



The Conversational Firm: Rethinking Bureaucracy in the Age of Social Media (The Middle Range Series)

By Catherine Turco

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A fast-growing social media marketing company, TechCo encourages all of its employees to speak up. By promoting open dialogue across the corporate hierarchy, the firm has fostered a uniquely engaged workforce and an enviable capacity for change. Yet the path hasn't always been easy. TechCo has confronted a number of challenges, and its experience reveals the essential elements of bureaucracy that remain even when a firm sets out to discard them. Through it all, TechCo serves as a powerful new model for how firms can navigate today's rapidly changing technological and cultural climate.

Catherine J. Turco was embedded within TechCo for ten months. *The Conversational Firm* is her ethnographic analysis of what worked at the company and what didn't. She offers multiple lessons for anyone curious about the effect of social media on the corporate environment and adds depth to debates over the new generation of employees reared on social media: Millennials who carry their technological habits and expectations into the workplace.

Marshaling insights from cultural and economic sociology, organizational theory, economics, technology studies, and anthropology, *The Conversational Firm* offers a nuanced analysis of corporate communication, control, and culture in the social media age.

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Editorial Review

Review

Will twenty-first-century social media technologies finally liberate organizations from stifling bureaucratic hierarchies? After spending ten months closely observing a software firm, Catherine J. Turco, one of sociology's brightest young stars, surprises with fascinating and nuanced answers. Brimming with vivid examples, *The Conversational Firm* will not only shape scholarly debate but also engage general readers interested in corporate life. (Viviana A. Zelizer, author of *Economic Lives*)

The Conversational Firm opens a new chapter in the study of workplace democracy by analyzing how social media enable a new balance between workers' autonomy and productivity in high-tech corporate settings. With a particularly keen ethnographic eye, the author reveals a brave new world in which some of the bars of the bureaucratic iron cage are pried open while others remain in place for the pursuit of corporate goals. While millennials gain a more personalized and empowering work environment in the bargain, business leaders gain fuller access to their inner thoughts and creativity. This book will have a lasting impact on the study of corporate cultures and new organizational forms. (Michèle Lamont, author of *The Dignity of Working Men*)

With *The Conversational Firm*, Turco uses the role of social media to challenge our fundamental assumptions about how modern organizations function. In this masterful work, she uncovers a new way of organizing where openness and hierarchy complement, rather than contradict one another. I'm putting this book next to my copies of Weber, Barnard, and Chandler. (Damon Phillips, Columbia Business School)

In *The Conversational Firm*, Turco argues that organizations can transcend bureaucracy, but still they are held in check by certain workplace demands for reproduction and stability. These checks seem to prevent the organization from becoming complete anarchy. Yet perhaps just as important, *The Conversational Firm* is a rich and delightful organizational ethnography of how work is being transformed in the era of social media. (Brayden King, Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University)

With a book that is as readable as it is wise, Turco makes a powerful case for the depth of insight that can only come from the best ethnographies—and is unavailable from the 'big data' analyses currently in vogue. Practitioners and scholars alike will come away with their understanding of firm hierarchy, culture, and communication transformed and enriched. (Ezra Zuckerman Sivan, MIT Sloan School of Management)

[A] well-written, insightful ethnographic study. (Theodore Kinni *Strategy + Business*)

About the Author

Catherine J. Turco is the Theodore T. Miller Career Development Professor and associate professor of organization studies at the MIT Sloan School of Management. An ethnographer and economic sociologist, her work has appeared in the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*.

Users Review

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