***The actional paradigm of organization as a dialogical inquiry.***

***Peeling the onion of sense and playing the ping pong of dialogue.***

"Form is the end, death. Form-giving is life...

"Art does not reproduce the visible, but **makes** visible".

Paul Klee

***Abstract***

In three historical steps (Adam Smith, Frederick Taylor, Herbert Simon), organization and management studies have discarded action-based paradigms of organization and opted for an information-processing, representational and decision-based paradigm of organization. But collective activity, thus neglected by theories and managerial practices, takes its revenge: complex, uncertain or risky situations, calling for situated adaptation, clever improvisation, and creativity, prove difficult to control through the decision- and representation- based views of organizations. Failure and disaster stories are thus becoming more popular than success stories...

That is why more and more research streams try to *bring activity back in*: practice-based studies, process perspectives on organizations, actor network theory, activity theory, structuration theory, sensemaking perspective, narrative studies, communicational and discursive views of organization, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, pragmatism... Most of them adopt a process perspective on organizations as "*organizing processes*". They re-introduce, not only *collective activity* as the central feature of organizing processes, but also situated sensemaking, to make sense of collective activity, as a continuous *inquiry*, in the sense of the pragmatist epistemologies of inquiry (Peirce, Dewey, Mead). The organizing inquiry produces signs about signs about signs about.... in a continuous *semiosis,* which peels the onion of activity sense, without ever reaching "the stone of the onion", since the onion of sense has no stone!

Furthermore this inquiry about activity is *dialogical*: the sense of situated activity does not result from the subjective interpretations of situations by individuals, who would, from time to time, try to "coordinate", but it emerges from the continuous interplay of dialogs in words and in acts, in a kind of continuous ping pong game. Activity and the inquiry about activity are multi-authored, even when they seem to result from heroic or disastrous decisions made by so-called "powerful decision-makers".

Bringing activity back in, through the concept of "*dialogical inquiry*", is a key step for management studies, since management techniques and concepts develop in radically distinct directions whether they are considered as decision-support mimetic representations or as sensemaking mediations. It will be illustrated by some examples, such as the management of change associated with a deep organizational re-engineering in a large energy company, the development of performance management in the cardiology service of a hospital, or incidents in the nuclear industry.