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**The role of a local trade union in the promotion of direct
employee voice in workplaces: Towards *organised
disintermediation?***

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Al lavoro, come quello di mio papà e di mia mamma, e a chi, ogni giorno, ci mette il cuore per rappresentarlo.

INDEX

CHAPTER 1. FRAMING THE ISSUE.....	2
1. 1. Fall and decline of trade unions	3
1.2. Is there a future for trade unions?	6
1.3. Trade unions faced with the challenge of new forms of worker voice.....	14
1.4. Research questions.....	20
1.5. Conceptual background and research hypotheses	28
1.6. The structure of the research project.....	35
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	37
2.1. The “frames of reference” of industrial relations	37
2.2. Employee voice.....	49
2.2.1. Representative employee voice	57
2.2.2. Direct employee participation	80
CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT	124
3.1. Ontology, epistemology, theoretical framework and methodology.....	124
3.2. Case study development	129
3.2.1. Environmental constraints.....	130
3.2.2. Institutional structure	142
3.2.3. Cognitive frames	162
3.2.4. Action.....	179
3.3. Discussion.....	234
CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSIONS	258
BIBLIOGRAPHY	273
DOCUMENTS	300
WEBOGRAPHY	302

CHAPTER 1. FRAMING THE ISSUE

The future of capitalism appears to be highly uncertain today. The financial crash of 2008 has been described as just the latest, evident symptom of a long-standing crisis, firstly emerged in the 1970s with the rise of financial markets, privatisation pressures and a decline in the bargaining power of labour¹. Today, economic stagnation, alarming unemployment rates and social misery, as well as environmental concerns, demographic changes and uneven technological advancements put a strain on many Western, highly interconnected, economies. According to Polanyi, only a social countermovement, spurred in response to the development of the three “fictitious commodities” (i.e. land, labour and money, which cannot be considered as real commodities as they were not originally produced to be sold on a market), would have protected us from the instability and inherent tensions of the system, as it did during the Nineteenth century and again after the First World War². However, there are reasonable fears today that the stabilising “double movement” (implying the emergence of institutional limitations to market expansion) might have stopped, and that capitalism might have hit the point of no return as a result of the increasing commodification and distortion of the former “fictitious commodities”³. Pursuant to this view, the crisis of labour movement, as the traditional, institutional watchdog protecting labour from full marketisation, may partly explain the current hardship of working population, and along with the erosion of the other safeguards of land and money, make the perspective of a socially disembedded economy more and more realistic.

In the following lines, I will deepen the reasons behind the presumed “sufferings” of labour representation (notably, trade unions) and after describing latest market-oriented changes in work organisation, I will conclude by providing the perspective of a union-driven countermovement for the embeddedness of some traditionally managerial practices within the framework of industrial relations: an approach that will be empirically investigated further in this research.

¹ See, among others, Harvey, D., *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*, Profile Books, 2010; Hyman, R., “What future for industrial relations in Europe?”, in *Employee Relations*, 2018, 40 (2): 569-579; Streeck, W., “How will capitalism end?”, in *New Left Review*, 2014, 87, 35-64.

² Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1944.

³ Streeck, W., “How will capitalism end?”, in *New Left Review*, 2014, 87, 35-64.

1. 1. Fall and decline of trade unions

It has been argued that «worker voice used to mean trade unions»⁴ and that unions represented the almost universal public policy answer to the need of worker voice. Despite differences in trade union membership, power, and role in the workplace and society, this condition did characterise the vast majority of European countries until the end of the Twentieth century.

However, with very few national exceptions, the reality today has changed on a global scale. Circumstances, such as the decline in trade union density and collective bargaining coverage⁵, the reduced union political influence, and the increasing marginality of union discourses in society⁶, are raised several times by literature. Notably, several studies show that throughout Europe, trade union membership rates have declined since the 1980s. Bargaining coverage has proven to be more resilient than trade union density (especially thanks to extension-clauses in some EU countries and labour law regulation), even though it has significantly decreased in several countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Greece, Germany and Portugal⁷. The main reasons behind these developments are often ascribed to deindustrialisation, globalisation and international

⁴ Ackers, P., “Trade unions as professional associations”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 95.

⁵ Addison, J. T., Bryson, A., Teixeira P., Pahnke, A., Bellmann, L., “The Extent of Collective Bargaining and Workplace Representation: Transitions between States and their Determinants. A Comparative Analysis of Germany and Great Britain”, in *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 2013, 60 (2): 182-209; Carrieri, M., Feltrin, P., *Al bivio. Lavoro, sindacato e rappresentanza nell’Italia d’oggi*, Donzelli, 2016; Colvin, A. J. S., Darbshire, O., “Convergence in Industrial Relations Institutions: The Emerging Anglo-American Model?”, in *Industrial & Labour Relations Review*, 2013, 66 (5): 1047-1077; Vachon, T. E., Wallace, M., Hyde, A., “Union Decline in a Neoliberal Age: Globalization, Financialization, European Integration, and Union Density in 18 Affluent Democracies”, in *Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 2016, 2, 1-22.

⁶ Ackers, P., “Trade unions as professional associations”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 100; Colvin, A. J. S., Darbshire, O., “Convergence in Industrial Relations Institutions: The Emerging Anglo-American Model?”, in *Industrial & Labour Relations Review*, 2013, 66 (5): 1047-1077; Crouch, C., Traxler, F. (eds.), *Organised industrial relations in Europe: What future?*, Aldershot, Avebury, 1995.

⁷ European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), *Just Go For It! A compendium of best practices from all over Europe on involving young people in trade unions*, 2017; Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., “Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?”, in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 1-22.

migration⁸, government measures in response to economic crisis⁹, technological development and the advent of a so-called *consumer capitalism*¹⁰, as well as the shift in forms of employment from full-time permanent to precarious and temporary status, the increasing diversification of the workforce and the apparently greater influence of individualism on society¹¹.

The reference to these processes is particularly important due to their implications on work organisation and workforce in traditional businesses, which directly impact trade unions' constituency and essential role. In particular, it has been contended that the development of a post-industrial society and the tertiarisation of economy tend to reduce the original rank-and-file of trade unions in Western countries (i.e. blue-collar and male employees), by increasing the amount of female and temporary workers¹². Moreover,

⁸ Antón, J. I., Böheim, R., Winter-Ebmer, R., "The effects of international migration on native workers' unionisation in Austria", in *IZA Discussion Papers*, December 2016; Blanchflower, D. G., Bryson, A., "Trade Union Decline and the Economics of the Workplace", in Brown, W., Bryson, A., Forth, J., Whitfield, K. (eds.), *The Evolution of the Modern Workplace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 48-73; Carrieri, M., Treu, T., "Introduzione. Le Relazioni industriali italiane ed europee: innovazioni da completare e convergenze da affinare", in Carrieri, M., Treu, T. (eds.), *Verso nuove relazioni industriali*, Il Mulino, 2013, 7-110; Lee, C. S., "International Migration, Deindustrialization and Union Decline in 16 Affluent OECD Countries, 1962-1997", in *Social Forces*, September 2005, 84 (1): 71-88; Rodrik, D., "Premature Deindustrialization", in *NBER Working Paper*, February 2015, No. 20935; Vachon, T. E., Wallace, M., Hyde, A., "Union Decline in a Neoliberal Age: Globalization, Financialization, European Integration, and Union Density in 18 Affluent Democracies", in *Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 2016, 2, 1-22; van Wanrooy, B., Bewley, H., Bryson, A., *Employment Relations in the Shadow of Recession. Findings from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

⁹ Interestingly, Marginson places liability for the corrosion of the standard-setting capacity of multi-employer bargaining systems, the increasing disorganised decentralisation and the weakening of union organisations in Western European countries with some government interventions under pressure from European authorities during the economic crisis, intended to invert the hierarchy of agreements in favour of the company level and to abandon, or suspend, the application of the favourability principle. For more details in this regard, see Marginson, P., "Coordinated bargaining in Europe: From incremental corrosion to frontal assault?", in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2015, 21 (2): 97-114. See also, Vachon, T. E., Wallace, M., Hyde, A., "Union Decline in a Neoliberal Age: Globalization, Financialization, European Integration, and Union Density in 18 Affluent Democracies", in *Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 2016, 2, 1-22; van Wanrooy, B., Bewley, H., Bryson, A., *Employment Relations in the Shadow of Recession. Findings from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

¹⁰ Ackers, P., "Trade unions as professional associations", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 103; Heery, E., "Industrial relations and the customer", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1993, 24 (4): 284-295.

¹¹ Murray, G., Lévesque, C., Dufour, C., Hege, A., "Workplace representatives: strategic actors of union renewal?", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 2013, 44 (4), 340.

¹² In this regard, it is worth mentioning that according to Keune, «the rise of precarious employment is not simply an outcome of inevitable economic and technological developments. It is also an outcome of conflicts and choices both in the political sphere and in labour relations» (378). Indeed, unions' choice to curb the trend of increasing precarious employment and the various strategies that have been adopted to address the issue (i.e. collective bargaining, social dialogue, organising and campaigning) are considered

global free trade and high levels of international migration have been considered as threatening the respect of national labour standards and enlarging the proportion of migrant workers in traditional businesses, which in turn demand national unions to recruit members from foreign workers as well as to increase relationships and connections with labour organisations from different countries. Finally, increasing competition in international product markets and the «new responsiveness to customer»¹³ have been associated to profound changes in traditional organisations in accordance to the principles of just-in-time and quality control management. Coherently, research has reported the deployment of new surveillance systems aimed at scrutinising employee behaviour and the quality of their work, and the introduction of quality circles or more recently, semi-autonomous work groups in a view of fostering employee involvement in the improvement of product and service quality. Strictly related to the previous processes and serving the objective of a greater competitiveness, digitalisation (i.e. the combination of automation and Big Data contributing to the outbreak of the so-called Fourth industrial revolution) is profoundly affecting traditional businesses and industries by promising the end of repetitive and routine tasks and the development of more flexible, autonomous and qualified work, though contemporarily threatening the destruction of medium-skilled jobs and compromising employee privacy and data protection, due to the use of GPS, smartphones and new surveillance systems¹⁴. The traditional membership of unions is thus shrinking following a progressive labour market polarisation towards the most qualified and autonomous professionals on the one hand, and the lowest skilled and precarious workforce on the other hand. In this increasingly polarised and unstable labour market, unions and collective bargaining find themselves inadequate to ensure equity among a fragmented workforce¹⁵. The emergence of flexible firm and global value chains, driven by a new type of companies (even by platform companies such as Uber, Lyft or AirBnB) less bound to physical locations and formalised employment relations,

as dependent on «specific national labour market situation, national industrial relations institutions and the resources the unions can draw upon» (397). Overall, what emerges is that unions' efforts have not been sufficient to reduce precarious work so far. For more information, see Keune, M., "Trade unions, precarious work and dualization in Europe", in Eichhorst, W., Marx, P. (eds.), *Non-Standard Employment in Post-Industrial Labour Markets: An occupational perspective*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015, 378-400.

¹³ Heery, E., "Industrial relations and the customer", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1993, 24 (4), 284.

¹⁴ Degryse, C., *Digitalisation of the economy and its impact on labour markets*, ETUI, 2016.

¹⁵ Sateriale, G., "Ripensare la contrattazione", in *Diritto delle Relazioni Industriali*, 2017, 3, 710-728.

has been considered as a challenge to union recruitment and organisation of workers¹⁶. Finally, Ackers has highlighted the rise of neoliberalism and unions' strategic mistakes as further elements compromising union power and influence¹⁷. Collective bargaining decentralisation, reduced bargaining coordination in some European countries, increased income inequality, the rise in precarious forms of employment, decline in political influence of trade unions on policy-making have been all highlighted as the most impressive outcomes of these processes¹⁸.

1.2. Is there a future for trade unions?

Interestingly, the developments occurring in the socio-economic scenario have been considered not only as the reasons behind the current marginalisation of trade unions but also as the justifications for their potential renewal. By borrowing a Polanyi's concept, a labour-led countermovement could be about to start¹⁹. After all, it has been argued that despite a changing scenario and tough challenges, spurring disintermediation²⁰ and individualisation tendencies, the support for collective representation and the demands for trade union protection are not declining²¹. Unions are still considered as a legitimate social institution, in which both traditional supporter strongholds and vulnerable social groups place their trust²².

Coherently, several researchers have attempted to imagine the future of employee representation, in terms of new orientations, structures, agendas and practices. More specifically, it has been contended that union revitalisation will depend on both external factors, such as state policy, and internal issues, such as union strategies, policies and

¹⁶ Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., "Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 1-22.

¹⁷ Ackers, P., "Trade unions as professional associations", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 96-127.

¹⁸ See among the others, Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., "Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 59 (2): 1-22; Marginson, P., "Coordinated bargaining in Europe: From incremental corrosion to frontal assault?", in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2015, 21 (2): 97-114; Marginson, P., "The changing nature of collective employment relations", in *Employee Relations*, 2015, 37 (6): 645-657.

¹⁹ Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1944.

²⁰ For deepening the concept of unions as intermediary organisation, see Müller-Jentsch, W., "Industrial Relations Theory and Trade Union Strategy", in *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 1988, 4 (3): 177-190.

²¹ Keune, M., "Shaping the future of industrial relations in the EU: Ideas, paradoxes and drivers of change", in *International Labour Review*, 2015, 154 (1): 47-56.

²² Frangi, L., Koos, S., Hadziabdic, S., "In Unions We Trust! Analysing Confidence in Unions across Europe", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, December 2017, 55 (4): 831-858.

actions, which should be aimed not only at demonstrating legitimacy in the eyes of employers, but also at increasing unions' appeal to modern workers²³. Particularly, Dufour and Hege have contended that the crisis of trade unionism is not one of external legitimacy but rather the loss of internal legitimacy, which poses higher pressures on unions' reconstruction of relations of representation and subsequently on a transformation of union relations with other groups within a community²⁴. In this regard, Hyman speaks about a crisis of a traditional style and orientation of trade unionism, rather than a crisis of trade unionism itself: he refers to the trade union politics of a traditional skilled, male, manual, working class constituency, which though was always an abstraction, and calls for new ways of transcending divisions and new forms of internal solidarity²⁵. However, an inherent tension between external and internal legitimacy has been detected by Mundlak particularly in the so-called hybrid systems of industrial relations, where the (high) rates of collective bargaining coverage are increasingly detached from the (low) levels of trade union membership. In these contexts, exemplified by Austria, the Netherlands, Israel and Germany, a union approach focused on organising new members threatens to compromise the logic of partnership which underlies and supports unions' formal incorporation in institutions of labour market governance²⁶. Even though the Author does not deny the possibility for unions to bridge the gap between internal and external legitimacy, the difficulty to combine both dimensions sometimes underpins also the scientific debate on union renewal.

Before getting to the heart of the matter, it is important to state that according to Fairbrother, union renewal should be considered as a process of transition, that is on-going, incomplete and partial, and derives from a dialectic relation between union organisation (the way unions operate and organise at all levels), union capacities (union capabilities and resources to address and define union concerns) and union purpose (the

²³ Johnstone, S., "The case for workplace partnership", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 153-176.

²⁴ Dufour, C., Hege, A., "The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal", in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16, 351-361.

²⁵ Hyman, R., "Trade unions and the disaggregation of the working class", in Regini, M. (eds.), *The future of labour movements*, SAGE Publications, 1992, 150-168.

²⁶ Mundlak, G., "We create spots from which we shine to others: Organizing as bridging practice between distinct meanings of association", in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 2017, 38 (2): 291-317.

aims of unions as collectivities)²⁷. More precisely, «the capacities of union leaders and activists are grounded by union organisation and union purpose»²⁸. Indeed, in the face of external pressures, such as the rise of cultural work requiring union service capabilities (especially when workers are employed in vulnerable and insecure jobs), it might become necessary to redefine union organisation in relation to union capacities. Moreover, the relevance of supporting and servicing members and the leveraging of union capacities might provide opportunities for unions to refocus their purpose in relation to their main interlocutors (employers, the state), and in all its forms, nationally and internationally. Subsequently, union activism and renewal are the result of the interplay between structure (economic and political conditions) and the agency of unions themselves. Such agency might involve an articulation of union purpose, which tends to reflect union identity²⁹.

In the debate on union renewal, both Ackers and Budd have concentrated on union identity, by acknowledging that the prevailing identity of trade unions is occupational, implying a job-centric representation strategy³⁰. They have both pointed out that revitalisation of labour movement requires unions to change this traditional identity. Indeed, as argued by Dufour and Hege, the hierarchical arrangement proposed by trade unions has been increasingly challenged, as centrifugal groups (e.g. workers in small businesses, women, youngsters, precarious workers, etc.) have been subject to the influence of contending hierarchical arrangements and have started to deny the legitimacy of the proposed combination of interests and identities. This rejection is even more worrying as it comes from particularly vulnerable social groups that should be the most likely beneficiaries of trade union representation³¹. For this reason, after recognising the demands from a highly differentiated workforce, Budd calls for a deconstruction of earlier modes of cohabitation of differing interests and groups and suggests the adoption of a

²⁷ Fairbrother, P., “Rethinking trade unionism: union renewal as transition”, in *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 2015, 26 (4): 561-576.

²⁸ Fairbrother, P., “Rethinking trade unionism: union renewal as transition”, in *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 2015, 26 (4), 570.

²⁹ Hodder, A., Edwards, P., “The essence of trade unions: understanding identity, ideology and purpose”, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2015, 29 (5), 847.

³⁰ Ackers, P., “Trade unions as professional associations”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 95-126; Budd, J. W., “Labor Unions Have More Younger Members Than They Think, And Why This is Important”, in *Whither Blog*, January 15, 2017.

³¹ Dufour, C., Hege, A., “The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal”, in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16 (3): 351-361.

life-cycle representation strategy, demanding unions to assist workers throughout the job switches and the other major changes that occur over the full life cycle of workers³². This approach resembles that promoted by a former Italian trade unionist, Sandro Antoniazzi, who observes that following the fragmentation of the working class and the affirmation of more subjective identities, trade unions should adopt a human-centred representation strategy, by acknowledging the central role of the individual in today societies, strengthening her/his relationships with the other individuals and contributing to the affirmation of a social conscience (in lieu of the past class conscience), which may contrast the dominance of individual egoisms and economic interests and encourage practices of mutual solidarity to the benefit of all individuals and society³³. In spite of initial homogeneous positions on the shortcomings of the today essence of unions, Ackers comes to propose a different union strategy, which centres on professionalism as a way not to overcome, yet to cut with the grain of occupational identities and the practice of partnership, while transforming the status and nature of work for both manual and white-collar workers³⁴. Pursuant to the Author, a professional oriented strategy implies raising the status of labour from a cost to a resource, and turning passive jobs into active careers thanks to the specific focus on education and training. Moreover, the formation of professional-oriented trade unions appears pivotal to the construction of an *organic solidarity* which prevents the emergence of an atomised society of isolated individuals³⁵. In this union strategy, partnership is a central element since «professions take some responsibility not only for the quality of work but also for the success of the organization and the services it provides»³⁶. Therefore, partnership enters Ackers' discourse on trade unions as professional associations and conceived in these terms, Ackers' intuition seems to provide unions with a way to bridge the gap between internal and external legitimacy.

Like Ackers, also Rubinstein argues that unions' survival in the long run may lie in their ability to contribute to the strength of the economic systems, by engaging also in “co-

³² Budd, J. W., “Labor Unions Have More Younger Members Than They Think, And Why This is Important”, in *Whither Blog*, January 15, 2017.

³³ Antoniazzi, S., *Cambia il lavoro, cambia il sindacato: Venticinque anni dopo “lettera alla classe operaia”*, BiblioLavoro, 2011.

³⁴ Ackers, P., “Trade unions as professional associations”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 98.

³⁵ Parkin, F., *Durkheim*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

³⁶ Ackers, P., “Trade unions as professional associations”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 122.

management” practices, in ways that also promote the interests of their members³⁷. However, this union orientation, aimed at restoring the legitimacy power through cooperative relations with employers, the state and public opinion, finds itself as opposed to the organising strategy promoted, for instance, by Simms³⁸.

By focusing on the coercive power, the organising approach implies challenging managerial behaviour so as to build collectivism amongst workers. According to Simms, this union orientation is preferable to partnership at the times of financialised and disconnected capitalism³⁹, which is expected to compromise local managers’ capacity of making long-term commitments to workers and unions, as they are subject to the corporate centre and the financial issues at stakes. Therefore, internal legitimacy is the core of her argumentation and it needs to be associated with the exercise of union coercive (rather than legitimacy) power in relations with external stakeholders. However, this approach is not always in contrast with the search for some forms of external solidarity. Indeed, dealing with these topics and notably with the impact of global value chains on work and workers’ representation, Greco suggests unions to adopt scalar strategies implying, for instance, the mobilisation of international labour organisations in response to local managers’ unfair practices and “satellite collective bargaining” over fair working conditions with both the national company and foreign suppliers. Moreover, Greco copes with the theme of union alliances, by identifying two main useful practices: first, developing global union networks and signing international collective agreements with MNEs; second, establishing relationships with other social movements and NGOs, especially after acknowledging the need to represent workers outside their workplaces, primarily as people, citizens, consumers, etc.⁴⁰ In so doing, Greco highlights the relevance

³⁷ Rubinstein, S. A., “Unions as Value-Adding Networks: Possibilities for the Future of US Unionism”, in *Journal of Labor Research*, 2001, XXII (3): 581-598.

