable of increasing both the social and relational fabric that produces it as well as the operability that must feed the tools and information systems.

The idea of community of practice “implies action, but not just action in and of itself. What we do has structure and purpose because it is done in a historical and social context. Practice is always social practice in this sense. Both the explicit and the implicit are included in this definition of practice. What is spoken and what is not said, expressed and assumed in assumptions, are all included. It contains the words, phrases, forms, images, and symbols that varied activities use to express a wide range of goals. It also includes codified procedures, internal rules, and contracts. But it also includes all the unstated connections, unspoken rules of thumb, subtle references, recognized intuitions, particular senses, ingrained sensibilities, unstated understandings, underlying presumptions, and widespread worldviews. The success of their actions depends on many of these factors, many of which will never be made explicitly clear but undeniably signify membership in communities of practice” (Wenger, 2006, p. 56).

We found the three main characteristics of the community of practice identified by Wenger (2006) to be particularly helpful for the development of the ISSS: what it is about – its joint enterprise as understood and continuously renegotiated by its members; how it functions – mutual engagement that ties members together as a social entity; and what capability it has produced – the shared repertoire of common resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that the community of practice has produced. In order to create an ISSS that all social workers would view as their own, an instrument rooted in their profession, working methodology, and experience, and as a result fit to support their daily activity, we thought these three factors were extremely vital. In reality, a community of practice entails much more than the technical expertise required to complete a task. Communities form around issues that are important to individuals, and members become involved in a network of interactions through time (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2006).

The organization of a specific field of knowledge and action by the community of practice fosters a sense of community and identity among its members.

Operational flows come before data and information flows in terms of what feeds the tools and information systems. They are streams of practices that are fuelled by the action of the operators. The latter is rarely individual because it typically involves a number of performers who are relied upon to collaborate to complete a common task. As a result, it is essential to develop documentation tools and information systems with the active participation of everyone involved in the delivery of interventions and services. To become meaningful and useful for their own operations through that circular process of attribution of meaning that characterizes reflexivity, they must figure out ways to make their operations informative and documentable. This process is followed by digitization, which is used as a tool to help its execution by customizing to its requirements. Praxis and documentation do not need to change to accommodate technology; rather, technology has to change to accommodate praxis and documentation. It is up to the practitioners who will utilize the computerized tools and systems to comprehend what the needs of practice and documentation are, translate them into precise and intelligible requirements for ICT developers, and confirm whether the ICT solutions prepared match those criteria. They may view it in this way as a 'shared effort' that may be accomplished with 'common commitment'. It is vital to build on their knowledge, ensure that they comprehend how these tools are meant to make things simpler and more effective, and look for solutions with them. Computerized tools are one of the concrete embodiments of the 'shared repertoire' of tools, processes, and artifacts that might evolve from the sharing of the 'business' and 'mutual commitment'.

The two mechanisms that support the community of practice, namely 'participation' and 'reification', should be balanced by digitization processes (Wenger, 2006, pp. 108-109). 'Participation' denotes active participation in a social project that fosters a sense of belonging. Thus, it alludes to the work necessary to ensure that every actor who will later utilize them adheres to and participates actively in the development of the information tools and systems. This entails encouraging the development of ideas, proposals, and suggestions regarding how to make informational and computerize their operations. It also entails determining the most efficient methods for gathering proposals, receiving referrals on what is formulated about them, and relaunching additional solutions.

On the other side, 'reification' refers to the practice of structuring and operationalizing ideas, values, approaches, and information generated by interaction among community members. It thus refers to the result of involvement, which may be seen in information artifacts as well as in new

customs, norms, and working methods that have developed as a result of community dialogue.

The community can ‘on the one hand, constantly renew its cognitive heritage in the form of a shared repertoire and, on the other hand, to place the individual contribution within a collective path of valorisation and accumulation of knowledge and experience’ (Trentin, 2004, p. 90). This is made possible by the ongoing transition from participation to reification and vice versa.

In communities of practice generally speaking, a succession of interactions and dynamics develop that, with a tendency toward cyclicity, give rise to an evolutionary process that is represented in the so-called ‘4Co model’ (Calvani, 2005) and includes the following:

- communication, in which questions and answers are exchanged while supporting one another in their daily work to which they each refer to solve their own problems. The more diverse the participants’ levels of experience are at this stage, which is typically indicative of the beginning of the life of a community, the more a sense of mutual help emerges;
- sharing, in which individuals interact with those from similar professional backgrounds to pool resources that they can use to solve their own problems. Individual learning is developed at this stage from a long-term perspective;
- collaboration is the stage when, when a problem needs to be solved, typically all community members are committed, to provide mutual support through exchanges of knowledge and experience, but from a short-term perspective;
- cooperation is the final stage when collaboration becomes more full-fledged and tends to relate to a longer-term horizon. It is also the moment when individuals work together to recognize, put into practice, and store in a shared repository the best practices, discarding those that occasionally have proven ineffective. Learning will become more structured and institutionalized as a result of these activities.

Due to these dynamics, the community of practice is able to guarantee that even national and regional legislative mandates — often those pertaining to the digitalization of services — that practitioners are required to implement feel are far removed from their own operations and related demands. When such mandates are implemented, the procedures sparked by the community of practice may assist create a chance for them to have local application. Indeed, “Even when a community’s practice is significantly influenced by factors beyond the members’ control, which is always the case in some regards, the participants nevertheless shape everyday reality within the resources and limitations that define their circumstances. It is their response to their circumstances, and as a result, their business” (Wenger, 2006, p. 94).

7. Conclusion

With a reflection on some methodological issues deemed essential to ensure that digitalization will be a useful tool for organizations, especially social services organizations, the goal of this article has been to contribute to the process of digitalization of public administration required by the National Plan of Recovery and Resilience.

We made the case that, to get this result, it is crucial to abandon the deterministic and top-down, centralized approaches to technology and instead adopt a relational approach that emphasizes both the relational nature of technology and the relationships involved in its use in organizations. Additionally, we stressed the significance of considering ISSS not just as a tool for gathering information describing reality but, more importantly, as a tool for its users to advance their knowledge and build relationships with their client and one another. Due to this, we suggested concentrating the informational tools and systems on social workers' daily tasks and developing them with their direct and ongoing engagement. We discovered that the concept of a community of practice was especially useful for achieving this. We can confirm that the community of practice is a very useful tool in developing the kind of involvement and mutual commitment as well as the repertory of tools and knowledge that are fundamental to setting up informational instruments and systems appropriate to social work goals, method, and practice based on our experience in assisting the development of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region's informational system of social services.

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