³⁸ Simms, M., “Union organizing as an alternative to partnership. Or what to do when employers can’t keep their side of the bargain”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 127-152.

³⁹ Thompson, P., “Disconnected capitalism: or why employers can’t keep their side of the bargain”, in *Work, employment and society*, 2003, 17 (2): 359-378.

⁴⁰ Greco, L., “Produzione globale, lavoro e strategia sindacale: alcune riflessioni a partire dalla teoria delle catene globali di valore”, in *Sociologia del Lavoro*, 2011, 123, 49-81.

of external solidarity, conceived as the embeddedness of unions within their localities and as part of national and global unions⁴¹.

Curiously, this conceptualisation seems to be in line with both Budd's above-mentioned argument on union life-cycle representation strategies and Safford' and Locke's conclusion. Notably, after conducting an analysis of two matched pair case studies, focused respectively on Pipetrades unions in Boston and Portland, and Carpenters unions in the same cities, the Authors claim that union revitalisation lies in unions' ability to (re-)embed themselves in their respective social, political and economic contexts, by establishing a dense network of local ties, which not only provide them with strategic information and potential allies, but also allow them to become more open and responsive organisations. If they fail to do so, they are likely to stagnate⁴². Consistently with these views, Lizzola and Brena invite trade unions to deal with increasing individualism and discontinuity in career paths and engage in the transitions and the major changes that affect people's private and working life, by enhancing participation, cooperation, and mutual solidarity⁴³. This process requires unions to abandon their traditional roles and organisational places, in order to move closer to people and their experiences. Hyman seems to agree with these considerations by arguing that «future effectiveness will require that unions act both as vehicles for the defence and advance of narrow interests and as cultivators of more general interests»⁴⁴, since «all workers have collective interests in the processes of production in which they are engaged (...) as well as individual interests in the immediate wage-work bargain and in their future employability»⁴⁵; «they are all members of society with collective interests as citizens as well as more personalized life-style concerns»⁴⁶. By moving the focus to the increasing enthusiasm for “customer care” in the economy, Heery shows some unions practices, which already imply a broader strategy particularly directed to the protection of the interests of both workers and

⁴¹ Fairbrother, P., “Rethinking trade unionism: union renewal as transition”, in *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 2015, 26 (4), 570.

⁴² Safford, S. C., Locke, R. M., “Unions on the Rebound: Social Embeddedness and the Transformation of Building Trades Locals”, in *MIT Sloan Working Paper*, September 2001, No. 4175-01.

⁴³ Lizzola, I., Brena, S., “Organizzarsi in cammino, una inedita sfida”, in *L'opinione*, 2015, 2, 24-45.

⁴⁴ Hyman, R., “The future of employee representation”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3), 326.

⁴⁵ Hyman, R., “The future of employee representation”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3), 325.

⁴⁶ Hyman, R., “The future of employee representation”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3), 325.

customers⁴⁷. According to the Author, the need to establish a coalition with customers, now at the centre of firms' industrial plans, may explain those management-union negotiations on training, employee involvement and work organisation.

Interestingly, Hyman specifies that this encompassing union identity has implications in terms of organisational structure. Notably, by quoting Fairbrother, Hyman argues that the centralised union organisation should have a role in representing and symbolising collective interests across and within the new decentralised forms of organisation; «the national level resources and facilitates»⁴⁸, he clarifies. Moreover, modern communication and information technologies are expected to help unions transform into more “discursive” forms of organisation. Coherently, Lizzola and Brena affirm that labour organisations should take time to listen to and talk with union representatives at all levels, take care of their concerns, give value to their commitment, and invest in the development of their skills and competences⁴⁹. As far as representative spaces are concerned, Baglioni underlines that union agenda should concentrate on the industry, territory and company levels, where pursuing workers' functional interests along the whole value chain and promoting mutual responsibility and partnership between workers and managers, rather than focusing on the political and institutional level, which is likely to induce unions to neglect their traditional functions (i.e. ensuring distributive justice, producing norms for the employer-employee relationships, balancing workers' rights with firms' demands for flexibility, tackling job insecurity)⁵⁰. A valuable attempt to reconfigure the role of unions at all levels of interest intermediation is that made by Müller-Jentsch, who suggests that today structural change and socio-technical reorganisation of production process drive unions into plant level cooperation and force them to take over a co-managing role. However, unions' possibility of exerting this role and not being vulnerable to management's behaviour and strategies, is highly dependent on their institutionalised functions on the meso or macro level. Plus, being cooperative at company level does not

⁴⁷ Heery, E., “Industrial relations and the customer”, in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1993, 24 (4): 284-295.

⁴⁸ Fairbrother, P., “Workplace trade unionism in the state sector”, in Hyman, R., “The future of employee representation”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3), 325.

⁴⁹ Lizzola, I., Brena, S., “Organizzarsi in cammino, una inedita sfida”, in *L'opinione*, 2015, 2, 24-45.

⁵⁰ Baglioni, G., “Problemi e strategie dei sindacati oggi”, in *Stato e mercato*, 2004, 1, 59-84.

seem to exclude, in the Author's argumentation, militant/organising actions at the sectoral and national level⁵¹.

Overall, what emerges from literature is the consideration that union revitalisation necessarily requires a broadening of union identity, encompassing the protection of workers not merely as producers and consumers, but also as citizens and people. In other words, «there are opportunities for policies which appeal to new working-class constituencies (or often, old sections whose interests have hitherto been neglected); for initiatives which address members' interests outside the workplace, and thus provide a fertile basis for transcending particularistic employment identities; and for programmes which link workers' interests as producers and consumers (as, for example, in demands for the improvement of public health care) so as to enable the construction of new types of encompassing and solidaristic alliances»⁵². Interestingly, moreover, since much of the confidence is granted to unions by vulnerable social groups (which are not likely to become members either because their precarious employment conditions make their affiliation difficult or because they do not belong to the labour force), unions are suggested to address not only non-organised and vulnerable employees, but also vulnerable individuals outside of the labour market⁵³.

Within this interesting and rich debate, the empirical study of Ibsen and Tapia shows three trends falling in between the pluralist and radical views⁵⁴. First, unions across many countries (even in coordinated market economies, such as Germany and the Nordic countries) are converging onto common revitalisation strategies. Notably, they tend to adopt the organising model to reach new constituencies, while retaining the partnership approach (via collective bargaining and involvement in policy-making) to defend their traditional constituency. It is also worth mentioning that scholars have emphasised the importance for unions to consider these new constituencies not just in terms of mere added membership numbers, but also as possible catalysts of internal cultural change.

⁵¹ Müller-Jentsch, W., "Industrial Relations Theory and Trade Union Strategy", in *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 1988, 4 (3): 177-190.

⁵² Hyman, R., "Trade unions and the disaggregation of the working class", in Regini, M. (eds.), *The future of labour movements*, SAGE Publications, 1992, 164.

⁵³ Frangi, L., Koos, S., Hadziabdic, S., "In Unions We Trust! Analysing Confidence in Unions across Europe", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, December 2017, 55 (4): 831-858.

⁵⁴ Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., "Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 59 (2): 1-22.

Second, it sounds increasingly unclear the objective of union organising. It has been argued that union organising is related to various tactics, that are used differently by different unions depending on the particular situation, rather than a broader strategic and political vision for union change. Third, unions have demonstrated that they can reinvent their “repertoires of contention”, namely through political action and external coalitions, which are becoming part of a long-term union agenda. However, «while we are seeing some convergence in organising strategies, the jury is still out on whether mobilisation or partnership is the more effective – partly due to the fact that scholars disagree about what revitalisation is really for»⁵⁵. Finally, it could be contended that a crucial issue for unions is to find a balance «between protecting the traditional, core constituencies of the labour market (and their institutions) and extending representation to new constituencies, that do not necessarily have the same interest and occupational identities»⁵⁶.

After all, the future of trade unionism seems to be all a matter of striking balances between apparently conflicting interests (between vulnerable and non-vulnerable groups, between core and periphery, between leadership and membership, between old and new constituencies, between individual and collective interests, etc.) and bridging gaps between different sources of union power and recognition (between organising and partnership, between legitimacy and coercive power, between external and internal recognition, etc.), thus strengthening internal solidarity without compromising their institutionalised role. Representing workers while disciplining them is a very delicate role, presuming extraordinary conditions, which need to be affirmed and reaffirmed whenever changes occur. Union embeddedness in social, political and economic networks is thus conceived as a crucial asset for unions to readily respond and adapt to new challenges.

1.3. Trade unions faced with the challenge of new forms of worker voice

Within the context of this interesting debate on the future of representative employee voice, a new trend has simultaneously emerged and arisen the interest of researchers since the 1980s: the spread of new forms of employee voice. The reference is generally to

⁵⁵ Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., “Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?”, in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 59 (2), 15.

⁵⁶ Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., “Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?”, in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 59 (2), 16.

profit-sharing, teamwork, HRM (Human Resource Management), total quality management, HPWS (High Performance Work Systems), etc. The rationale behind the adoption of these practices is usually linked to the *business case* argument, deriving from the assumption that employee voice is an essential link in the quest for increased organisational performance⁵⁷. For this reason, other scholars have spoken about “functional participation”, emphasising its economic and productive purposes⁵⁸.

The affirmation of this principle goes hand in hand with the transition towards a so-called *knowledge economy*, whose efficiency levels rely more heavily on workers’ skills and abilities rather than on rigid and routine organisational structures. In this sense, the expression of *cognitive participation* sounds appropriate⁵⁹. After the Taylorist management theory exacerbated the separation between planning and execution, workers’ participation in organisational innovation has thus turned into a crucial challenge of current “post-Fordist” times⁶⁰. In other words, far from being exclusively considered as a building block of *industrial democracy*⁶¹, promoted by socio-political institutions via trade unions, employee voice has more recently become an essential vehicle for increased organisational performance, encouraged by management via practices such as quality circles, teamwork and HRM. All these practices, performed by enterprises since the 1980s, can be considered as a direct form of employee voice, which is expressed in the direct relationship between workers and managers at the shop floor. The introduction of such direct employee participation schemes has been interpreted, especially by US observers, as a concrete challenge to unionisation⁶² and especially by European experts, as a breakthrough towards more individualised relationships between management and workers, deprived of any mediation by trade union representation⁶³. Interestingly, pursuant to a recent study on Anglo-American countries, the rise of so-called “never-

⁵⁷ Johnston, S., Ackers, P., “Introduction: Employee voice”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 8.

⁵⁸ Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., “Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122.

⁵⁹ Tronti, L., “Economia della conoscenza, innovazione organizzativa e partecipazione cognitiva: un nuovo modo di lavorare”, in *Economia & lavoro*, 2015, 3, 7-20.

⁶⁰ Nadel, H., “Relazioni industriali e rendimento economico: lo stato della ricerca”, in *Working Paper ADAPT*, 2008, 60.

⁶¹ Webb, S., Webb, B. P., *Industrial Democracy*, London: Longmans, 1897.

⁶² Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

⁶³ Caruso, B., *La rappresentanza delle organizzazioni di interessi tra disintermediazione e re-intermediazione*, working paper CSDLE “Massimo D’Antona”.IT, 2017, 326, 1-26.

membership” (new segments of workers that have never joined a union) and alternative forms of voice in newly set-up firms can largely explain the decline in union density over the past decades⁶⁴. Plus, it should not be overlooked that the relevance of employees’ participation has been stressed also in socio-technical literature by authors arguing that far from entailing a specific organisational outcome, technologies can engender different organisational results, and that, in order to optimise them, the design phase of new technologies, with the direct participation of all users involved (including workers), comes to be of crucial importance⁶⁵. Moreover, given the presumed relevance of empowerment, flat hierarchies, horizontal communication and cooperative team work in *Industry 4.0* work environments⁶⁶, this trend is expected to affect also the next decades of industrial development.

As regards the relationship with unions, literature tends to consider these new forms of employee voice as either a substitute for indirect employee voice, organised by unions⁶⁷, or a complementary agent of workers’ representatives⁶⁸ in guaranteeing a balance between efficiency and equity at workplaces⁶⁹.

On the one hand, since modern employers recognise the value of “good” people management and employees have access to an array of alternative voice mechanisms, one

⁶⁴ Bryson, A., Freeman, R., Gomez, R., Willman, P., “The Twin-Track Model of Employee Voice: An Anglo-American Perspective on Union Decline and the Rise of Alternative Forms of Voice”, in *IZA Discussion Paper*, December 2017, 11223.

⁶⁵ Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., “Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122.

⁶⁶ Shamim, S., Cang, S., Yu, H., “Management approaches for Industry 4.0: A human resource management perspective”, paper presented at the IEEE Congress on Evolutionary Computation, Vancouver, July 2016, available at: <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/7748365/> (accessed 15 November 2017).

⁶⁷ See, among others, Leana, C. R., Ahlbrandt, R. S., Murrell, A. J., “The effects of employee involvement programs on unionized workers’ attitudes, perceptions, and preferences in decision making”, in *Academy of Management Journal*, 1992, 35 (4): 861-873; Reshef, Y., Kizilos, M., Ledford, G. E., Cohen, S. G., “Employee Involvement Programs: Should Unions Get Involved?”, in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1999, XX (4): 557-569; Kaufman, B. E., Levine, D., “An Economic Analysis of Employee Representation”, in Kaufman, B. E., Taras, D. G. (eds.), *Nonunion Employee Representation: History, Contemporary Practice, and Policy*, M. E. Sharpe, 2000, 149-175; Bryson, A., “Managerial responsiveness to union and non-union worker voice in Britain”, in *Industrial Relations*, 2004, 43 (1): 213-241.

⁶⁸ See, among others, Gill, C., “Union impact on the effective adoption of High Performance Work Practices”, in *Human Resource Management Review*, 2009, 19 (1): 39-50; Bryson, A., Barth, E., Dale-Olsen, H., “The effects of organizational change on worker well-being and the moderating role of trade unions”, in *ILR Review*, 2013, 66 (4): 989-1011; Pohler, D. M., Luchak, A. A., “Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice: The impact of unions and high-involvement work practices on work outcomes”, in *ILR Review*, 2014, 67 (4): 1063-1094.

⁶⁹ Barbash J., Barbash K. (eds.), *Theories and concepts in comparative industrial relations*, University of South Carolina Press, 1989; Budd, J. W., *Employment with a human face: balancing efficiency, equity and voice*, NY: ILR Press, 2004.

can reasonably contend that trade unions are now superfluous and that the decline in their power is not a problem for employment relations and worker voice⁷⁰. In other words, it has been claimed, especially by unitarist advocates, that effective HRM centred on practices of mutual gains (e.g. investments in employee training, above-market wages and benefits) and forms of internal communication and problem-solving between managers and their employees, is likely to make labour unions and government-mandated labour standards unnecessary to workers⁷¹. Moreover, empirical findings, mostly concentrated on Anglo-American workplaces, have emphasised the risk that: workers participating in employee involvement programmes come to support such practices as preferred decision-making structures at the expense of collective bargaining⁷²; workers' interest in union involvement in these programmes decreases as they are perceived as durable⁷³; and non-union voice is as effective as union voice in protecting employees' interests⁷⁴ or even more effective in eliciting managerial responsiveness⁷⁵. A certain trade-off between direct and representative employee voice with specific reference to organisational performance is proved by Kim and co-authors, highlighting that the positive impact of each type of voice is stronger at low levels of the other type of voice⁷⁶.

On the other hand, it has been argued that labour is not simply a commodity (it is a "fictitious commodity", as Polanyi would assert⁷⁷) and that the employment relationship is not limited to an economic exchange. Conversely, it implies social, psychological, legal and political dimensions and it underlies a concrete imbalance of power between workers and employers. According to this pluralist perspective, representative participation is

⁷⁰ Johnstone, S., "The case for workplace partnership", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 153-176.

⁷¹ Budd, J. W., Bhawe, D. P., "Values, Ideologies, and Frames of Reference in Industrial Relations", in Blyton, P., Bacon, N., Fiorito, J., Heery, E. (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*, SAGE Publications, London, 2008, 92-112.

⁷² Leana, C. R., Ahlbrandt, R. S., Murrell, A. J., "The effects of employee involvement programs on unionized workers' attitudes, perceptions, and preferences in decision making", in *Academy of Management Journal*, 1992, 35 (4): 861-873.

⁷³ Reshef, Y., Kizilos, M., Ledford, G. E., Cohen, S. G., "Employee Involvement Programs: Should Unions Get Involved?", in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1999, XX (4): 557-569.

⁷⁴ Kaufman, B. E., Levine, D., "An Economic Analysis of Employee Representation", in Kaufman, B. E., Taras, D. G. (eds.), *Nonunion Employee Representation: History, Contemporary Practice, and Policy*, M. E. Sharpe, 2000, 149-175.

⁷⁵ Bryson, A., "Managerial responsiveness to union and non-union worker voice in Britain", in *Industrial Relations*, 2004, 43 (1): 213-241.

⁷⁶ Kim, J., MacDuffie, J. P., Pil, F. K., "Employee voice and organizational performance: Team versus representative influence", in *Human Relations*, 2010, 63 (3): 371-394.

⁷⁷ Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1944

necessary to redress this imbalance, by ensuring that employers benefit from the efficiency gains of a more highly engaged workforce, while distributing the rewards with workers as fairly as possible⁷⁸. This argument clearly interlaces the quite recent body of research investigating the role of industrial relations and its actors in the dynamics of organisational innovation in traditional businesses. Within this strand of literature, work environment has been depicted as the essential place where establishing an effective participation between managers, workers and their representatives, founded on principles of mutual trust and loyalty and regarded as essential in a view of enhancing productivity, via knowledge creation⁷⁹. Moreover, a combination of representative and direct employee voice seems relevant not simply because employee involvement programmes are found to be ineffective as substitutes for union representation and collective bargaining, albeit their potential to provide workers with greater access to information⁸⁰, but also because indirect, union-led employee voice may increase employee trust and commitment⁸¹, prevent negative drawbacks on the side of workers⁸² and contribute to achieving substantive empowerment, thus overcoming the current impediments to effective employee involvement⁸³. Indeed, it has been contended that even in contexts where high performance work practices are carried out, there still exist a managerial attitude scantily oriented to the effective involvement of workers⁸⁴ and an unequal distribution of power

⁷⁸ Johnstone, S., “The case for workplace partnership”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 153-176; Pohler, D. M., Luchak, A. A., “Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice: The impact of unions and high-involvement work practices on work outcomes”, in *ILR Review*, 2014, 67 (4): 1063-1094.

⁷⁹ See, among others, Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., “Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122; Della Rocca, G., “L’innovazione tecnologica e le relazioni industriali in Italia”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1985, 5, 1-186; Nadel, H., “Relazioni industriali e rendimento economico: lo stato della ricerca”, in *Working Paper ADAPT*, 2008, 60.

⁸⁰ Gollan, P. J., *Non-union employee representation in the United Kingdom: Management strategies and union responses*, thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the PhD London School of Economics and Political Science, 2014, available at: <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/1967/1/U231048.pdf> (accessed 15 November 2017).

⁸¹ Gill, C., “Union impact on the effective adoption of High Performance Work Practices”, in *Human Resource Management Review*, 2009, 19 (1): 39-50.

⁸² Pohler, D. M., Luchak, A. A., “Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice: The impact of unions and high-involvement work practices on work outcomes”, in *ILR Review*, 2014, 67 (4): 1063-1094.

⁸³ Vidal, M., “Manufacturing empowerment? “Employee involvement” in the labour process after Fordism”, in *Socio-Economic Review*, 2007, 5 (2): 197-232.

⁸⁴ Leoni, R., Cristini, A., “Nuove forme di organizzazione del lavoro e pratiche di coinvolgimento: verso quali relazioni industriali incamminarsi?”, in *Quaderni di rassegna sindacale. Lavori*, 2005, VI (2): 143-194.

preventing employees from having a say over work-related issues⁸⁵. In other words, «although nobody is denying that anything has changed there is no real evidence of a *paradigmatic* break with the capitalist logic of “Fordist” or “Taylorist” work techniques»⁸⁶. This paradigm shift has though been foreseen within an *Industry 4.0* scenario⁸⁷.

Within this framework of complex and sometimes contradictory research findings, the only certainty appears to be the management-led nature of direct employee participation practices. Overall, and with the sole exception of some Scandinavian experiences⁸⁸, when dealing with such challenges, unions are found to hold different attitudes, which generally appear as either interventionist/cooperative⁸⁹, pragmatic⁹⁰, apathetic⁹¹ or obstructionist/confrontational⁹², though often implying a “cautious scepticism”, deriving from the fear that employee participation schemes do not represent a completely separate domain from union-based collective bargaining, and that they can jeopardise trade union

⁸⁵ Heller, F., “Participation and Power: A Critical Assessment”, in *Applied Psychology*, 2003, 52 (1): 144-163.

⁸⁶ Danford, A., “Workers, unions and the high performance workplace”, in *Work, employment and society*, 2003, 17 (3), 573.

⁸⁷ Seghezzi, F., *La nuova grande trasformazione: Lavoro e persona nella quarta rivoluzione industriale*, ADAPT University Press, 2017.

⁸⁸ It has been reported that since mid-1960s, Scandinavian trade unions have been able to acknowledge the trend towards organisational and technological innovation and, after outlining their own strategies for development, engaged in processes of “negotiated participation” in workplaces. See, Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., “Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122; Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., “If you can’t beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production”, in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3): 445-460; Schneider, L., “La partecipazione al cambiamento tecnologico. Stati Uniti ed Europa a confronto”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1986, 11, 1-84.

⁸⁹ See, Ortiz, L., *Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain*, in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57; Frost, A. C., *Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America*, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564; Ahlstrand, R., Sederblad, P., *Teams, continuous improvement, the unions and conditional trust in the company Scania*, paper presented at the 16th International Workshop on Team working, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, September, 2012, available at: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/15296> (accessed 18 June 2018).

⁹⁰ See, Frost, A. C., “Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564; Regini, M. *Uncertain Boundaries: The social and political construction of European economies*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

⁹¹ Frost, A. C., “Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564.

⁹² See, Frost, A. C., “Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564; Pulignano, V., Stewart, P., “Firm-level restructuring and union strategies in Europe: local union responses in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands”, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2013, 27 (5): 842-859.

density and power⁹³. The likelihood that unions show an attitude or the other, turns out to be dependent upon a series of factors, such as historical workplace relationships⁹⁴, firm economic conditions⁹⁵, institutional support to collective voice⁹⁶, union power resources⁹⁷, union perception of workplace change⁹⁸, union identity and values⁹⁹, and so on.

1.4. Research questions

Stemming from these considerations, the research project is intended to investigate an almost neglected research topic: the role of unions as promoters, rather than victims or antagonists, of non-union (and often direct) employee voice within traditional businesses. Far from being a matter of past decades, employee participation and its interplay with trade union representation is expected to become increasingly important given the

⁹³ Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., Mower, N. R., *Worker Participation and American Unions: Threat or Opportunity?*, M.I.: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1984.

⁹⁴ Kriesky, J., Brown, E. L., *Implementing Employee Involvement: How Paper Companies Gain Local Union Support*, in *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 1992, 5 (2): 117-130; Pulignano, V., Stewart, P., "Firm-level restructuring and union strategies in Europe: local union responses in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands", in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2013, 27 (5): 842-859.

⁹⁵ Garaudel, P., Noël, F., Schmidt, G., "Overcoming the risks of restructuring through the integrative bargaining process: Two case studies in a French context", in *Human Relations*, 2008, 61 (9): 1293-1331; Pulignano, V., Stewart, P., "Firm-level restructuring and union strategies in Europe: local union responses in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands", in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2013, 27 (5): 842-859.

⁹⁶ Ortiz, L., *Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain*, in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57; Doellgast, V., *Collective voice under decentralized bargaining: a comparative study of work reorganization in US and German call centres*, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2010, 48 (2): 375-399.

⁹⁷ Lévesque, C., Murray, G., "Union involvement in workplace change: a comparative study of local unions in Canada and Mexico", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 43 (3): 489-514; Grenier, J. N., "Local unions and the restructuring of work within the multinational company: internal solidarity and local context", in *Labor Studies Journal*, 2006, 31 (3): 65-84.

⁹⁸ Ahlstrand, R., Sederblad, P., "Teams, continuous improvement, the unions and conditional trust in the company Scania", Paper to the 16th International Workshop on Team working, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, September 6-7, 2012, available at: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/15296> (accessed 18 June 2018); Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., "If you can't beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3): 445-460.

⁹⁹ Ortiz, L., *Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain*, in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57.; Frost, A. C., "Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564; Regini, M. *Uncertain Boundaries: The social and political construction of European economies*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

challenges that the perspective of *Industry 4.0* is issuing in terms of socio-technical reorganisation of production¹⁰⁰.

I have elsewhere defined the union proactive attitude towards non-union employee voice with the expression of *organised disintermediation*, whereby *disintermediation* hints at the increasing adoption of those forms of work organisation that imply more individualised labour-management relationships (e.g. teamwork, suggestion schemes, continuous improvement groups, quality circles, individual consultation, etc.)¹⁰¹, and *organised* refers to the proactive role of unions in the promotion, regulation and implementation of such direct forms of employee voice¹⁰².

I have argued that the theoretical foundations of this approach may lie in Thelen and co-authors' arguments on institutional incremental change and in a solid *democracy at work* rationale. Indeed, despite a literature generally bringing out a reactive and if anything, cooperative union approach in the design of management-led workplace changes, Thelen and co-authors' contributions to historical institutionalism suggest that different, transformative outcomes must not be excluded, since also periods of apparent institutional stability may be characterised by a gradual, incremental change¹⁰³, that as such - I have contended - is unlikely to stop where empirical research currently is. This perspective seems to be in line also with Fairbrother's conceptualisation of union renewal as an ongoing, incomplete and transitional learning process, characterised by a dialectic

¹⁰⁰ Butera, F., "Industria 4.0 come progettazione partecipata di sistemi socio-tecnici in rete", in Cipriani, A., Gramolati, A., Mari, G. (eds.), *Il lavoro 4.0: la quarta rivoluzione industriale e le trasformazioni delle attività lavorative*, Firenze University Press, 2018, 81-116.

¹⁰¹ Again, for a definition of trade unions as intermediary organisations, see Müller-Jentsch, W., "Industrial Relations Theory and Trade Union Strategy", in *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 1988, 4 (3): 177-190. Unions can be intended as: i) organisations which mediate between state and society on the one hand, and the individual on the other hand; ii) as organisations which mediate between the interests of different and (partly) adversarial interest groups e.g. capital and labour; iii) as organisations which mediate between different levels of interest representation: macro, meso (e.g. industry level) and micro-level. In this research, disintermediation takes place at the micro-level (i.e. workplace level) when relationships between management and employees are not mediated by unions, yet more direct and immediate via employer-sponsored participation and employee involvement.

¹⁰² Armaroli, I., "In the midst of union (incremental) change in workplaces. Towards *organised disintermediation*?", *Forthcoming*.

¹⁰³ Mahoney, J., Thelen, K., "A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change", in J. Mahoney, K. Thelen (eds.), *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 1-10; Streeck, W., Thelen, K., "Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies", in Streeck, W., Thelen, K. (eds.), *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, 1-39.

relationship between union organisation, union capacities and union purpose¹⁰⁴. Subsequently, though not denying the potential of current environmental pressures (especially those emphasising workers' knowledge via HRM or work organisation measures and direct employee participation practices) to threaten the traditional image of unions as the most effective public policy answer to the need of worker voice, I have contended that some endogenous/subjective union features (especially those related to union cultural/cognitive frames), though shaped and mediated by some structural constraints (such as power resources, legal support for collective voice), could positively interact with external challenges and encourage unions to progressively engage in the promotion, regulation and implementation of new work organisation measures, which often imply greater employee participation.

Particularly, it is the need to continue to fulfil their original duties and even better achieve their traditional goals (i.e. consenting workers to express their concerns and opinions, countering a static notion of managerial prerogatives, raising workers' status within society)¹⁰⁵ in a very changed scenario, that could provide a leverage for unions to engage in *organised disintermediation*.

A parallel with the Traxler's concept of *organised decentralisation*¹⁰⁶ is intuitive. As in the wake of decentralisation and subsequent arguments for the erosion of standard-setting capacity of sectoral agreements, national-level bargaining agents have been able to adopt "rules of coordination", at the times of increasing *workplace disintermediation* and serious concerns about collective voice marginalisation, unions are expected to take on the control over direct employee participation, thus ensuring better quality of these practices and preventing negative consequences on the side of workers. This is not simply arguing, as it has already been done, that the coexistence of direct and indirect channels of employee voice at workplace level may be possible and positively influence firm

¹⁰⁴ Fairbrother, P., "Rethinking trade unionism: union renewal as transition", in *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 2015, 26 (4): 561-576.

¹⁰⁵ See, among others, Flanders, A. D., *Industrial Relations: What is wrong with the system? An Essay on Its Theory and Future*, Faber & Faber, 1965; Freeman, R. B., Medoff, J. L., *What Do Unions Do?*, Basic Books, 1984; Hyman, H., "The future of employee representation", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3): 309-336.

¹⁰⁶ Traxler, F., "Farewell to labour market associations? Organized versus disorganized decentralization as a map for industrial relations", in Crouch, C., Traxler, F. (eds.), *Organized industrial relations in Europe: What future?*, Aldershot, Avebury, 1995, 3-19.

performance¹⁰⁷. This is about suggesting unions to stop waiting for managerial action to bargain over the distribution of profits or the mitigation of drawbacks, and to start demanding a role in the management of work reorganisation processes, thus restoring that human, social and emancipatory value of employee participation which goes beyond its economic rationale. Another parallel can be made with Thelen's popular argumentation against the traditional wisdom about a dichotomy between liberalisation (generally linked to inequality) and coordination (generally favouring equality) in market economies¹⁰⁸. Particularly, as the pattern of *embedded flexibilisation*, envisaged by Thelen and discerned in Scandinavian countries, entails that liberalising reforms can be embedded in institutions and policies that protect most vulnerable groups, thus ensuring the coexistence of liberalisation and equality, in my view, the trend towards *organised disintermediation* implies that economic instances for increased workers' knowledge and direct participation can be embedded in union discourses and actions that protect workers' needs, thus countering the idea that efficiency pursued via direct employee voice is incompatible with both collective representation and equity. The reference to embeddedness clearly recalls Polanyi's argument and the union approach of *organised disintermediation* may end up confirming Polanyi's belief that the existence of three "fictitious commodities" (i.e. land, labour and money) explains the impossibility of disembedding economy from society: any attempt to do so would inevitably encounter resistance by all groups in society which participate in it¹⁰⁹. In the case of *organised disintermediation*, it is a labour countermovement which is expected to embed the new *knowledge economy* within the framework of collective representation and industrial relations, thus restoring the balance to the system.

In practical terms, *organised disintermediation* may require unions to momentarily leave aside the *class*-focused part of their tripartite identity¹¹⁰, together with their culture of

¹⁰⁷ See, among others, Bryson, A., Forth, J., Kirby, S., "High-involvement management practices, trade union representation and workplace performance in Britain", in *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 2005, 52 (3): 451-491.

¹⁰⁸ Thelen, K., *Varieties of liberalization and the new politics of social solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1944.

¹¹⁰ Hyman, R., *Understanding European trade unionism between market, class and society*, SAGE Publications, 2001.

defensiveness and insecurity¹¹¹ towards employer hostility and rivalry, and concentrate on their *market* and *society* orientations, that can allow them to engage in workplace-level industrial relations and collective bargaining in a view of challenging a static notion of managerial prerogatives and make *workplace disintermediation* a coordinated, *integrative* and win-win labour-management process¹¹², directed to the increase of company innovation as well as to the maximisation of workers' wellbeing¹¹³. On the one hand, unions are supposed to disclose their relevant, though controversial, economic value-adding role¹¹⁴, by taking new responsibilities in the promotion, regulation and management of new work organisation practices, thus cushioning their adversarial approach and engaging in a more cooperative interaction with management for the delivery of mutual gains¹¹⁵. After all, a constructive union approach to industrial relations is more recommended than ever at a time when the next industrial revolution is yet to come and can still be shaped. Plus, a partnership model is regarded as coherent with developmental issues like technological and organisational innovation, as they tend to be aspirational, featuring built-in opportunities for consensus and requiring constant monitoring¹¹⁶. On the other hand, unions cannot establish integrative bargaining unless they consider their intra-organisational relationships and build consensus among the rank-and-file¹¹⁷. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that new agendas too distant from core concerns are unlikely to achieve renewal¹¹⁸. Therefore, it must be noted that *organised disintermediation* is depicted as an unforeseen chance for unions to be themselves, thus adhering to their duties and pursuing their traditional goals: fulfilling the functions inherent to their "collective voice/institutional response face", which consents workers to express their concerns and organise collectively for the improvement of their

¹¹¹ Craft, J. A., "Unions, Bureaucracy, and Change: Old Dogs Learn New Tricks Very Slowly", in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1991, XII (4): 393-405.

¹¹² Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, McGraw-Hill, 1965.

¹¹³ Dunlop, J., *Wage Determination Under Trade Unions*, Macmillan, 1944.

¹¹⁴ Rubinstein, S. A., *Unions as Value-Adding Networks: Possibilities for the Future of US Unionism*, in *Journal of Labor Research*, 2001, XXII (3): 581-598.

¹¹⁵ Kochan, T. A., Osterman, P., *The Mutual Gains Enterprise: Forging a Winning Partnership Among Labor, Management and Government*, Harvard Business Review Press, 1994.

¹¹⁶ Farnhill, T., "Union renewal and Workplace Greening – Three Case Studies", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 00 (0): 1-28.

¹¹⁷ Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., "The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining", in *Monthly Labor Review*, 1977, 100 (4): 52-55.

¹¹⁸ Dufour, C., Hege, A., "The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal", in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16(3): 351-361.

conditions¹¹⁹, hence actualising the concept of *industrial democracy*, focused on contrasting the asymmetric nature of the employment relationship¹²⁰; contributing to the regulation of the so-called “managerial relations”, related to mechanisms for promotion and career advancement, training opportunities, the determination of workloads and work organisation, and so on¹²¹; improving workers’ personal and social existence¹²², promoting workers’ dignity as human beings¹²³, giving value to the work of people and devising a new identity of workers within society, by empowering them to have a say and affect their work environment.

Overall, *organised disintermediation* is presented as a valuable option for unions, as it allows them to continue their history of change by expanding their identity in the pursuit of more comprehensive economic and societal goals¹²⁴, while temporarily adhering to their original responsibilities, and restoring that human, social and emancipatory value of employee participation, which goes beyond its economic rationale. Therefore, by endorsing the perception that beneficial outcomes are unlikely to be achieved solely through unilateral employer action and management *goodwill*¹²⁵ yet that they need an industrial relations system, founded on trade union representation and collective bargaining providing an effective counterweight to employer power, *organised disintermediation* perfectly fits with a pluralist interpretation of industrial relations, formerly outlined by the “Oxford school”¹²⁶. Accordingly, if industrial relations are not

¹¹⁹ Freeman, R. B., Medoff, J. L., *What Do Unions Do?*, Basic Books, 1984.

¹²⁰ Webb, S., Webb, B., *Industrial Democracy*, Longmans, London, 1897.

¹²¹ Hyman, R., *The future of employee representation*, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3): 309-336.

¹²² Hyman, R., *The future of employee representation*, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3): 309-336; Hyman, R., *Understanding European trade unionism between market, class and society*, SAGE Publications, 2001.

¹²³ Flanders, A. D., *Industrial Relations: What is wrong with the system? An Essay on Its Theory and Future*, Faber & Faber, 1965.

¹²⁴ Indeed, it can be argued that the history of unions is a history of change, triggered and forged by changes in the economic system. The transition from free market conditions, prevailing throughout the XIX century, to mixed-economy societies in the aftermath of World War II led many European unions, whether professional or industry associations, to expand their originally narrow goal of struggling for the interests of their constituency, up to incorporate and represent the general interests of societies (i.e. economic recovery and full employment at that time). From opposition movements at the dawn of capitalism to institutions in the labour market, whose autonomous action in the form of collective bargaining is acknowledged by political authorities as beneficial to economic and social development. See, Romani, M. (eds.), *Appunti sull'evoluzione del sindacato*, Edizioni Lavoro, 1981.

¹²⁵ Commons, J. R., *Industrial Goodwill*, McGraw-Hill, 1919.

¹²⁶ Fox, A., *Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations: An assessment of the contribution which industrial sociology can make towards understanding and resolving some of the problems now being considered by the royal commission*, London Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1966; Flanders, A. D.,

to overthrow capitalism, yet to find an equilibrium between *efficiency* (i.e. economic objectives of companies), *equity* (i.e. fair and just treatment of workers) and *voice* (i.e. employees' involvement in shaping the work environment) within the capitalist society¹²⁷, it sounds pretty reasonable to affirm that *organised disintermediation* may be oriented to find a new balance given a changed context. A new context where the managerial interest in employee voice makes the restoration of its human and social dimension more important than ever. After all, employee voice is «an intrinsic standard of participation - participation in decision-making is an end in itself for rational human beings in a democratic society ... intrinsic voice is important whether or not it improves economic performance and whether or not it improves the distribution of economic rewards»¹²⁸. Moreover, by stressing the “positive outward democratic spillover” from workplace to the political and social arena, that is the positive link between employee voice in the workplace and political participation in civil society¹²⁹, a union behaviour that promotes employee voice, participation and autonomy in workplaces, such as that of *organised disintermediation*, is supposed to give credit also to the more recent neopluralist perspective, whose scope of analysis encompasses also those relations originating outside the employment system, within the labour market and society. Though not denying the conflict of interests between workers and employers, this theoretical approach insists on workplace cooperation as the driver for a forward vision of a wider sustainable and integrative society, and on the role of trade unions as independent forms of associational life, that can bind society together through the development of responsible, professional identities¹³⁰.

Finally, the perspective of *organised disintermediation* can contribute to the existing debate on union revitalisation, thus confirming the general perception that, beyond the discussion over organising vs. partnership strategies, future effectiveness will depend

Management and Unions: The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations, Faber & Faber, 1970; Clegg, H. A., “Pluralism and Industrial Relations”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1975, 13 (3): 309-316.

¹²⁷ Budd, J. W., *Employment with a human face: balancing efficiency, equity and voice*, NY: ILR Press, 2004.

¹²⁸ Budd, J. W., *Employment with a human face: balancing efficiency, equity and voice*, NY: ILR Press, 2004, 13.

¹²⁹ Budd, J. W., Lamare, R., Timming, A. R., “Learning about democracy at work: Cross-national evidence on the effects of employee participation in workplace decision-making on political participation in civil society”, in *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, December 2017.

¹³⁰ Ackers, P., “Trade unions as professional associations”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 96-127.

upon the ability of unions to expand their identity by acting «both as vehicles for the defence and advance of narrow interests and as cultivators of more general interests»¹³¹.

In this research project, I would like to further investigate this topic and provide new empirical findings helping better understand *organised disintermediation* as a suggested union option, thus shedding light on its internal and external determinants as well as on its research and practical consequences. More specifically, the research questions underpinning this project are: how and why do trade unions in traditional industries come to promote forms of work organisation enhancing direct employee participation at workplaces? How and why do institutional factors (i.e. formal and informal norms, organisational structures), environmental constraints (i.e. market conditions, innovation pressures and power relations) and cognitive frames (i.e. trade union identity) interplay to affect trade union orientation in this field and the outcomes of union-*organised disintermediation* in workplaces? How and why does *organised disintermediation* impact on union purposes, identity and organisation, and interact with collective bargaining in workplaces?

To answer to these questions, I develop an inductive and qualitative analysis based on a longitudinal case study, which concentrates on the experience of FIM-CISL of Brescia, a local metalworkers' organisation based in the North of Italy. The reason behind this choice lies in the fact that during my first year of the Ph.D. programme, I had the opportunity to come into contact with this metalworkers' organisation and cooperate with its officials in daily research activities concerning collective bargaining. This circumstance allowed me to know the main concerns and activities of this organisation. Notably, one of the issues most frequently raised by the officials of FIM-CISL in Brescia was related to non-union employee voice in work organisation. When I started to work in FIM-CISL of Brescia, in May 2016, the metalworkers' organisation had just begun to carry out some initiatives in this field and employee involvement in work organisation had just become a priority in the trade union policy agenda. Even though one year later, I moved to Milan to collaborate with FIM-CISL of Lombardia (the Italian region where the city of Brescia is located) within the framework of my industrial Ph.D. programme, I

¹³¹ Hyman, R., "The future of employee representation", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3): 309-336.

had the chance to stay in contact with Brescia's unionists and meet them several times in order to keep track of their activities in this field.

1.5. Conceptual background and research hypotheses

The study of the existing literature, further deepened in the following chapter, allows me to outline some research hypotheses related to the afore-mentioned "how" and "why" questions.

Internal factors influencing union attitude and behaviour towards non-union employee participation

Union identity emerges from literature as an important factor influencing union behaviour towards non-union employee participation at workplaces. More precisely, a cooperative approach to industrial relations, an openness to technological innovations¹³² and a propensity to share objectives with companies¹³³ are often highlighted to explain union positive (and sometimes "Interventionist"¹³⁴) attitude towards the introduction of employee involvement work practices. Given this conceptual framework, it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 1 (H. 1): A partnership/cooperative/integrative approach to industrial relations positively affects union willingness to take part in the definition of employee involvement work practices.

Partly related to union identity, union perception of change is another determinant of union behaviour. Notably, union awareness of the relevance of the organisational change as well as of its potential and sometimes contradictory effects (e.g. better quality, increased productivity, lower energy and material consumption, improved health and safety at work, a possible "enrichment of collective bargaining" as well as intensified work pressures, no opportunities for learning and autonomy, greater risk of repetitive

¹³² Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., "If you can't beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3): 445-460.

¹³³ Ortiz, L., "Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57.

¹³⁴ Frost, A. C., "Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564.

strain injuries, the marginalisation of union-led voice)¹³⁵ may convince unions to take part in the development process of lean production models, in order to protect workers from too negative implications, thus negotiating with managers for a right balance between the demands of their constituents and the demands of the company¹³⁶. However, it is worth mentioning that whether unions are exclusively concerned about the risk that employee involvement programmes can undermine the role of collective voice, they are likely to respond by opposing to the management-led change in an effort to retain their power¹³⁷. This attitude is even more plausible in companies where these models of work organisation are promoted by managers as a part of a broader union-avoidance strategy¹³⁸. Finally, union perception that work reorganisation does not affect members' interests may lead to an "apathetic" union approach¹³⁹. Given this conceptual framework, it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 2 (H.2): Union awareness of both positive and negative effects of employee involvement programmes increases the chances of union willingness to participate in the development of programmes in workplaces.

¹³⁵ Ahlstrand, R., Sederblad, P., "Teams, continuous improvement, the unions and conditional trust in the company Scania", Paper to the 16th International Workshop on Team working, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, September 6-7, 2012, available at: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/15296> (accessed 18 June 2018); Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., "If you can't beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3): 445-460; Ortiz, L., "Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57; Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., "The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining", in *Monthly Labor Review*, April 1977.

¹³⁶ Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., "If you can't beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3): 445-460; Ahlstrand, R., Sederblad, P., "Teams, continuous improvement, the unions and conditional trust in the company Scania", Paper to the 16th International Workshop on Team working, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, September 6-7, 2012, available at: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/15296> (accessed 18 June 2018); Ortiz, L., "Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57; Kochan, T. A., et al., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986; Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., "The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining", in *Monthly Labor Review*, 1977, 100 (4): 52-55.

¹³⁷ Frost, A. C., "Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564; Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

¹³⁸ Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

¹³⁹ Frost, A. C., "Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564.

The issue of union power and capabilities is raised by some authors when trying to explain union positive attitude towards work organisation models enhancing direct employee participation. Notably, union organisational strength, deriving from the independence of the representative body from its constituency¹⁴⁰, and the power to encourage management to engage in a sustainable and long-term organisational change¹⁴¹ may convince unions to operate proactively in the development of new organisational models. By contrast, union's perception of being powerless in the face of management is likely to prevent it from acting in this field¹⁴². Interestingly, union power may depend upon the ability to build unity and consensus among the rank-and-file, to collect the relevant information concerning the company's conditions and corporate programmes, to establish networks and links with external actors and unions operating in other plants¹⁴³. By and large, unions should be able to mobilise different power resources in order to influence workplace change process¹⁴⁴. Given this conceptual framework, it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 3 (H.3): The greater the union power, the greater the likelihood unions engage in the promotion of models of work organisation enhancing direct employee participation.

External factors influencing union attitude and behaviour towards non-union employee participation

Market conditions do play a role in influencing trade union behaviour in this field. Productivity and quality concerns at the national level, competitive pressures at the sectoral level as well as financial concerns and the need of restructuring at company level seem to motivate union interest in promoting work reorganisation and to increase the ratio

¹⁴⁰ Ortiz, L., "Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57.

¹⁴¹ Gill, C., "Union impact on the effective adoption of High Performance Work Practices", in *Human Resource Management Review*, 2009, No. 19(1): 39-50.

¹⁴² Frost, A. C., "Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564.

¹⁴³ Grenier, J. N., "Local unions and the restructuring of work within the multinational company: internal solidarity and local context", in *Labor Studies Journal*, 2006, 31 (3): 65-84; Lévesque, C., Murray, G., "Union involvement in workplace change: a comparative study of local unions in Canada and Mexico", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 43 (3): 489-514.

¹⁴⁴ Lévesque, C., Murray, G., "Union involvement in workplace change: a comparative study of local unions in Canada and Mexico", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 43 (3): 489-514.

of problem solving to bargaining activity, thus favouring a cooperative response from unions¹⁴⁵. Given this conceptual background, it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 4 (H.4): Market pressures are expected to increase the union's propensity to cooperate with management for the implementation of new models of work organisation even emphasising non-union employee voice.

Interestingly, it is argued that workplace labour-management relationships may moderate the positive impact of financial/economic constraints on union's behaviour. Indeed, adversarial industrial relations, especially associated with a management cost-cutting agenda, tend to provoke union opposition to change¹⁴⁶. By contrast, a tradition of cooperative industrial relations at the workplace, even implying a certain degree of union autonomy and power in decision-making processes, is likely to facilitate a joint union-management initiative for the development of a work reorganisation project¹⁴⁷. Therefore, «unions activity seems to “spur” organisational changes if rooted on a participative and cooperative industrial relations system»¹⁴⁸. However, it must not be overlooked that a certain monistic culture in the management of firms and a defensive managerial approach towards trade union representation could resist even in contexts where labour-management collaboration does take place particularly as far as issues like working time

¹⁴⁵ Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., “If you can't beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production”, in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3): 445-460; Ahlstrand, R., Sederblad, P., “Teams, continuous improvement, the unions and conditional trust in the company Scania”, Paper to the 16th International Workshop on Team working, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, September 6-7, 2012, available at: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/15296> (accessed 18 June 2018); Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986; Pulignano, V., Stewart, P., “Firm-level restructuring and union strategies in Europe: local union responses in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands”, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2013, 27 (5): 842-859; Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., “The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining”, in *Monthly Labor Review*, 1977, 100 (4): 52-55; Garaudel, P., Noël, F., Schmidt, G., “Overcoming the risks of restructuring through the integrative bargaining process: Two case studies in a French context”, in *Human Relations*, 2008, 61 (9): 1293-1331.

¹⁴⁶ Pulignano, V., Stewart, P., “Firm-level restructuring and union strategies in Europe: local union responses in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands”, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2013, 27 (5): 842-859.

¹⁴⁷ Gill, C., “Union impact on the effective adoption of High Performance Work Practices”, in *Human Resource Management Review*, 2009, 19 (1): 39-50; Pulignano, V., Stewart, P., “Firm-level restructuring and union strategies in Europe: local union responses in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands”, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2013, 27 (5): 842-859; Kriesky, J., Brown, E. L., “Implementing Employee Involvement: How Paper Companies Gain Local Union Support”, in *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 1992, 5 (2): 117-130.

¹⁴⁸ Antonioli, D., “Industrial relations, techno-organizational innovation and firm economic performance”, in *Economia politica*, 2009, XXVI (1), 34.

flexibility and work-life balance are concerned¹⁴⁹. Given this conceptual framework, it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 5 (H.5): Historical workplace labour-management relationships characterised by cooperation favour union support for employee involvement programmes.

Institutional (e.g. legal) support for union voice emerges from literature as a crucial element explaining union willingness to take part in the development of new models of work organisation, despite the possibility of some negative consequences for workers and their representatives (e.g. the marginalisation of collective voice)¹⁵⁰. Given this conceptual background, it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 6 (H.6): Institutional support for collective voice at the workplace and firm level positively affects union propensity to operate for the development of employee involvement programmes.

Ways through which unions promote non-union employee voice

Unions can promote employee participation by including this issue in their agenda as a part of a broader strategy centred on good/decent/sustainable work. In other words, after acknowledging both positive and negative consequences of employee involvement in lean production systems, unions can still favour the adoption of new organisational models, by attempting to have a say in this process in a way that a balance is ensured between good working conditions and high productivity. Therefore, unions can develop a narrative on good work, implying the promotion of a modified form of lean production, which has to ensure workers' learning, skills development and participation in work organisation.

¹⁴⁹ Ponzellini, A. M., "Organizzazione del lavoro e relazioni industriali. Una rassegna degli studi degli ultimi 20 anni in Italia", in *Economia & lavoro*, 2017, 1, 147-164; Signoretti, A., "Quale ruolo per il sindacato nell'innovazione organizzativa?", in *Note di ricerca*, 2016, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Ortiz, L., "Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57; Doellgast, V., "Collective voice under decentralized bargaining: a comparative study of work reorganization in US and German call centres", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2010, 48 (2): 375-399; Ponzellini, A. M., "Organizzazione del lavoro e relazioni industriali. Una rassegna degli studi degli ultimi 20 anni in Italia", in *Economia & lavoro*, 2017, 1, 147-164; Pulignano, V., Stewart, P., "Firm-level restructuring and union strategies in Europe: local union responses in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands", in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2013, 27 (5): 842-859; Signoretti, A., "Quale ruolo per il sindacato nell'innovazione organizzativa?", in *Note di ricerca*, 2016, 4.

Direct employee involvement thus becomes an objective of union action: the content of lobbying pressures towards employers and political institutions¹⁵¹.

At the company/establishment level, unions can negotiate with management over the implementation of the organisational change in a way that it is sustainable to workers. For instance, it is possible to introduce teamwork on an experimental (e.g. for one year) and voluntarist (i.e. in the sense that not all workers are forced to participate in it) basis; unions can be allowed to attend all the relevant meetings and closely monitor the development of the process; unions can participate in a steering committee along with managers to assess the organisational change¹⁵²; unions can be granted a role in the strategic level of decision-making and can negotiate increased job security and new pay outcomes¹⁵³. In so doing, unions can ensure that management engages in a long-term and sustainable organisational change, while fostering trust between management and workers, which is regarded as a precondition for an effective direct employee involvement and the overall success of new organisational models¹⁵⁴. Given this conceptual framework, it can be hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 7 (H. 7): Direct employee participation can be advanced by unions either in public speeches and reports, often in association with concepts like good and sustainable work, or in collective bargaining at company/workplace level, particularly to take part in the introduction of organisational changes and the possible drawbacks.

Collective bargaining thus emerges from literature as an important factor influencing the organisational change. It is argued that economic difficulties may encourage a cooperative and integrative approach to negotiations, since in these circumstances a distributive approach, focused on the maintenance of the status quo, may lead to

¹⁵¹ Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., “If you can’t beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production”, in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3): 445-460; Ahlstrand, R., Sederblad, P., “Teams, continuous improvement, the unions and conditional trust in the company Scania”, Paper to the 16th International Workshop on Team working, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, September 6-7, 2012, available at: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/15296> (accessed 18 June 2018).

¹⁵² Ortiz, L., “Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain”, in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57.

¹⁵³ Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

¹⁵⁴ Gill, C., “Union impact on the effective adoption of High Performance Work Practices”, in *Human Resource Management Review*, 2009, 19(1): 39-50; Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

bankruptcy and the loss of all jobs¹⁵⁵. However, integrative bargaining does not necessarily result in the improvement of the positions of both workers and management, yet in the limitation of the losses. Plus, it is stated that there is no evidence that cooperation delivers mutual gains. Therefore, unions should adopt a bargaining strategy encompassing some conflict tactics to ensure a fair distribution of the gains from the change¹⁵⁶. Importantly, it is stressed that unions should engage in negotiations with management since the introduction of new organisational models so that better outcomes can be guaranteed to all stakeholders¹⁵⁷. Hence, timing is a relevant variable. Moreover, it is emphasised that bargaining over work reorganisation requires a high degree of trust between management and unions, since mistrust hampers communication and can engender serious discussions. Finally, it is also said that it is particularly important for unions to seek rank-and-file consensus for the agreements they might conclude with management¹⁵⁸. Therefore, *attitudinal structuring* and *intra-organisational bargaining* are equally important in these processes¹⁵⁹. Given this conceptual framework, it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 8 (H. 8): Bargaining over work reorganisation is expected to: encourage an integrative/problem-solving approach to negotiations, which in turn places a higher premium on structuring attitudes of mutual trust and respect; require unions to seek rank-and-file consensus for the agreements they might reach; demand unions to start bargaining since the beginning of the organisational change and to adopt conflict tactics to achieve a better distribution of the gains from the change.

Moreover, it is worth pointing out that the establishment of two different committees (i.e. one joint labour-management committee at the site level devoted to work organisation-related issue and one bargaining committee at the top level) is not unusual and that this procedure allows the involvement of more people «in an open and spontaneous

¹⁵⁵ Garaudel, P., Noël, F., Schmidt, G., “Overcoming the risks of restructuring through the integrative bargaining process: Two case studies in a French context”, in *Human Relations*, 2008, 61 (9): 1293-1331

¹⁵⁶ Bacon, N., Blyton, P., “Conflict for Mutual Gains?”, in *Journal of Management Studies*, 2007, 44 (5): 814-834; Garaudel, P., Noël, F., Schmidt, G., “Overcoming the risks of restructuring through the integrative bargaining process: Two case studies in a French context”, in *Human Relations*, 2008, 61 (9): 1293-1331.

¹⁵⁷ Frost, A. C., “Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564.

¹⁵⁸ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, McGraw-Hill, 1965.

¹⁵⁹ For further details of the framework conceived by Walton and McKersie, see the paragraph 2.2.3.1.

exploration of issues without preventing the parties from addressing the issues in a controlled and channelled decision-making process at a later point in time»¹⁶⁰. A very critical issue is indeed ensuring that the new joint labour-management practices are not performed at the expense of the traditional role and strengths of collective bargaining¹⁶¹. Given this conceptual background, it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 9 (H. 9): Work reorganisation may imply the establishment of a negotiation channel which is parallel and complementary to that devoted to traditional “bread-and-butter” issues.

Finally, it should be noticed that due to the almost total absence of former empirical research investigating union behaviours, potentially connected to the framework of *organised disintermediation*, the above-mentioned research hypotheses have been elaborated from those empirical studies focused on unions which exhibited at least a cooperative attitude towards direct employee participation. Subsequently, it is reasonable to expect that these research hypotheses won't be completely borne out by the analysis and that on the contrary, the longitudinal case study might bring out slightly divergent outcomes, thus consenting to develop new hypotheses, that more appropriately fit with the case of union-*organised disintermediation*.

1.6. The structure of the research project

The research project is structured as follows. A literature review is composed of two main paragraphs. The former concentrates on the various “frames of reference” within industrial relations, with the aim of providing a conceptual background helping interpret the Italian trade union's orientation towards new models of work organisation. The second paragraph of the literature review is focused on employee voice. After assessing the interpretations of employee voice according to the IR “frames of reference”, this part of the literature review concentrates on representative and direct channels of employee voice, since they are particularly related to the topic of this research project. The section named “Research development” comes next the literature review and is composed of

¹⁶⁰ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, McGraw-Hill, 1965, 54.

¹⁶¹ Kochan, T. A., Cutcher-Gershenfeld, J., McKersie, R. B., *Institutionalizing and diffusing innovations in industrial relations*, Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, September 1987, WP 1928.

three main parts. Firstly, I offer an explanation of the ontological and epistemological perspective as well the methodological principles assumed by this research project. Secondly, in line with the ontological perspective, a theoretical model is depicted. In accordance to this model, the project sheds light on the environmental constraints (i.e. market conditions, innovation pressures and power relations in the metalworking sector in the area of Brescia), institutional structures (i.e. organisational structure, formal and informal norms affecting the action of FIM-CISL of Brescia) and cognitive frames (i.e. ideas on employee representation, values charactering the identity of FIM-CISL of Brescia) which are supposed to affect the Italian metalworkers' organisation and its actions towards direct employee participation at workplaces. Thirdly, a longitudinal case study analysis is conducted and focuses on how and why the interest in direct employee participation affects union representation strategies and organisational structure, and on how and why the union organises disintermediation in different metalworking companies in the area of Brescia. Substantially, I interpret the empirical findings of this research project, in order to underline any new understanding about the research topic and explain to what extent this case-study analysis has moved the general comprehension of the issue forward from where the prior scientific contributions, examined in the literature review, came to. Notably, the results are assessed in the light of the current debate on the future of trade unions and employee representation. The research project concludes by providing a synthesis of the research topic and questions as well as of the main findings from the case-study analysis. Moreover, limitations of the project and implications for future research and practice in the field of industrial relations are fully assessed. Finally, a bibliography is included, containing a list in alphabetical order of the references used to develop this research project.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The “frames of reference” of industrial relations

The purpose of this first part of the literature review is to illustrate the various “frames of reference” that have been developed to study and analyse industrial relations. This intellectual effort will be particularly important in a view of framing the behaviour of the Italian metalworkers’ organisation, FIM-CISL of Brescia, within the broad range of conceptualisations of industrial relations and trade unions.

By paraphrasing Fox, as quoted by Ackers, «an IR “frame of reference” is not just a way of understanding reality, it also informs any approach to solving practical employment problems»¹.

As contended by Strauss and Whitfield, «There is considerable disagreement as to what the field of industrial relations comprises»². In his attempt to provide an integrative theory, Kaufman³ reviews some of the various definitions of industrial relations found in literature.

The broadest definition was offered by Chamberlain (1960:103), who equated industrial relations with “all aspects of labor.” Also quite broad is the definition offered by Cox (1971:139): “industrial relations are defined . . . as the social relations of production.” A somewhat less expansive but nonetheless broad definition was given by Heneman (1969:4), who defined industrial relations as the study of “employment relationships in an industrial economy.” In the middle are some more specialized definitions of the subject of industrial relations. Barbash (1993:67), for example, defined industrial relations as “the resolution of tension and conflict among the contending interests in the employment relationship,” while Hyman (1995:10) defined it as “the social regulation of market forces.” Another perspective was given by Clegg (1972:1): “Industrial relations could be

¹ Ackers, P., “Trade unions as professional associations”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 96.

² Strauss, G., Whitfield, P. (eds.), *Researching the World of Work: Strategies and Methods in Industrial Relations Research*, ILR Press, 1998, 6.

³ Kaufman, B. E., “Employment Relations and the Employment Relations System: A Guide to Theorizing”, in Kaufman, B. E. (eds.), *Theoretical perspectives on work and employment relationship*, Cornell University ILR School, 2004.

briefly defined as the study of job-regulation,” while Hills (1993:191) suggested along somewhat similar lines, “Industrial relations is the study of negotiation between the firm and groups of individuals (or their agents) about control over the employment relationship.” On the narrow side are several other definitions of industrial relations. Laffer (1974:72), for example, contended that the core subject of industrial relations is the “study of bargaining relations between employers and employees.” A popular but more narrowly focused definition of industrial relations is the study of union–management (or collectively organized) employment relationships. Thus, Richard Marsden (1982:232) stated, “Everyone, instinctively it seems, knows what industrial relations is about, even those who have never studied the subject. It is ‘about’ trade unions, managers, and collective bargaining”.

So, «is there any way to determine the ‘true’ subject domain of industrial relations?»⁴.

Besides making the job of the industrial relations theorist difficult and problematic, the plethora of alternative conceptualisations of industrial relations reflects the existence of various «frames of reference»⁵, or «coherent models of how the employment relationship works»⁶.

There are three main competing interpretations of the employment relationship: pluralism, unitarism and radical or critical perspective. At the core of these different “frames of reference” are competing understandings of the relative interests of workers and employers. The following sections will deepen the essential features of these theoretical outlooks.

Pluralism: from conflict to norms

⁴ Kaufman, B. E., “Employment Relations and the Employment Relations System: A Guide to Theorizing”, in Kaufman, B. E. (eds.), *Theoretical perspectives on work and employment relationship*, Cornell University ILR School, 2004, 44

⁵ This conceptual device has been coined by Fox. See, Fox, A., *Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations: An assessment of the contribution which industrial sociology can make towards understanding and resolving some of the problems now being considered by the royal commission*, London Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1966.

⁶ Budd, J. W., Bhawe, D., “Values, Ideologies, and Frames of Reference in Industrial Relations”, in Blyton, P., Bacon, N., Fiorito, J., Heery, E. (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*, SAGE Publications, 2008, 95.

The disciplinary formation of industrial relations originates in the United Kingdom in the 1950s, when the “Oxford School” begins to form at Naffield College around Hugh Clegg, Allan Flanders, Alan Fox⁷ and Lord McCarthy. It was a period characterised by the rejection of fascism, the industrialisation, the mass manufacturing and the emergence of organised labour. The pluralist approach to industrial relations comes from this historical background. According to Ackers and Wilkinson⁸, the research subject underpinning the pluralist outlook is represented by trade unions and employers’ associations «as the chief institutions of industrial relations»⁹. The interpretative framework is institutional rule-making and systems of job regulation; the practical policy orientation is towards state intervention in a primarily voluntarist system; the research methods are either historical descriptions of institutions or case studies; and the implicit epistemology and ontology is a realism centred on collective bargaining institutions.

Grounded in the Durkheim’s notion of “normative order”, industrial relations pluralism believes in the role of collective bargaining in finding a balance between opposing interests of social groups and providing an equilibrium between capital and labour. Conflict of interest between workers and employers encompasses both labour market issues (e.g. related to remuneration and working time) and managerial concerns (e.g. referred to work organisation and the deployment and control of labour). However, pluralists do not neglect both the existence of common interests (i.e. the survival and success of the employing enterprise), to be pursued by strategies of mutual gains, and the possibility of reaching a compromise to the benefit of all¹⁰. This conceptualisation of the employment relationship derives from the belief that labour markets are not perfectly

⁷ It is important to specify that Fox comes to adopt a critical position towards industrial relations pluralism. Notably, in 1974 in the volume *Beyond Contract: Work, Power and Trust Relations*, he dissociates from the pluralist framework because of assumption about the equal distribution of power between workers and employers. On the contrary, he perceives the employment relationship as asymmetrical and hence a driver for employers’ exploitation of workers.

⁸ Ackers, P., Wilkinson, A., “British industrial relations paradigm: A critical outline history and prognosis”, in *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 47 (4): 443-456.

⁹ Flanders, A., Clegg, H.A., (eds.), *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain: Its History, Law and Institutions*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1954.

¹⁰ Heery, E., “Frames of reference and worker participation”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 22.

competitive due to mobility costs, excess labour supply, etc., and large corporations boast of a power advantage over individual employees¹¹.

The pluralist literature of the early post-war period assumes that beneficial outcomes are unlikely to be achieved solely through unilateral employer action and management *goodwill*¹² to protect workers. Conversely, the maximisation of shared interests in the employment relations could be secured through the creation of an industrial relations system, founded on trade union representation and collective bargaining¹³, providing a productive counterweight to corporate power¹⁴. The role of norms, customs and the rules of the game in the development of firms and trade unions is particularly emphasised by Commons¹⁵. In the words of Budd¹⁶, finding a balance between the three perspectives of *efficiency* (i.e. economic objectives of companies), *equity* (i.e. fair and just treatment of workers) and *voice* (i.e. employees' involvement in shaping the work environment) is the key role of modern-day industrial relations. Pursuant to the Dunlop's theory¹⁷, which is in many ways related to the pluralist perspective¹⁸, industrial relations systems are embedded in external variables (i.e. technology, markets and budgets, attitudes and power relations), which provide the environment where various actors (i.e. workers and their organisations, managers and their organisations, and the representatives of government agencies) perform their roles and produce a «web of rules». According to Flanders¹⁹, this

¹¹ Budd, J. W., Bhavé, D., “Values, Ideologies, and Frames of Reference in Industrial Relations”, in Blyton, P., Bacon, N., Fiorito, J., Heery, E. (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*, London: Sage, 2008, 92-112.

¹² This expression has been coined by Commons, who refers to industrial goodwill as «the spirit of brotherhood» (20), that unifies workers and employers in the perception of a common project. Commons lays the foundations for high-performance work practices, when adds «The personnel department is not the employment department. (...) It is the department of industrial goodwill. (...) it is the department that guides the entire establishment in the administration of justice, industrial welfare, and service to the nation» (165). See Commons, J. R., *Industrial Goodwill*, McGraw-Hill: New York, 1919.

¹³ Heery, E., “Frames of reference and worker participation”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 22.

¹⁴ Budd, J. W., Bhavé, D., “Values, Ideologies, and Frames of Reference in Industrial Relations”, in Blyton, P., Bacon, N., Fiorito, J., Heery, E. (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*, London: Sage, 2008, 92-112.

¹⁵ Commons, J. R., *The economics of collective action*, Macmillan: New York, 1950.

¹⁶ Budd, J. W., *Employment with a human face: balancing efficiency, equity and voice*, NY: ILR Press, 2004.

¹⁷ Dunlop, J. T., *Industrial Relations System*, New York: Holt and Company, 1958.

¹⁸ Notably, both pluralist perspective and the Dunlopian systems theory share the belief in a mechanistic harmony as the result of a balance between competing interests. See Elvander, N., *Industrial Relations: A Short History of Ideas and Learning*, Stockholm National Institute for Working Life, 2002.

¹⁹ Flanders, A., *Management and Unions: The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations*, London: Faber, 1975.

expression encompasses both substantive norms governing labour in production (e.g. wages, working hours) and procedural institutions governing the relations between the actors (e.g. conciliation and arbitration boards).

A conflict of interest between employers and employees, and the normative potential of industrial relations are therefore the essential theoretical foundations of the pluralist perspective. «In truth, IR pluralism is a conflict and co-operation theory»²⁰, since it is aimed at establishing partnership and compromise in the workplace, though recognising the distinctive roles and interests of management and employees. Another important assumption, which distinguishes industrial relations approaches from economic theories, is the acknowledgement of the human essence of labour²¹. This is an assumption that dates back to Polanyi²², who defines labour as a “fictitious commodity”, that cannot be simply traded on markets and whose human essence makes it to necessitate protection. In the view of the Author, this particular condition of labour and the other “fictitious commodities” (i.e. land and money) makes possible the emergence of a countermovement that constrains the expansion of market and keeps embedding it in society, thus providing balance to the system. In this sense, the pluralist frame of industrial relations appears to embody important elements of Polanyi’s theory.

Radical perspective: from conflict to class struggle

One criticism to the pluralist paradigm derives from the attention paid by the “Oxford school” and the Dunlopian system to stability and order rather than conflict and change. Indeed, industrial disputes and student protests breaking out in the 1960s and 1970s, led to the rise of Marxism as an alternative to the pluralist frame of reference. The new mood matched its growing disenchantment with industrial relations pluralism and the need to make sense of the facts and problems of society at that time²³.

²⁰ Ackers, P., “Rethinking the employment relationship: a neo-pluralist critique of British industrial relations orthodoxy”, in *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2014, 25 (18), 2612.

²¹ Gomez, R., Budd, J. W., Meltz, N., “Why a balance is best: The pluralist industrial relations paradigm of balancing competing interests”, in Kaufman, B. E. (eds.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Work and the Employment Relationship*, Cornell University ILR School, 2004, 195-228.

²² Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1944.

²³ Ackers, P., Wilkinson, A., “British industrial relations paradigm: A critical outline history and prognosis”, in *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 47 (4): 443-456.

Stemming from Marxism, feminism and the other sociological theories contending the division and control of labour, the radical approach to industrial relations, re-labelled as “critical” by Budd and Bhavé²⁴, is rooted in the power and control interests of employers and employees and sees the employment relationship as a struggle for power and control. It therefore considers conflict not only as the natural condition of the employment relationship but also as the unique way in which workers can hope to improve their condition, within an «exploitative, coercive and dehumanising» society²⁵. Importantly, pursuant to Edwards, conflict, or the “structured antagonism”, is not simply determined by different interests of capital and labour, but it rests on the employer’s need to extract surplus from employees²⁶. Moreover, unlike pluralism, the radical perspective believes that conflict is not limited to the employment relationship but is socially rooted, with the state playing a crucial role in perpetuating the dominance of powerful groups. As a consequence, collective bargaining is conceived as inadequate to solve inequalities. In contrast, militant and class-oriented trade unions are the vehicles of workers’ voice in the workplace and in the political arena, until the establishment of some forms of collective ownership and workers’ control²⁷. Notably, Blyton and Turnbull stress the relevance of trade unions’ activity as «the organised expression of grievances, deprivation and the wider interests of employees that arise from their (subordinate) role in the process of good production or service provision»²⁸.

Unitarism: from unity of interests to individual bargaining

When Fox’s research paper on “frames of reference”²⁹ came out from the *Donovan Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers’ Associations*, the unitary managerial

²⁴ Budd, J. W., Bhavé, D., “Values, Ideologies, and Frames of Reference in Industrial Relations”, in Blyton, P., Bacon, N., Fiorito, J., Heery, E. (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*, London: Sage, 2008, 92-112.

²⁵ Heery, E., “Frames of reference and worker participation”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 22-23.

²⁶ Ackers, P., “Rethinking the employment relationship: a neo-pluralist critique of British industrial relations orthodoxy”, in *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2014, 25 (18): 2608-2625.

²⁷ Kaufman, B. E., “The future of employee voice in the USA: predictions from an employment relations model of voice”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 281.

²⁸ Blyton, P., Turnbull, P., *The dynamics of employee relations*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994, 41.

²⁹ Fox, A., *Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations: An assessment of the contribution which industrial sociology can make towards understanding and resolving some of the problems now being considered by the royal commission*, London Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1966.

perspective emerged in contrast to the pluralist outlook, by regarding the enterprise as «a harmonious whole, with workers and management united by common interests and values»³⁰. At that time, few industrial relations researchers agreed with the unitary perspective. Only in the 1980s, when the industrial relations discipline came under the influence of Human Resource Management (HRM), unitarism started to play a greater role and industrial relations academics, such as Keith Sisson, David Guest, John Purcell, John Storey and Michael Poole, became prominent figures in this new discipline. Interestingly, in the period 1984-92, the Industrial Relations Research Unit (IRRU) at the University of Warwick, led by William Brown and later by Keith Sisson, defined industrial relations as «the study of all aspects of the employment relationship, including the ways in which employees are recruited, rewarded, trained and disciplined»³¹, hence giving stronger emphasis on management and direct employer-employee relationship than traditional industrial relations research. Similarly, since the 1930s in the United States “the institutional labour economics school” coexisted with “the personnel management school”, under the label of industrial relations. However, a breach in that unity was heralded in the 1970s by Dunlop’s and Kerr’s criticism of human relations research as responsible for neglecting trade unions. At the same time, the increasing success of “the personnel management school” started to be defined as HRM³².

The advent of HRM took place in parallel with the political, economic and social changes that notably in the United States and the United Kingdom, led to the marginalisation of trade unions and manufacturing industry, compromised the voluntarist system of collective bargaining and narrowed the scope of state intervention³³. However, there is still a debate as to whether HRM has emerged to fill the “representation gap” left over by the decline in union power or is itself a cause of union decline³⁴.

³⁰ Ackers, P., Wilkinson, A., “British industrial relations paradigm: A critical outline history and prognosis”, in *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 47 (4), 448.

³¹ Elvander, N., *Industrial Relations: A Short History of Ideas and Learning*, Stockholm National Institute for Working Life, 2002, 11.

³² Elvander, N., *Industrial Relations: A Short History of Ideas and Learning*, Stockholm National Institute for Working Life, 2002, 22.

³³ Ackers, P., Wilkinson, A., “British industrial relations paradigm: A critical outline history and prognosis”, in *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 47 (4), 450.

³⁴ Barry, M., “The regulative framework for HRM”, in Wilkinson, A., Bacon, N., Redman, T., Snell, S. (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Human Resource Management*, 2010, 78.

Unlike pluralism and the radical perspective, conflict is seen by the unitarist approach as essentially pathological, due to management failures or inappropriate regulations by the state or trade unions. Unitarism assumes that the interests of workers and employers are fully congruent, thus fostering cooperation within the employment relationship³⁵. Importantly, this “frame of reference” underlies HRM centred on practices of mutual gains (e.g. investments in employee training, above-market wages and benefits) and forms of internal communication and problem-solving between managers and their employees³⁶. As a consequence, unitarism emphasises the individual rather than the collective dimension. If companies succeed in developing human resources practices aimed at aligning the interests of employees and employers (e.g. training and skills development opportunities, performance-related pay schemes, reliable and respectful methods of supervision, etc.), then labour unions and government-mandated labour standards are perceived as unnecessary to workers³⁷. As contended by Heery, academic commentary on work and employment assuming the unitarist perspective takes two main forms³⁸. On the one hand, “soft” unitarism sees the basis for shared interests at work in the management ability to configure job roles as intrinsically satisfying and rewarding. On the other hand, according to “hard” unitarism, it is the capacity of managers to offer financial incentives that produces a community of interests between workers and employers. In this perspective, the best approach for management is to command and control the organisation.

Alongside these three frames of reference, Budd and Bhavé³⁹ posits a fourth perspective: the so-called *egoism*. This outlook equates labour with a commodity. Both employees and employers are seen as rational agents in the pursuit of their self-interests (individual freedom on the one hand, and economic optimisation on the other hand) within economic

³⁵ Heery, E., “Frames of reference and worker participation”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 21.

³⁶ Kaufman, B. E., “The future of employee voice in the USA: predictions from an employment relations model of voice”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 280.

³⁷ Budd, J. W., Bhavé, D., “Values, Ideologies, and Frames of Reference in Industrial Relations”, in Blyton, P., Bacon, N., Fiorito, J., Heery, E. (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*, London: Sage, 2008, 92-112.

³⁸ Heery, E., “Frames of reference and worker participation”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 21-22.

³⁹ Budd, J. W., Bhavé, D., “Values, Ideologies, and Frames of Reference in Industrial Relations”, in Blyton, P., Bacon, N., Fiorito, J., Heery, E. (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*, London: Sage, 2008, 92-112.

markets. According to the egoist perspective, there is no conflict between workers and employers, since perfect competition in the labour market prevents any abuse or inequality. Wages perfectly reflect each worker's contributions. Within this framework, trade unions are perceived as interfering with the invisible hand of free market, even by protecting unproductive workers.

Neo-pluralism: from conflict in the employment relationship to norms in a sustainable society

As Ackers and Wilkinson highlight, «changes in society and workplace identity may have dissolved the very industrial conditions that produced union organisation in the first place»⁴⁰. Notably, with reference to the decline in trade union membership and power throughout the developed world and the increasing diffusion of HRM, the Authors suggest the need to review the classical pluralist approach to industrial relations and wonder «which element of the pluralist IR paradigm constructed by Clegg and Flanders in the 1960s are worthy of salvage and reconstruction»⁴¹. In the wake of these thoughts, Ackers lays the foundations for a new “frame of reference” in industrial relations: neo-pluralism.

Following the internal logics of the employment relationship, neo-pluralism insists on the conflict of interests between workers and employers, which though does not exclude chances for cooperation. However, neo-pluralism expands the scope of its analysis by including external relations which originate outside the employment system. Notably, Ackers⁴² refers to the direct link between employees and customers in the service sector⁴³,

⁴⁰ Ackers, P., Wilkinson, A., “British industrial relations paradigm: A critical outline history and prognosis”, in *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 47 (4), 452.

⁴¹ Ackers, P., Wilkinson, A., “British industrial relations paradigm: A critical outline history and prognosis”, in *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 47 (4), 453.

⁴² Ackers, P., “Rethinking the employment relationship: a neo-pluralist critique of British industrial relations orthodoxy”, in *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2014, 25 (18): 2608-2625.

⁴³ In this regard, it is important to highlight that a new “customer focus” has characterised the entire economy over the last decades. Indeed, in a paper written in 1993, Heery reports that organisational priorities have shifted from the protection of producer interest to a deference to the needs of consumers, as a result of the increasing international competition and changes in the product markets such as the focus on quality rather than quantity and the emergence of markets of semi-customised goods. Subsequently, Heery acknowledges the necessity for industrial relations and their “frames of reference” to comprehend consumer as well as employee and employer interests, hence to reconceptualise the relationship between employees and customers, conceived as either purchasers or users of goods and services. The new centrality of customer in modern-day economy goes hand in hand with another phenomenon known as the servitisation of manufacturing, which refers to the growing interdependence between services and manufacturing

and the complex relations between work and family/society life. Moreover, neo-pluralism allows the scope for employers and workers to construct shared values and interests, thus bringing co-operation back into the centre of the pluralist equation⁴⁴. Subsequently, like classical pluralism, the neo-pluralist framework embraces the Durkheim's concept of "normative order". However, it conceives workplace co-operation as a driver for a forward vision of a wider sustainable and integrative society. Coherently, Streeck emphasises the embeddedness of German industrial relations «in a broader context of joint regulation that enforces on workplaces solidarities and principles of justice ... that significantly transcend the individual "company community"»⁴⁵.

Overall, the main peculiarity of neo-pluralism is the conceptualisation of the employment relationship as linked with the rest of society. Within this framework, normative and institutional mechanisms should ensure that business effectively contributes to socially sustainable community and civil society. To this purpose, social institutions, such as trade unions and non-governmental bodies, should cooperate with the state in public policy problem-solving and institutional reform. The health of society is, thus, at the core of the neo-pluralist perspective. Importantly, neo-pluralism stresses the idea that «the employment relationship bears hidden ethical connotations of trust and responsibility in relation to other human beings»⁴⁶. Ethics is hence introduced into the social sciences and industrial relations are provided with an ethical dimension centred on social values over interests, co-operation over conflict and trust over power. Drawing on these considerations, neo-pluralism leads to a new definition of industrial relations as «the

industry in the current time. Indeed, as a 2015 OECD paper states, the competitiveness of manufacturing firms in OECD countries increasingly relies on service activities like design, R&D, sales, logistics, etc. To deepen these observations, see De Backer, K., Desnoyers-James, I., Moussiégt, L., "Manufacturing or Services – That is (not) the Question: The Role of Manufacturing and Services in OECD Economies", in *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, OECD Publishing, 2015, 19; Heery, E., "Industrial relations and the customer", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1993, 24 (4): 284-295.

⁴⁴ Ackers, P., "Rethinking the employment relationship: a neo-pluralist critique of British industrial relations orthodoxy", in *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2014, 25 (18), p. 2623.

⁴⁵ Streeck, W., "Comment on Ronald Dore", in *Industrielle Beziehungen*, 1996, 3 (2), 190 in Hyman, R., "The future of employee representation", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3), 326.

⁴⁶ Ackers, P., "Reframing employment relations: the case for neo-pluralism", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 2002, 33 (1), 17.

study of the social institutions involved in the normative regulation of the employment relationship and business's interaction with other stakeholders in society»⁴⁷.

There is a further approach that deserves to be considered in this paragraph: the so-called Capability Approach, originally proposed by Sen⁴⁸. Even though it is commonly applied to welfare economics rather than industrial relations, it is engendering a growing interest among scholars and experts involved in the analysis of the crisis of the traditional foundations of labour law and the search for new elements and goals that can ensure its sustainability in the long run⁴⁹. By arguing that the Capability Approach can provide a new value basis for labour law, thus reorienting its idea of protection and egalitarian tradition (i.e. to support workers as weak subjects in the employment relationship) towards a more proactive conceptualisation grounded on the promotion and development of workers' capabilities (i.e. conceived by Langille as real capacities «to live a life we have reason to value» and by Deakin et al. as abilities of individuals to access «the processes of socialisation, education and training which enable them to exploit their resource endowments»⁵⁰), these Authors propose a narrative that sounds coherent with the neopluralist perspective of industrial relations, though more evidently putting into question the traditional unitarist/pluralist dichotomy. Indeed, Davidov specifies that both approaches focus on the interests of the parties rather than on the goals of regulation in the area where they operate (i.e. the goals of society) and that by acknowledging either unified interests or a multitude of different interests, these frames cannot capture complexities in life⁵¹. Conversely, Davidov advocates an articulation of labour law that encompasses universal justifications alongside selective ones, and hence tackles vulnerabilities in the employment relation (i.e. democratic deficits, dependency) while

⁴⁷ Ackers, P., "Reframing employment relations: the case for neo-pluralism", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 2002, 33 (1), 18.

⁴⁸ Sen, A., *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁴⁹ See, among others: Deakin, S., "Contract Law, Capabilities and the Legal Foundations of the Market", in Deakin, S., Supiot, A. (eds.), *Capacitas*, Hart, 2009, 1-29; Del Punta, R., "Labour Law and the Capability Approach", in *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 2016, 32 (4): 383-406; Langille, B., "Labour Law's Theory of Justice", in Davidov, G., Langille, B. (eds.), *The Idea of Labour Law*, Oxford University Press, 2011, 101-119.

⁵⁰ Davidov, G., "The Goals of Regulating Work: Between Universalism and Selectivity", in *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 2014, 64 (1), 25-26.

⁵¹ Davidov, G., "The Goals of Regulating Work: Between Universalism and Selectivity", in *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 2014, 64 (1): 1-35.

assessing their relevance for society⁵². The Capability Approach can thus integrate the IR neopluralist perspective by providing a further rationale for industrial relations to concentrate on goals (notably values) over interests (or power relations). However, as suggested by Ackers, IR neopluralism does not overlook fundamental vulnerabilities in the employment relations, yet it attempts to link them with the rest of society.

Figure 1. Key elements of the main IR “frames of reference”.

FRAME OF REFERENCE	THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION	EXPECTED OUTCOMES	ACTION FIELD	KEY ACTORS
Pluralism	Conflict of interest between capital and labour	Collective bargaining can find a balance between opposing interests and deliver norms regulating relations between workers and employers	Employment relationship	Trade unions, employers’ associations, state
Radicalism	Class conflict between capital and labour	Class struggle conducted by militant trade unions against capital’s exploitation	Society	Trade unions
Unitarism	Congruence of interest between capital and labour	HRM, individual bargaining aimed at aligning interests of employers and employees	Employment relationship	Individual workers, managers
Neo-pluralism	Conflict of interest between capital and labour (potentially	Multilateral cooperation for the health of society	Society	Trade unions, employers’ associations,

⁵² Davidov, G., “The Goals of Regulating Work: Between Universalism and Selectivity”, in *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 2014, 64 (1): 1-35.

	combined with the Capability Approach)			state, civil society actors
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2.2. Employee voice

This section is aimed at shedding light on the concept of employee voice. To this purpose, I will rely on the variety of disciplines that have addressed the topic over the past decades, in an attempt to review the «meanings, purposes and practices»⁵³ underpinning the definitions of voice, the main actors surrounding the concept and the several forms of voice developed at the workplace level.

Before deepening these issues, it is worth précising that the best-known use of the concept of voice dates back to Hirschman⁵⁴. Notably, he develops a theory of voice focused on consumers in a product market. More specifically, he regards voice as an option, alternative to “exit”, for consumers who can express their concerns in a selling organisation, thus exercising some power that may convince the organisation to remedy the situation. Vice versa, consumers can choose to stop buying the firm’s products, hence opting for the “exit” alternative. In this sense, Hirschman’s conceptualisation of voice is deeply imbued with power: voice is conceived as a foundation for power.

We would have to wait Freeman and Medoff’s work⁵⁵ for an articulation of the concept of voice within the industrial relations framework. The Authors conceive unions as the best agents to provide a voice mechanism. Indeed, thanks to the “collective voice/institutional response face” of unions, unionised workers are found to be less prone to quit their jobs (i.e. to choose the “exit” option) than their non-unionised colleagues, since they are able to express their concerns and demands (i.e. to take advantage of the “voice” option). Drawing on Hirschman’s perspective, Freeman and Medoff’s argumentation is thus perfectly in line with a long-lasting tendency in IR research to consider employee voice as a synonym for trade union representation. This assumption has been predominant until the last decade of the Twentieth century.

⁵³ Dundon, T., Wilkinson, A., Marchington, M., Ackers, P., “The meanings and purpose of employee voice”, in *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2004, 15 (6), 1149.

⁵⁴ Hirschman, A. O., *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to the Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970.

⁵⁵ Freeman, R. B., Medoff, R., *What Do Unions Do?*, New York: Basic Books, 1984.

However, as contended by Johnstone and Ackers⁵⁶, employee voice is a truly contested concept, whose understandings are particularly relevant to the lively intellectual and policy debate about how business organisations should be considered and managed. Notably, there are three main approaches to voice and participation. Firstly, stemming from a “soft” unitarist perspective, the managerial idea of *employee involvement*, implying company-led approaches, such as teamwork, HRM, profit-sharing, total quality management and so on, is driven by the rationale to enhance employee, and in turn organisational performance. Secondly, the radical approach to industrial relations tends to promote the idea of *workers’ control* in order to put an end to conventional capitalist organisations, that are run for shareholders against the interests of employees. Lately, the pluralist frame supports the idea of *representative participation*, which is aimed at balancing management voice with employee voice through trade unions and the support of a democratic state. Underlying this view is the concept of *industrial democracy*, coined by Sidney and Beatrice Webb in 1897, which is supposed to be achieved through either collective bargaining with employers (i.e. joint regulation, in the words of Flanders⁵⁷) or statutory codetermination system of employee representation on company boards and works councils, as argued by Bullock⁵⁸. These mechanisms of cooperation between managers, workers and their representatives are expected to lead to a win-win outcome⁵⁹.

The above description of the main approaches to voice and participation suggests that different rationales underpin the variety of conceptualisations. Firstly, the *democracy at work* argument conceives voice as a means for both completing the democratic process (as emphasised by the Webbs) and rebalancing the unlimited power of management (as promoted by classic pluralists). Secondly, pursuant to the economic and *business case* argument, employee voice is an essential link in the quest for organisational performance, through high performance work practices or HRM in general⁶⁰. Interestingly, Budd challenges this view by arguing that employee voice is «an intrinsic standard of

⁵⁶ Johnstone, S., Ackers, P., “Introduction: Employee voice”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 2-3.

⁵⁷ Flanders, A., *Management and Unions: The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations*, London: Faber, 1975.

⁵⁸ Bullock, A., *Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Industrial Democracy*, 1977, CMND 6706.

⁵⁹ Johnstone, S., Ackers, P., “Introduction: Employee voice”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 2-3.

⁶⁰ Johnstone, S., Ackers, P., “Introduction: Employee voice”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 8.

participation - participation in decision-making is an end in itself for rational human beings in a democratic society ... intrinsic voice is important whether or not it improves economic performance and whether or not it improves the distribution of economic rewards»⁶¹. Coherently, Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman state that «democracy is both an end in itself and also a means to other value ends»⁶².

Several attempts have been accomplished so far to provide a comprehensive definition of employee voice as well as to fully conceptualise the issue. However, as affirmed by Budd *et al.*⁶³, employee voice remains a very contested term, which has engendered a widespread and interdisciplinary debate.

Form has been identified as an important dimension of employee voice⁶⁴. Marchington and Wilkinson distinguish between direct communication, upward problem-solving and representative participation⁶⁵. The first two denote direct and individually-focused participation, through face-to-face interactions between supervisors and their staff. The third form regards union and non-union representation, and its role in discussions between managers and the workforce, via joint consultation or collective bargaining. Similarly, Leonardi distinguishes between direct and indirect employee participation: the former lacking any mediation by representative bodies and often more informal; the latter usually formalised through collective (frequently union-based) representation⁶⁶. Other dimensions of employee voice are *agenda* (i.e. shared, integrative vs. contested, distributive) and *influence* (i.e. communication, suggestion vs. influence, cost-benefit action)⁶⁷. Gollan and Xu prefer to use the terms *depth* (i.e. from information to consultation and negotiation to self-determination) and *scope* (i.e. from operational

⁶¹ Budd, J. W., *Employment with a human face: balancing efficiency, equity and voice*, NY: ILR Press, 2004, 13.

⁶² Gumbrell-McCormick, R., Hyman, R., *Trade unions in western Europe. Hard times, hard choices*, University Press, Oxford, 2013, 197.

⁶³ Budd, J. W., Gollan, P. J., Wilkinson, A., "New approaches to employee voice and participation in organisations", in *Human Relations*, 2010, 63 (3): 303-310.

⁶⁴ Kaufman, B. E., "The future of employee voice in the USA: predictions from an employment relations model of voice", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 283.

⁶⁵ Marchington, M., Wilkinson, A., "Direct participation and involvement", in Bach S. (eds.), *Managing Human Resources*, 4th edn. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, 398-423.

⁶⁶ Leonardi, S., "Modelli e forme della partecipazione dei lavoratori: le promesse non mantenute della democrazia industriale?", Paper presented at the seminar IRES/INFORMA, Rome, July 15-16, 2010.

⁶⁷ Kaufman, B. E., "The future of employee voice in the USA: predictions from an employment relations model of voice", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 283.

matters to strategic issues)⁶⁸ to indicate similar concepts. By contrast, Leonardi uses the concept of *intensity* to distinguish between mere information, consultation, co-determination and co-management, while collective bargaining is not considered as a form of employee participation, even though it is conceived as an instrument of industrial democracy in workplaces, as it consents to exchange organisational and economic flexibilities for rights and protections for workers⁶⁹. Plus, the Author emphasises the dimension of the degree of formalisation of employee voice in workplaces, depending on whether the issue is regulated by law, collective bargaining or inspired by a completely voluntary approach. A further important dimension of employee voice is offered by Dundon *et al.*⁷⁰, and we can call it *purpose*. According to the Authors, voice can be seen as an articulation of *individual dissatisfaction*, aimed at finding expression in a grievance procedure or speak up programme. This meaning is very close to that conceptualised by Hirschman. Secondly, voice can be an expression of *collective organisation*, by providing a countervailing source of power to management through unionisation and collective bargaining. This view of employee voice is clearly in line with Freeman and Medoff perspective. Thirdly, voice can be conceived as a contribution to *management decision-making*, when it is directed to improving work organisation and efficiency, via quality circles or team working. Here there may be the foundations for the high involvement/high commitment literature⁷¹. Lately, voice can be a demonstration of *mutuality* and cooperative relationships. This view fits with the partnership model outlined by Guest and Peccei⁷².

Interestingly, Guest and Peccei affirm that partnership is «an idea with which almost anyone can agree, without having any clear idea of what they are agreeing about»⁷³. Later, they contend that there is no agreed definition or conceptualisation of partnership in either

⁶⁸ Gollan, P. J., Xu, Y., “Re-engagement with the employee participation debate: beyond the case of contested and captured terrain”, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2015, 29 (2): NP1-NP13.

⁶⁹ Leonardi, S., “Modelli e forme della partecipazione dei lavoratori: le promesse non mantenute della democrazia industriale?”, Paper presented at the seminar IRES/INFORMA, Rome, July 15-16, 2010

⁷⁰ Dundon, T., Wilkinson, A., Marchington, M., Ackers, P., “The meanings and purpose of employee voice”, in *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2004, 15 (6): 1150-1171.

⁷¹ Huselid, M., “The impact of human resource management practices on turnover, productivity and corporate financial performance”, in *Academy of Management Journal*, 1995, 38 (3): 635-672; Pfeffer, J., *The Human Equation*, Harvard Business Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998.

⁷² Guest, D., Peccei, R., “Partnership at work: Mutuality and the balance of advantage”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (2): 207-236.

⁷³ Guest, D., Peccei, R., “Partnership at work: Mutuality and the balance of advantage”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (2), 207.

the academic or policy literature. However, they identify three main approaches to partnership, which are rooted in three broad theoretical perspectives of industrial relations. The first approach draws on the pluralist frame and it is rooted in the concept of industrial democracy. This perspective acknowledges differences of interest between capital and labour and partly in recognition of this, supports a legislative framework which provides the basis for co-determination. Importantly, the primary focus of the pluralist frame of partnership is on representative systems, though not necessarily involving trade union representatives. The second approach has its roots in the unitarist perspective that supports the idea of a congruence of interests between capital and labour. Within this framework, one strand promotes the use of financial incentives (e.g. profit-sharing schemes) and shared ownership to allow workers to acquire a financial stake in the company. Conversely, a second unitarist strand encourages direct employee participation and involvement in day-to-day work activities⁷⁴. However, Guest and Peccei point out the risk that this form of partnership is one-sided, in the sense that it is permitted by employers only as long as it maximises workers' contribution. A further unitarist approach focuses on maximising the «individual employees' psychic stake in the organisation»⁷⁵, through the use of high-performance, or high-involvement human resource practices, aimed at enhancing individual-organisational linkages and high levels of satisfaction, loyalty and commitment. The third approach is hybrid as it combines elements of the two previous perspectives, by recognising the importance of both representative and direct forms of employee involvement. This hybrid approach is probably best exemplified by the *mutual gains* model of Kochan and Osterman⁷⁶, where «employees, both individually and through representatives, work with management to provide shared benefits, such as job security and increased flexibility and productivity»⁷⁷.

⁷⁴ As mentioned in the previous paragraph of this literature review, these strands of literature have been defined respectively as “hard” and “soft” unitarism in Heery, E., “Frames of reference and worker participation”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 21-43.

⁷⁵ Guest, D., Peccei, R., “Partnership at work: Mutuality and the balance of advantage”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (2): 207-236.

⁷⁶ Kochan, T., Osterman, P., *The Mutual Gains Enterprise: Forging a Winning Partnership Among Labor, Management and Government*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1994.

⁷⁷ Guest, D., Peccei, R., “Partnership at work: Mutuality and the balance of advantage”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (2), 210.

Pursuant to this perspective, formalised representative systems are necessary to sustain partnership and prevent exploitation by management.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning the contribution of an Italian lecturer, Baglioni, who, after acknowledging the non-viability of antagonistic self-management in current times, distinguishes between employee participation as involvement (*coinvolgimento*), employee participation as agreement (*contratto*), and employee participation as sharing (*condivisione*)⁷⁸. The second dimension relates to collective bargaining between managers and workers (and their representatives) where the former promotes efficiency and the latter supports equity. Similarly, the latter dimension's underlying objective is to modify the employment relationship and managerial prerogatives. It draws on the concept of *industrial democracy* and its emphasis on the social foundations of participation (i.e. the need to strengthen workers' rights in a view of contrasting the asymmetric nature of employment relationship). However, unlike the "agreement" perspective, employee participation as sharing implies labour and management to put equal emphasis on both efficiency and equity. Subsequently, this dimension is associated with practices such as co-determination and financial participation to pursue strategic objectives, and negotiated organisational participation (i.e. via bilateral bodies, information and consultation rights, etc.). It is thus interesting to note that these forms of employee participation take place at the strategic (i.e. concerning management's "political" choices, such as investment plans, mergers and partnership, etc.) and organisational level (i.e. regarding the immediate implementation of strategic choices) of the decision-making process in a company and requires workers' representation. Finally, the perspective of employee involvement stresses the *business case* argument and the functional foundations of employee participation. Subsequently, it can simply mitigate the effects of managerial prerogatives. Among its various forms, employee involvement includes HRM and direct participation practices at the operational level (i.e. regarding daily activities aimed at executing tasks, solving problems and improving the functioning of certain units), cultural participation (i.e. a sharing of values between workers and management at the company level), and profit-sharing schemes to pursue distributive objectives⁷⁹.

⁷⁸ Baglioni, G., *Lavoro e decisioni nell'impresa*, Il Mulino, 2009.

⁷⁹ Baglioni, G., *Lavoro e decisioni nell'impresa*, Il Mulino, 2009.

Figure 2 is an attempt to map the orientations of the literature regarding employee voice.

Figure 2. A categorisation of employee voice.

VIEW	MEANING	RATIONAL	PURPOSE	FORM	LEVEL	EXAMPLES
Unitarism	Voice as employee involvement	Functional foundation / <i>Business case</i> argument	To simply mitigate the effect of managerial prerogative and to contribute to management decision-making (Dundon <i>et al.</i> 2004)	Representative participation	Organisational level	Profit-sharing, payment for performance
				Direct participation	Operational level	HRM, teamwork, quality circles, etc.
				Collective participation	Cultural level	Managerial practices to create loyalty, trust, identity
Radicalism	Voice as workers' control	Class conflict-related foundations	To put an end to capitalist organisations (Johnstone, Ackers 2015)	Representative participation	All levels	Strikes, industrial conflict
Pluralism	Voice as agreement	Social foundation / <i>Democracy at work</i> argument (Webbs 1897)	To contrast the asymmetric nature of employment relation and to obtain equity in exchange	Representative participation	Organisational level	Collective bargaining

			of efficiency (Baglioni 2009)			
	Voice as participation	Social foundation / <i>Democracy at work</i> argument (Webbs 1897)	To modify managerial prerogatives, by putting equal emphasis on efficiency and equity (Baglioni 2009)	Representative participation	Strategic level	Co-determination, financial participation (i.e. employee shareholding)
					Organisational level	Information and consultation bilateral bodies, works councils, etc.
Mutual gains model (Kochan, Osterman 1994)	Voice as a demonstration of mutuality (Guest, Peccei 2001)	Functional and social foundations / <i>Business case</i> and <i>Democracy at work</i> argument	To sustain partnership and provide shared benefits	It integrates both pluralist (voice as agreement or participation) and unitarist (voice as involvement) forms of employee voice		
Neopluralism	Voice as an end in itself (Budd 2004, Gumbrell-McCormick, Hyman 2013)	Ethical foundations	For rational human beings in a democratic society (Budd 2004)	It is not associated with a specific form of employee voice		

2.2.1. Representative employee voice

2.2.1.1. Trade unions

Among the various vehicles of representative employee voice, I concentrate on trade unions, their identity and functions, due to their relevance for the development of this research project and the case study analysis on FIM-CISL of Brescia.

Trade unions according to IR “frames of reference”

As argued by Ackers⁸⁰, unions have been conceptualised differently according to the IR “frames of reference”, described by Fox in 1966 and 1974. Notably, supporting the idea that the interests of workers and employers are fully congruent, *unitarists* view unions with great suspicion and often hostility, as independent bodies liable to jeopardise the community of interests and trigger conflict. Conversely, considering the enterprise as composed of different interest groups, which can often engage in conflict, *pluralists* regard trade unions as the representatives of employees’ interests, that bargain and consult with managers, thus contributing to institutionalising and solving the conflict inherent to the employment relationship. Finally, as influenced by Marxism, *radicals* conceive trade unions as militant workers’ organisations that fight for better wages and conditions within a system of class exploitation.

Interestingly, Ackers highlight two further ways of understanding industrial relations and unionism: *gradualism* and *neopluralism*. Sidney and Beatrice Webb⁸¹, the major exponents of the *gradualist* viewpoint, combine the pluralist perspective with Marxist principles, by considering unions as pragmatic organisations engaged in collective bargaining, though simultaneously perceiving them as «continuous associations of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their employment»⁸², and foreseeing that capitalism would travel towards a socialist collectivism, where conflicts of interests between capital and labour would no longer exist. Conversely, *neopluralism* assumes that classical IR pluralism is no longer an

⁸⁰ Ackers, P., “Trade unions as professional associations”, in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁸¹ Webb, S., Webb, B. P., *Industrial Democracy*, London: Longmans, 1897; Webb, S., Webb, B., *The History of Trade Unionism*, London: Longmans, 1920.

⁸² Webb, S., Webb, B. P., *Industrial Democracy*, London: Longmans, 1897, 1.

adequate lens to understand industrial relations and trade unions, in an era where conflicts over values can be as important as conflicts over interests, fragmented tensions are particularly visible outside the workplace, notably between work, family life and society, and collective bargaining alone is not a valuable trade union strategy⁸³. Drawing on this background, trade unions are seen as independent forms of associational life, that can bind society together through the development of responsible, professional identities, that are something different from mere occupational identities. In order to convey an image of unions as beneficial actors in society, legitimacy power is more important than coercive power and it has to be achieved via closer dialogue with employers, the state and public opinion⁸⁴.

Figure 3. Framing unions.

PERSPECTIVE	MEANING
Unitarism	Unions are seen with suspicion as likely to jeopardise the community of interests
Radicalism	Unions as militant workers' organisations that fight for better wages and conditions within a system of class exploitation
Pluralism	Unions as representatives of employees' interests, that bargain and consult with managers, thus contributing to institutionalise and solve the conflict inherent to the employment relationship
Gradualism (Webbs 1897, 1920)	Unions as «continuous associations of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their employment», within a society travelling towards a socialist collectivism, where conflicts of interests between capital and labour would no longer exist.
Neopluralism (Ackers 2015)	Unions as independent forms of associational life, that can bind society together through the development of responsible, professional identities.

The formation of unions

⁸³ Ackers, P., "Trade unions as professional associations", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 109.

⁸⁴ Ackers, P., "Trade unions as professional associations", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 96-127.

Before deepening unions' identities and functions, it is important to review the main research contributions about the logics of their formation. One of the preliminary works in this field is *The Logic of Collective Action*, written by Olson and first published in 1965. As before mentioned, this book follows a rational choice approach and particularly focuses on the so-called collective goods, whose main feature is the non-excludability so that if they are delivered to one member of a group, they must be delivered to all members. As a result, the rational individuals depicted by Olson will choose to save the cost of union duties and free-ride on the other workers, after realising that they can benefit from union action irrespectively of whether they belong to the union. If we took this line of reasoning to the extreme, we could predict that nobody could join the union. However, trade unions do exist and take action. Olson explains collective organisation and action through the provision of selective goods (i.e. rewards for participation or punishments for free-riding), that change the calculations of rational individuals. Another important feature in Olson's reasoning is group size. The Author contends that small unions are more likely to be exempt from free-riding and succeed in taking collective action. However, when unions grow, only compulsory membership and public support of strikes can explain their survival. Conversely, in *Trade Unions: The Logic of Collective Action*, Crouch argues that Olson theory is of limited usefulness in explaining union membership. In fact, he designs the so-called "primary logic of collective action", which consists of two variables: the utility and the possibility of joining unions. The former is a function of the worker's dependency on the employer, which depends on the scope of collective bargaining and the potential impact of unions on wages. The latter corresponds to the employer's recognition policy.

After reviewing the abovementioned rational choice approaches, Kelly⁸⁵ contends that the mobilisation theory, as proposed by Tilly⁸⁶, can offer a richer and more plausible account of unions' formation. This theory is composed of five elements, dealing respectively with interests, organisation, mobilisation, opportunity, and the different forms of action. The fulcrum of the model is interests and the way in which group's members perceive and define them. The structure of the group (e.g. hierarchy) is

⁸⁵ Kelly, J., *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilisation, Collectivism and Long Waves*, London Routledge, 1998.

⁸⁶ Tilly, C., *From Mobilization to Revolution*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978.

associated with the concept of organisation. Mobilisation refers to «the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action»⁸⁷ or the ways in which individuals are turned into a collective actor. The concept of opportunity includes three elements: the balance of power between the parties, the costs of repression by the dominant group, and the opportunities available for subordinate groups to pursue their instances. Pursuant to Tilly's theory, the dominant group can engage in a counter-mobilisation in order to repress subordinate groups' attempts at mobilisation. Lately, the forms of collective action depend on a variety of factors such as the balance between interests, mobilisation, organisation and opportunity. Kelly applies this theory to explain workers' acquisition of a collective identity in response to employer-generated injustice. Ibsen and Tapia expand this argument by deploying a Polanyian perspective of "double-movements" to interpret the nature and role of trade unions⁸⁸. More specifically, there are five stages in the historical trajectory of industrial relations. Firstly, when competitive markets are created, the social fabric of society is disrupted. This disruption generates a counter-mobilisation by society to protect itself. During this second phase, workers organise and mobilise to secure their livelihood and ways of living. According to the Authors, there is nothing automatic about counter-mobilisation, which instead is profoundly affected by the organisational forms of worker representation and the repertoires of contention available (e.g. strikes, lockouts, picketing, political campaigns, lobbying, etc.). In the third stage, the state is viewed as the supreme regulatory authority, which responds to counter-mobilisation and worker organising by restoring social order and ensuring new forms of institutionalised governance of markets. Finally, the Authors observe that governance of employment relations is constantly challenged in capitalism, by demands for liberalisation, and competitive pressures. Indeed, it is argued that since the 1970s cross-national phenomena such as skill-biased technological change, increased competition and intensified demands for deregulation have brought about market enhancement and consequently, the disruption of the established social structures. This makes the Authors wonder about the possibility of the outburst of a new

⁸⁷ Tilly, C., *From Mobilization to Revolution*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978, 7.

⁸⁸ Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., "Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 59 (2): 1-22.

countermovement by workers and social actors, in response to current marketisation of society⁸⁹.

An important debate has developed around the concept of interests, the first element of Kelly's mobilisation theory. Offe and Wieselth⁹⁰ argue that on the one hand, it is particularly difficult to identify workers' real interests by comparison with capitalists for whom profitability provides an agreed goal, and on the other hand, creating and maintaining trade unions depends not only on the members' willingness to pay fees but also on their willingness to act collectively. Hyman contributes to this debate, by suggesting that interests are "socially constructed". Notably, «through their own internal processes of communication, discussion and debate (...) unions can help shape workers' own definitions of their individual and collective interests»⁹¹. Similarly, Ackers recognises that «worker interests are socially constructed by trade unions, but the material that activists build with is some shared sense of working in the same company, trade (craft), industry, or profession»⁹². In so doing, the Author contends that whereas it is a *necessary condition* for trade unions that their members are paid workers, as stated by the Webbs, some sense of occupational identity represent a *sufficient condition*⁹³. Going back to Hyman, he offers us a specific framework, according to which unions must resolve three fundamental questions before developing a strategy: «they must determine the scope of their constituency or *whose* interests they represent; they must decide objectives or *what* interests they will represent; and they must select methods or decide *how* interests are to be represented»⁹⁴. Moreover, Hyman specifies that the central issues in interest representation are autonomy, legitimacy and efficacy⁹⁵. Autonomy indicates the

⁸⁹ Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., "Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 59 (2): 1-22.

⁹⁰ Offe, C., Wieselth, H., "Two logics of collective action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form", in *Political Power and Social Theory*, 1980, 1, 67-115.

⁹¹ Hyman, R., "Changing trade union identities and strategies", in Hyman, R., Ferner, A. (eds.), *New Frontiers in European Industrial Relations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, 122.

⁹² Ackers, P., "Trade unions as professional associations", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 107.

⁹³ Ackers, P., "Trade unions as professional associations", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 107.

⁹⁴ Hyman, R., "Trade Unions and Interest Representation in the Context of Globalisation", in *Transfer*, 1997, 3, 515-533, in Heery, E., "Partnership versus Organising: Alternative Futures for British Trade Unionism", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 2002, 33 (1), 21.

⁹⁵ Hyman, R., "The future of employee representation", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3): 309-336.

independence of a representative body from the employer as well as the constituency represented. Indeed, a certain institutional distance is identified as a prerequisite for an effective articulation of a coherent employee voice, that filters and prioritises multiple, fragmented and often contradictory aspirations and demands. Legitimacy is gained thanks to the ability of delivering goods, manipulating ideological resources, and informing, explaining and arguing. Efficacy may be conceptualised in terms of both organisational capacity (i.e. the ability to acquire the necessary information, to formulate coherent policies and to implement them) and relationship with the constituents (i.e. the extent to which representatives can enable their constituents to contribute to their own knowledge and expertise and to act in the pursuit of policy goals)⁹⁶. By probably drawing on Hyman's work, Dufour and Hege state that the task of union organisations is first to identify and interpret collective interests and then to organise, in accordance with the circumstances, the appropriate forms of mediation in relation to the common interest⁹⁷. The process of constructing a collective interest or a "collective consciousness" entails the selection of certain identities and interests within a group to the detriment of others, thus establishing hierarchies and making choices which are frequently implicit. The "hidden" nature of this process plays a powerful role in the formation of a collectivity, as it allows to conceal potential conflicts and makes the acceptance of constructed collective interests an obvious and natural behaviour. With the recognition by a social group, the interest becomes legitimate. As soon as the unified social group emerges, it comes to be regarded by its individual as an external fact and an objective agent; hence, the issue of the unity within the group comes out. Representation is thus seen by the Authors as the form of mediation able to create a sense of identity and unify individual members, thus ensuring strength and duration of a group. In the past, the groups of representatives played a remarkable role in establishing the existence of a wage-earning class as a social fact and initiating the claim for legitimate standards. These leadership groups pursued these objectives «by securing the backing of occupational groups which, far from regarding themselves as turned in on themselves, affirmed, on the contrary, the universal nature of their

⁹⁶ Hyman, R., "The future of employee representation", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3), 310-311.

⁹⁷ Dufour, C., Hege, A., "The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal", in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16, 357.

representation»⁹⁸. However, it is important to note that the representative bodies do not exist in the absence of the will and consent of the social group of which it is the emanation; their power remains subordinated to the recognition of their legitimacy by the group of represented. Therefore, a crucial challenge of the leader group is to persuade the represented group to adhere to the proposed hierarchy of priorities. Even the groups on the periphery must accept the universal nature of these priorities. This acceptance is called internal legitimacy, which is opposed to the external legitimacy, as it entails the recognition of the validity of the group's claims by third parties, such as the state and the employers⁹⁹.

The essence of unions

As before mentioned, one of the first definitions of unions is provided by the Webbs in 1897. Unions are «continuous associations of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their employment»¹⁰⁰. This sentence has been interpreted by Kaine¹⁰¹ as capturing the essence of union representation. Moreover, the Webbs emphasise the regulatory role of unions, which implies the setting of rules and the enforcement of them by the means of mutual insurance, collective bargaining and legal enactment¹⁰². Similarly, Flanders considers trade unions as aimed at protecting workers' dignity as human beings and at providing them with stability of earnings, a continually rising standard of living and a greater influence on managerial decisions¹⁰³.

Conversely, Freeman and Medoff¹⁰⁴ direct readers' attention to the economic function of unions. Notably, they identify two "faces" of trade unionism. The former is the "monopoly face" which concerns the power of unions to raise wages. The latter is the "collective voice/institutional response face" which consents workers to express their discontent and organise collectively. The Authors highlight unions' role in equalising

⁹⁸ Dufour, C., Hege, A., "The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal", in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16, 359.

⁹⁹ Dufour, C., Hege, A., "The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal", in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16, 361.

¹⁰⁰ Webb, S., Webb, B. P., *Industrial Democracy*, London: Longmans, 1897, 1.

¹⁰¹ Kaine, S. "Union voice", in Wilkinson, A., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T., Freeman, R. B. (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, Edward Elgar, 2014, 170.

¹⁰² Webb, S., Webb, B. P., *Industrial Democracy*, London: Longmans, 1897.

¹⁰³ Flanders, A., *Industrial Relations: What is wrong with the system?*, Institute of Personnel Management, 1965, 112.

¹⁰⁴ Freeman, R. B., Medoff, R., *What Do Unions Do?*, New York: Basic Books, 1984.

wages especially among blue-collar workers and reducing turnover, by favouring “voice” (i.e. the expression of workers’ concerns) over “exit” (i.e. workers’ decision to quit) in the employment relationship. Conversely, as regards organisational efficiencies, the Authors observe that «unionism per se is neither a plus nor a minus to productivity. What matters is how unions and management interact at the workplace»¹⁰⁵. Interestingly, Freeman and Medoff outline four main reasons why collective rather than individual voice is preferable at workplace. First of all, public goods (e.g. health and safety at workplace, remuneration policies) are unlikely to be pursued by individuals. Secondly, without a collective representation, workers are unlikely to express their opinions to the employer for fear of some sort of retaliation. Thirdly, union presence is expected to ensure that the desires of all workers are heard, even those of who, for a variety of reasons including age, skill and non-transferable rights and entitlements, are unlikely to leave the organisation. Fourthly, unions countervail managerial power, thus preventing workers from engaging in individual actions (e.g. shirking or sabotage) in response to a perceived injustice. Finally, unions promote the security of employment contracts¹⁰⁶.

Drawing on a Marxist interpretation of employment relationship and the mobilisation theory to explain workers’ acquisition of a collective identity, Kelly sees unions as «components of a social movement, whose aims and methods include, but are not coterminous with, collective bargaining and some of whose actions are expressive of the movements’ core values and instrumental in reinforcing and winning support for those values»¹⁰⁷.

Importantly, Hyman provides broader and more encompassing conceptualisations of employee representation. In 1997, the Author identifies four main constellations of interests of concern to employees and their representatives¹⁰⁸. The first is represented by the traditional core of “bread-and-butter” collective bargaining over wages and the other conditions of employment, as emphasised by the Webbs. This dimension has been highlighted by Baglioni via the Italian term *tutela*, meaning the role of unions in

¹⁰⁵ Freeman, R. B., Medoff, R., *What Do Unions Do?*, New York: Basic Books, 1984, 179.

¹⁰⁶ Freeman, R. B., Medoff, R., *What Do Unions Do?*, New York: Basic Books, 1984, 8-10.

¹⁰⁷ Kelly, J., *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilisation, Collectivism and Long Waves*, London Routledge, 1998, 52.

¹⁰⁸ Hyman, R., “The future of employee representation”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3): 309-336.

countervailing the power of employers by pursuing the functional interests (*interessi funzionali*) of workers¹⁰⁹. The second constellation designed by Hyman regards the regulation of the so-called “managerial relations”, including mechanisms for promotion and career advancement, training opportunities, the determination of workloads and the employment protection, and so on. The third may be identified as the macro-political representation, since it concerns the role of unions as interlocutors of government and employers’ associations in tripartite bargaining tables, aimed at designing macroeconomic policies and social welfare. The final is related to unions’ concern for workers’ personal and social existence, which is linked to the external environment, the sphere of consumption, the institutions and the facilities of the local communities. Interestingly, Hyman observes that these four areas intersect with the traditional distinction between collective and individual issues. An important role of collective representation is indeed that of redressing the vulnerability of the individual employee in her/his dealings with the employer. The Webbs speak about “mutual insurance” as a trade union method to provide extensive benefit facilities, cementing the individual to the collectivity. In other words, trade unions are sometimes seen as “service” organisations, that contribute to solving personal problems in the work environment (e.g. grievances and dismissals)¹¹⁰. As reported by Hyman, in the light of a “fracturing of collectivism”¹¹¹, some writers have observed a general trend towards increased individualism, which implies for unions to concentrate their efforts to solve individual issues and provide personal services. In 2001, Hyman deepens his reasoning about employee representation, by further evaluating trade union identity¹¹². Notably, he realises that a fragmentation of labour movements exists in almost every European country and it is rooted in different identities embraced by trade unions, which shape «the interests with which they identify, the conceptions of democracy influencing members, activists and leaders, the agenda they pursue, and the type of power resources which they cultivate and apply»¹¹³. Hyman

¹⁰⁹ Baglioni, G., “Problemi e strategie dei sindacati oggi”, in *Stato e mercato*, 2004, 1 (70): 59-84.

¹¹⁰ Hyman, R., “The future of employee representation”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3): 309-336.

¹¹¹ Bacon, N., Storey, J., “Individualism and collectivism and the changing role of trade unions”, in Ackers, P., Smith, C., Smith, P. (eds.), *The New Workplace and Trade Unionism*, London: Routledge, 1996, 43.

¹¹² Hyman, R., *Understanding European trade unionism between market, class and society*, SAGE Publications, 2001.

¹¹³ Hyman, R., *Understanding European trade unionism between market, class and society*, SAGE Publications, 2001, 10.

identifies three ideal types of European trade unionism, each associated with a peculiar ideological orientation. In the first, unions are interest organisations with labour market functions, such as wage settlement through collective bargaining. In the second, unions are vehicles for raising workers' status in society and advancing social justice. In the third, unions are mobilisers of working class in the struggle against capital. According to Hyman, the tension between these three different orientations (i.e. *market*, *society* and *class*) is inherent to every European trade union. Particularly, unions tend to incline towards a mixture of two of the three ideal types, thus oriented either between class and market, between market and society, or between society and class. These orientations derive from both material circumstances and ideological traditions. Thus, in times of changes and challenges, a reorientation can occur¹¹⁴. In so doing, the Author develops a geometry, or better a trichotomy, of trade union identity.

Baglioni identifies five principal functions of trade unions. The first and the second are both related to the distributive role of unions, which are committed to guaranteeing a fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and incomes among workers at the national and company level. The third function regards the capacity of unions of producing norms that regulate employer-employee relationships, as previously emphasised by the Webbs. Fourthly, unions are more and more involved in balancing the respect of workers' rights with firms' demands for flexibility. Finally, unions are engaged in providing solutions to the increasing job insecurity¹¹⁵.

A further categorisation is provided by Carrieri and Feltrin in the book *Al Bivio. Lavoro, sindacato e rappresentanza nell'Italia d'oggi*, published in 2016, where, by drawing on Schmitter and Streeck's typology of logics and activities of interest associations¹¹⁶, the

¹¹⁴ Hyman, R., *Understanding European trade unionism between market, class and society*, SAGE Publications, 2001, 13.

¹¹⁵ Baglioni, G., "Problemi e strategie dei sindacati oggi", in *Stato e mercato*, 2004, 1 (70): 59-84.

¹¹⁶ This model was originally devised with reference to business interest associations. According to the model, there are two clusters of independent variables that are assumed to affect the structure of any intermediary organisation such as trade unions: properties of the represented group ("Logic of Membership") and properties of the state and other political institutions ("Logic of Influence"). Besides these organisational logics, other two functional exigencies ("Logic of Goal Formation", related to the formation of solidaristic goals within a community; and "Logic of Effective Implementation", related to the provision of selective goods e.g. membership fees, assistance, etc.) are supposed to affect the organisation of interest representation. Schmitter, P. C., Streeck, W., "The Organization of Business Interests: Studying the Associative Action of Business in Advanced Industrial Societies", *WZB Discussion Paper IIM/LMP 81/13*, 1981.

Authors concentrate on the unions' provision of goods and services and identify three main goods delivered by unions: i) "identity goods" with a symbolic value, such as professional, associational or political identity, mainly offered at the origins of union experience; ii) "collective goods" with an indivisible value, such as national or decentralised collective agreements, legislative measures in the area of social policy, mainly provided in the period of union institutionalisation; iii) "individual goods" with a divisible value, such as assistance in the application of contractual and legislative rules, and in social and fiscal areas, mainly offered by unions in the current phase¹¹⁷. The Authors contend that following the decline of their political relevance and role in society, trade unions are expected to concentrate on the provision of selective/individual goods to survive.

Figure 4. Conceptualising trade union role and action.

ROLE	ACTIONS	OBJECTIVES	FUNCTIONS	CONTEXT
Regulatory role to deliver "indivisible collective goods" (Carreri, Feltrin 2016)	Collective bargaining, mutual insurance, legal enactment	Workers' protection / <i>tutela</i> (Baglioni 2004) / distributive role	Setting of the rules and their enforcement (Webbs 1897)	Employment relations and labour market
			"Bread-and-butter" collective bargaining over wages and conditions (Hyman 1997)	
			Countervailing the power of employers by pursuing workers' functional interests (Baglioni 2004)	
			Providing solutions to the increasing job insecurity (Baglioni 2004)	
			Distributive role: Guaranteeing a fair distribution of	

¹¹⁷ Carreri, M, Feltrin, P., "Il sistema d'offerta sindacale", in Carreri, M., Feltrin, P., *Al bivio. Lavoro, sindacato e rappresentanza nell'Italia d'oggi*, Donzelli Editore, 2016, 57-93.

			resources, opportunities, and incomes among workers at the national and company level (Baglioni 2004)	
			Monopoly face: Raising workers' wages (Freeman, Medoff 1984)	
			Providing workers with stability of earnings, a continually rising standard of living (Flanders 1965)	
		Workers' promotion	"Managerial relations": Setting mechanisms for promotion and career advancement, training opportunities, the determination of workloads and the employment protection (Hyman 1997)	
			Providing workers with greater influence on managerial decisions (Flanders 1965)	
		Balancing efficiency and equity (Budd 2004) / Integrative role	Balancing the respect of workers' rights with firms' demands for flexibility (Baglioni 2004)	
		Promoting social justice	Advancing social justice (Hyman 2001)	Society
			Unions as interlocutors of government and	

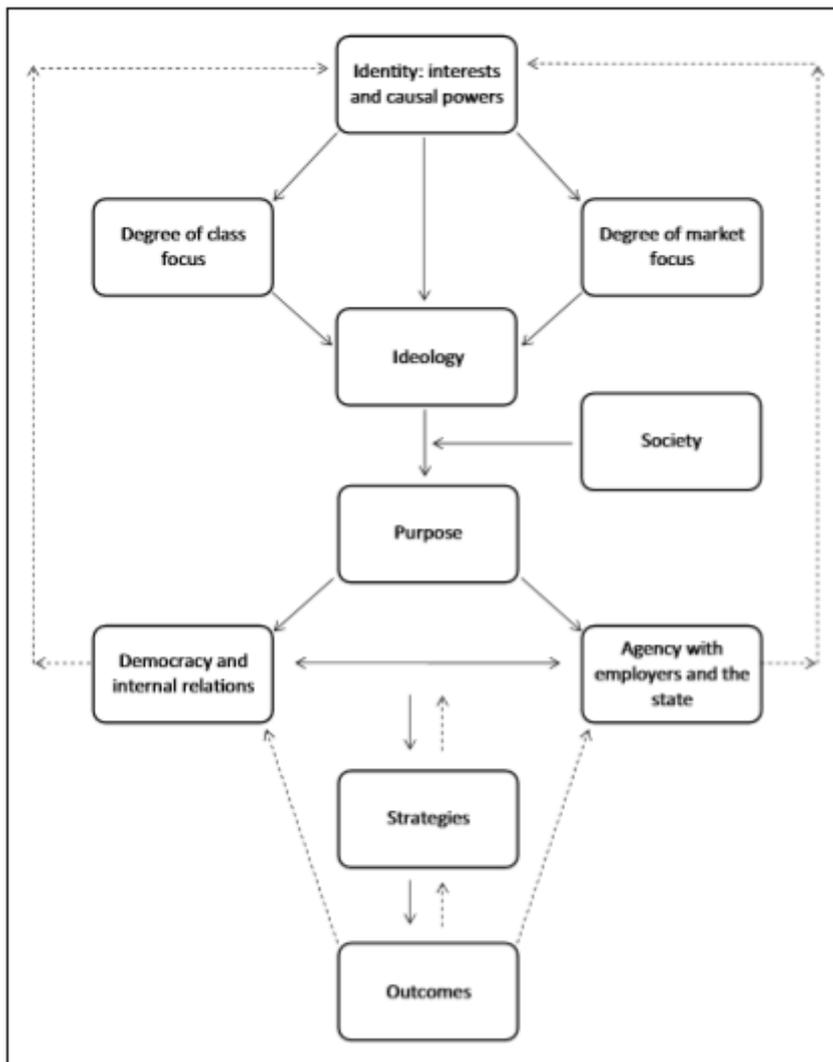
			employers' associations in tripartite bargaining tables, aimed at designing macroeconomic policies and social welfare (Hyman 1997)	
Representation role to deliver "identity goods" (Carreri, Feltrin 2016)	Mobilisation, networking	Enhancing workers' collective dimension	Collective/Institutional face: Expressing workers' discontent and organising collectively (Freeman, Medoff 1984)	Collectivity/Society
		Enhancing workers' identity as citizens and people	Taking care of workers' personal and social existence, which is linked to the external environment, the sphere of consumption, the institutions and the facilities of the local communities (Hyman 1997)	
			Protecting workers' dignity as human beings (Flanders 1968)	
		Mobilising workers against capitalism	Mobilisers of working class in the struggle against capital (Hyman 2001; Kelly 1998)	Class
"Service" organisations to deliver "divisible individual goods" (Carreri, Feltrin 2016)	Individual care and assistance	Assisting workers in the solution of their individual issues	Providing individual services and solving personal problems in the work environment (e.g. grievances and dismissals) (Hyman 1997)	Individual sphere

In an attempt to make sense of this jungle of interpretations, and being particularly inspired by Hyman, Hodder and Edwards have designed a general framework helping understand the essence of unions and clarify the links between union purposes, identities and strategies¹¹⁸. Pursuant to the Authors, «identity embraces interests and causal powers at a fundamental level. How these are played out affects a union's location on the market-class dimension. Unions can have different degrees of market and/or class focus. Identity and the degree of market or class orientation then affect ideology. Society comes in as a separate idea, for the distinct national history of a given country reflects processes that are outside the capital-labour relation. The outcome of the interaction of society with market, class and ideology generates the empirical basis of a union. These items establish its purposes and overall objectives. Unions then have two elements, the internal and the external. These elements interact. That is, unions engage in internal (democratic) processes of debate as well as external bargaining with employers and interactions with the state. Both these elements lead to the production of strategies for action. Finally, strategies generate outcomes»¹¹⁹. The suggested framework is depicted as not static, since it is likely to change as a result of different actions by the state, capital and unions themselves. The Authors hope this framework could allow researchers to better understand the deep reasons behind union renewal strategies. Their work can also help explain trade unions' different orientations as outlined in the next paragraph.

Figure 5. Hodder and Edwards' framework to understand the essence of unions.

¹¹⁸ Hodder, A., Edwards, P., "The essence of trade unions: understanding identity, ideology and purpose", in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2015, 29 (5): 843-954.

¹¹⁹ Hodder, A., Edwards, P., "The essence of trade unions: understanding identity, ideology and purpose", in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2015, 29 (5), 848-849.



Trade unions' orientations

Interestingly, Kelly distinguishes between two unions' orientations: *militancy* and *moderation*¹²⁰. The former refers to unions' confrontational approach towards employers, which implies the frequent threat or use of industrial action. The latter relies on an ideology of partnership and cooperation with management, which is mirrored in the infrequent use of industrial action and the willingness to deploy institutional resources others than collective bargaining. Kelly regards militancy and moderation as two ends of a continuum. Unions interact with the external environment, which shape their goals, methods and resources, thus influencing their orientation. However, Kelly encourages a

¹²⁰ Kelly, J., *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilisation, Collectivism and Long Waves*, London Routledge, 1998.

critical assessment of unions' moderation, given employers' persistent hostility towards joint regulation and the effectiveness of militancy in pursuing, and winning, employee claims and grievances.

The above-mentioned distinction resembles that depicted by Heery in 2002¹²¹. The Author sheds light on two main proposals for the revival of British trade unionism. The first is named *partnership* and relates to a form of interaction between unions and employers, based on cooperation for mutual gains. According to this view, unions are intermediary organisations and should cultivate the resources of employers in order to achieve their institutional security and gain opportunities to recruit and represent members. The second is called *organising* and is aimed at reviving trade unionism on the basis of membership growth and a strengthening of collective organisation. Accordingly, unions should cultivate their internal sources of power, «on the assumption that workers' "willingness to act" in support of their unions provides the only secure foundation for long-term renewal»¹²². Pursuant to Simms, whereas *partnership* requires unions to build long-term, high-trust bargaining relationships with employers and it is thus focused on relationships within the organisation, *organising* is often aimed at challenging managerial behaviour and may require unions to make links with wider communities to pursue objectives outside the employment relationships¹²³. In addition, Simms observe that the process of financialisation of the economy has limited the opportunities to establish long-term and high-trust relationships between unions and employers. In so doing, Simms draws on the work of Thompson¹²⁴ and his identification of the phenomenon of "disconnected capitalism", which refers to «the emergence of a new form of capitalism where the decisions of the corporate centre are "disconnected" from the operationalisation of decisions at the level of the business unit»¹²⁵. This is due to the current financialised

¹²¹ Heery, E., "Partnership versus Organising: Alternative Futures for British Trade Unionism", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 2002, 33(1): 20-35.

¹²² Heery, E., "Partnership versus Organising: Alternative Futures for British Trade Unionism", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 2002, 33(1), 20.

¹²³ Simms, M., "Unions organizing as an alternative to partnership. Or what to do when employers can't keep their side of the bargain", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 127-152.

¹²⁴ Thompson, P., "Disconnected capitalism: or why employers can't keep their side of the bargain", in *Work, employment and society*, 2003, 17 (2): 359-378.

¹²⁵ Simms, M., "Unions organizing as an alternative to partnership. Or what to do when employers can't keep their side of the bargain", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 132.

capitalism which makes the corporate leaders concerned about the financial situation of the corporation, tied to financialised practices through measures, such as stock options, and distanced from their local consequences even in terms of union-management relationship. In other words, they appear as not interested in attending to the agreements signed by managers and unions at plant level. As a result, «it is difficult, if not impossible, for local managers to sustain a long-term engagement with workplace bargains»¹²⁶. Simms concludes that since one partner cannot commit to and deliver on a long-term and high-trust relationship, the notion of an effective *partnership* is largely irrelevant. Conversely, if it is essential to maintain a relationship, *organising* (i.e. a more assertive and confrontational approach) is required for effective representation of workers' interests¹²⁷.

The topic of unions' orientations has been addressed also by Baglioni, who distinguishes between an employee representation which intends to simply reflect (*rispecchiare*) the interests and objectives of its constituency, and another kind of employee representation which aims at interpreting (*interpretare*) those interests¹²⁸. The organisations belonging to the first type tend to legitimise themselves via direct forms of democracy; the organisations related to the second type tend to adopt representative forms of democracy. Baglioni specifies that trade unions usually select and interpret workers' interests. However, though equally committed to interpreting the interests of their constituency, unions differ in essential aspects such as the idea of the role of unions and purposes of collective action. Notably, the Author highlights three main differentiations: 1) antagonistic / non-antagonistic unions; 2) union policy agenda which is implicitly antagonistic / union policy agenda which is more open to cooperation with management (*compatibilità*); 3) union collective action based on exogeneous (mainly, political) concerns / union collective action focused on interpreting workers' functional interests. According to the Author, unions can be innovators if they are prone to cooperate with

¹²⁶ Simms, M., "Unions organizing as an alternative to partnership. Or what to do when employers can't keep their side of the bargain", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 132.

¹²⁷ Simms, M., "Unions organizing as an alternative to partnership. Or what to do when employers can't keep their side of the bargain", in Johnstone, S., Ackers, P. (eds.), *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 128.

¹²⁸ Baglioni, G., "Problemi e strategie dei sindacati oggi", in *Stato e mercato*, 2004, 1 (70): 59-84.

management and abandon politics-related campaigns to concentrate on workers' demands at company level¹²⁹.

2.2.1.1.1. Collective bargaining

First used in 1891 by Beatrice Webb, collective bargaining is conceived as an alternative to individual bargaining, or one of the methods used by unions to pursue the purpose «of maintaining or improving the conditions of their [members'] working lives»¹³⁰. Collective bargaining is also defined as a process of negotiation, joint decision-making, or joint regulation, as proposed by Alan Flanders¹³¹. It is different from consultation or joint problem-solving, since it results in formal and bargained agreements to which both parties are obliged to adhere during an agreed period¹³². Collective bargaining is seen as the most developed form of representative and collective voice. «The distinctiveness of collective bargaining lies in this role as an institution that involves formal negotiations between two organisations representing employer and worker interests, and holding different forms of political and economic power»¹³³. In 1968, the *Donovan Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations* asserts that «collective bargaining is the most effective means of giving workers the right to representation in decisions affecting their working lives»¹³⁴.

As mentioned in the first section of this literature review, Walton and McKersie¹³⁵ provide a detailed analysis of the situation that occurs when representatives of capital and labour meet to negotiate agreements. According to Katz, Kochan and Colvin¹³⁶, their framework is particularly useful to analyse the traditional positional approach to bargaining which was common in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. However,

¹²⁹ Baglioni, G., "Problemi e strategie dei sindacati oggi", in *Stato e mercato*, 2004, 1 (70): 59-84.

¹³⁰ Webb, S., Webb, B., *The History of Trade Unionism*, London: Longmans, 1920, 1.

¹³¹ Flanders, A., *Management and Unions: The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations*, London: Faber, 1975.

¹³² Doellgast, V., Benassi, C., "Collective bargaining", in Wilkinson, A., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T., Freeman, R. B. (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, Edward Elgar, 2014, 227-246.

¹³³ Doellgast, V., Benassi, C., "Collective bargaining", in Wilkinson, A., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T., Freeman, R. B. (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, Edward Elgar, 2014, 228.

¹³⁴ Donovan, T., *Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations*, CMND, 1968, 3623, 185.

¹³⁵ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965.

¹³⁶ Katz, H. C., Kochan, T. A., Colvin, A. J. S., "The negotiations process and structures", in *Labor relations in a globalizing world*, Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2015, 79-101.

their work provides also the theoretical basis for interest-based techniques that emerged in the 1980s. Walton and McKersie argue that almost all behaviour can be subsumed under four headings:

- *Distributive bargaining* refers to how negotiators resolve differences when their interests are in conflict. Game-theory is adopted as a working model. It is a win-lose bargaining, also called zero-sum bargaining, since each gain obtained by one party is perceived as a loss by the other. As a consequence, what labour gains, management gives up. Examples of distributive issues are wage levels and fringe benefits (e.g. paid vacation time). Determining how distributive issues are resolved involves the exercise of bargaining power, in the form of strike leverage on the side of labour, or threats of reduced labour demands on the side of management. This kind of negotiation is thus regarded as power-based. Distributive issues are at the centre of the negotiation of a collective agreement, since disagreement over how to distribute profits from what labour produces lies at the core of labour-management relations¹³⁷.
- *Integrative bargaining* refers to a situation in which a solution provides gains to both labour and management, leading to joint gains or win-win bargaining. A problem-solving model is applied to this situation, since the parties see themselves as having a joint problem. It might be thought that labour and management both gain when they resolve problems that jeopardise productivity and organisational performance. In this regard, the introduction of new technology can provide an avenue for integrative bargaining. However, new technology alone is not expected to achieve the best results in terms of productivity, yet it should be accompanied by changes in work practices such as the adoption of training programmes, the introduction of personnel involvement methods, and so on. Interestingly, integrative bargaining can take place over a single issue or over multiple issues, some of which involve conflicting interests and some, shared interests. This is a *mixed-motive situation* and according to the Authors, is the most common type of negotiation and implies difficulties for the bargaining parties to make integrative changes. An example can be brought again from the introduction of new

¹³⁷ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965, 126.

technology. Even though it may be encouraged by both labour and management in a view of improving firm's competitiveness, discussions may arise from the need to divide up the joint gains. As a result, it might be asserted that every integrative bargain prompts a distributive discussion, which is likely to compromise the achievement of integrative solutions. Another problem linked to integrative bargaining refers to the fact that it requires a specific negotiation style (i.e. entailing information sharing and a communication process made up by multiple voices), which is different from that used in distributive bargaining (i.e. including overstate demands, low trust and with-hold information). However, when a negotiation process involves both integrative and distributive issues, it is particularly difficult to make a proper use of the various tactics and be effective in achieving gains.

- *Intra-organisational bargaining* springs from the fact that negotiators often are not individual decision makers, yet they are representatives of groups or organisations and must answer to these constituents. Therefore, this negotiation occurs when there are different goals or preferences among the members of each group, and it is aimed at reconciling those differences, uniting negotiating efforts and building consensus. Interestingly, intra-organisational conflict can occur when a representative at the bargaining table lacks the sufficient authority to make commitments that are stick in his or her organisation. This situation is called *surface bargaining* and increases the probability of an impasse or a strike as the counterpart intends to force the real decision-makers at the bargaining table¹³⁸.
- *Attitudinal structuring* refers to how negotiators shape the other party's attitudes to advance their own or their mutual advantage. Indeed, negotiations involve more than the substantive terms of the deal. They are influenced by cultural norms and the interpersonal relationships (e.g. based on low or high trust) that the parties have developed with each other. This type of negotiation has come to be seen as primarily about trust. Particularly, high degree of trust is expected to encourage integrative bargaining, while mistrust hampers communication and can engender

¹³⁸ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965, 131.

serious discussions of the substantive merits of the issues. Labour and management can attempt to build trust by meetings before or during negotiations.

Even though these subprocesses are introduced separately, their interaction is crucial to understand negotiations. As before mentioned, low degree of trust can inhibit integrative bargaining, whereas failure to resolve intra-organisational conflict is likely to compromise distributive bargaining. All these dynamics and outcomes are influenced by the relative power of the parties¹³⁹.

Doellgast and Benassi¹⁴⁰ provide a detailed explanation of the main differences in collective bargaining across countries. First of all, it is worth mentioning that even though the right to collective bargaining is a core labour standard as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), workers continue to lack this basic right in several countries, such as Belarus, Cambodia and Myanmar. Therefore, one important institutional difference is whether or not governments protect employees' right to join unions and engage in industrial relations activities.

In countries with developed industrial relations systems, collective bargaining can take different forms. "Single-employer bargaining" occurs when individual employers negotiate agreements with unions or other workers' representatives, such as works councils, at the company or workplace level. This often occurs in Liberal Market Economies (LMEs). Conversely, "multi-employer bargaining" refers to negotiations between one or more unions (or union confederations) and one or more employers' associations. These agreements are usually signed in Coordinated Market Economies (CMEs)¹⁴¹. They can cover the workforce in a particular industry or occupation, or in a range of sectors at the territorial or national level. Negotiations can also involve government agencies, and in this case, we refer to "tripartite agreements".

¹³⁹ Kochan, T. A., Lipsky, D. B., "Conceptual foundations: Walton and McKersie's subprocesses of negotiations", in Kochan, T. A., Lipsky, D. B. (eds.), *Negotiations and change: From the workplace to society*, Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2003, 15-19.

¹⁴⁰ Doellgast, V., Benassi, C., "Collective bargaining", in Wilkinson, A., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T., Freeman, R. B. (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, Edward Elgar, 2014, 227-246.

¹⁴¹ For a distinction between Liberal Market Economies and Coordinated Market Economies, see: Hall, P. A., Soskice, D. (eds.), *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Another important difference regards the degree of bargaining centralisation. “Centralised bargaining” is characterised by national or industry-level agreements as the dominant form for regulating terms and conditions of employment. On the contrary, “decentralised bargaining” implies that company or establishment-level agreements predominate. In many European countries bargaining takes place at multiple levels. In Sweden, for instance, minimum wage increases are agreed centrally, while supplementary agreements are reached at company or plant level. Interestingly, Traxler¹⁴² distinguishes between vertical and horizontal centralisation. The former refers to the level of aggregation of economic activities embraced by an agreement. The main levels are local (i.e. the establishment and the company), intermediate (i.e. the branch, sector and occupation) and central (i.e. cross-sectoral agreements). The latter depends on whether bargaining for distinct categories of jobs (e.g. blue-collar and white-collar workers) is conducted jointly or separately¹⁴³.

In addition, multi-employer bargaining systems differ in the degree of coordination between levels. «Bargaining coordination can be defined as the extent to which “minor players” (such as managers or union representatives at company level) follow or adhere to agreements reached by “major players” (such as peak associations)»¹⁴⁴. In this regard, Traxler specifies that multi-bargaining may take an unarticulated or articulated form. «In the unarticulated case (e.g. Spain), agreements at differing levels simply coexist without any hierarchical order. In an articulated system higher-level agreements are devised to frame and govern those at lower levels, implying that the higher-level agreement includes the domain of agreements at lower levels (e.g. the Nordic countries)»¹⁴⁵. As explained by Doellgast and Benassi¹⁴⁶, there are many ways to achieve coordination (or “bargaining governability”, in the words of Traxler¹⁴⁷): through direct means, such as an explicit goal

¹⁴² Traxler, F., “Bargaining (De)centralization, Macroeconomic Performance and Control over the Employment Relationship”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2003, 41 (1): 1-27.

¹⁴³ Traxler, F., “Bargaining (De)centralization, Macroeconomic Performance and Control over the Employment Relationship”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2003, 41 (1), 8.

¹⁴⁴ Doellgast, V., Benassi, C., “Collective bargaining”, in Wilkinson, A., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T., Freeman, R. B. (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, Edward Elgar, 2014, 229.

¹⁴⁵ Traxler, F., “Bargaining (De)centralization, Macroeconomic Performance and Control over the Employment Relationship”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2003, 41 (1), 8.

¹⁴⁶ Doellgast, V., Benassi, C., “Collective bargaining”, in Wilkinson, A., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T., Freeman, R. B. (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, Edward Elgar, 2014, 229.

¹⁴⁷ Traxler, F., “Bargaining (De)centralization, Macroeconomic Performance and Control over the Employment Relationship”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2003, 41 (1): 1-27.

of peak business and labour associations and through state intervention (i.e. statutory provisions for the legal enforceability of collective agreements and the peace obligation during their validity); or through informal means, such as pattern bargaining (i.e. the attempt led by bargaining agents at large firms or in leading industries to make decentralised collective agreements uniform across a sector or industry).

As reported by Doellgast and Benassi¹⁴⁸, over the last decades, most OECD countries have experienced an increase in company or establishment-level bargaining. Traxler supposes that this change may have been made by employers in the attempt to compensate for a loss of attractiveness of multi-employer bargaining. Notably, it may be contended that: firstly, growing economic internalisation has jeopardised the role of multi-employer bargaining in taking wages out of competition; secondly, an increase in rights for employee representation across Europe has reduced the chances to neutralise unions in the workplace; and finally, whipsawing tactics have been less effective in times of declining union power¹⁴⁹. As a consequence, unions have experienced a massive loss of control over employment terms, whereas managerial control has increased as a result of the shift towards single-employer bargaining. However, in countries where multi-employer bargaining system has remained predominant this change has led to another equilibrium: «organized decentralization, in the course of which certain bargaining issues are delegated to regulation at company and plant level within a binding framework set by the multiemployer settlement»¹⁵⁰. This compromise seems to allow unions to retain a grip on the employment terms via multi-employer bargaining, while employers can benefit from an extended managerial control via decentralised bargaining. Moreover, according to the Author, legal support (e.g. via rights to strike, participation rights, mandatory extension of collective agreements, etc.) is a decisive determinant of a country's bargaining structure and notably, for the survival of a multi-employer bargaining system in any labour market situation. In other words, «in the long run, multi-employer bargaining is compatible with decentralization processes only when the legal framework keeps the overall system articulated. Otherwise multi-employer agreements, single-

¹⁴⁸ Doellgast, V., Benassi, C., "Collective bargaining", in Wilkinson, A., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T., Freeman, R. B. (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, Edward Elgar, 2014, 229.

¹⁴⁹ Traxler, F., "Bargaining (De)centralization, Macroeconomic Performance and Control over the Employment Relationship", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2003, 41 (1), 19.

¹⁵⁰ Traxler, F., "Bargaining (De)centralization, Macroeconomic Performance and Control over the Employment Relationship", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2003, 41 (1), 19.

employer agreements and individual labour contracts are likely to become alternative, competing modes of employment regulation»¹⁵¹. Lately, Traxler specifies that supportive statutory provisions are a necessary but not a sufficient precondition for the stability of multi-employer bargaining system. Importantly, it is the way in which the bargaining parties make use of them that also matters.

To conclude, the different bargaining arrangements and legal frameworks have an impact on other two important dimensions: collective bargaining coverage (i.e. the proportion of the workforce covered by collective agreements) and union density (i.e. the proportion of workers who are union members). It is important to state that union density rates are not always correlate with bargaining coverage. Indeed, some countries, such as Austria, Spain and the Netherlands, have high bargaining coverage and low union membership rates. Moreover, since 1990 until 2011, coverage fell dramatically in countries that experienced a weakening in legal support for bargaining, including Australia and New Zealand. However, coverage remained stable in many countries, including the Nordic countries, Belgium, Spain, Austria and the Netherlands, even though union density decreased in most OECD countries. It is noteworthy that bargaining coverage can be extended through legal provisions, as occurs in countries like Austria, Belgium, France and Spain¹⁵².

2.2.2. Direct employee participation

According to Baglioni, direct employee participation relates to the operational level (i.e. concerning the influence of workers in day-to-day operational decisions, the degree of workers' autonomy in executing tasks and solving problems, etc.) and mainly regards individuals or groups of individuals, that may be variable¹⁵³. Similarly, Kim *et al.* define direct employee voice as the degree to which individuals or groups of individuals influence key local establishment-level decision affecting their day-to-day work¹⁵⁴. Direct employee voice can be either consultative or substantive. Consultative participation is also known as upward problem-solving and implies soliciting of workers' suggestions on

¹⁵¹ Traxler, F., "Bargaining (De)centralization, Macroeconomic Performance and Control over the Employment Relationship", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2003, 41 (1), 20.

¹⁵² Doellgast, V., Benassi, C., "Collective bargaining", in Wilkinson, A., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T., Freeman, R. B. (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, Edward Elgar, 2014, 227-246.

¹⁵³ Baglioni, G., *Lavoro e decisioni nell'impresa*, Il Mulino, 2009.

¹⁵⁴ Kim, J., MacDuffie, J. P., Pil, F. K., "Employee voice and organizational performance: Team versus representative influence", in *Human Relations*, 2010, 63 (3): 371-394.

issues related to their day-to-day activities. Quality circles, engagement surveys and suggestion schemes can be examples of consultative participation. In these circumstances, workers do not take part in decisions on how to solve problems and may not be involved in the implementation of their suggestions. By contrast, substantive participation refers to the creation of formal structures, such as semi-autonomous groups, where employees play a role in workplace decisions¹⁵⁵. However, the Authors point out that in practice, it is difficult to distinguish consultative from substantive nature of direct voice. In addition, direct employee voice can be either individual or collective. These variables contribute to shaping direct employee voice, by creating a range of different practices as exemplified in the Figure 6. Figure 6 is drawn on 2000 Regalia’s article on direct employee participation¹⁵⁶.

Figure 6. Types of direct employee participation pursuant to Regalia.

	CONSULTATIVE	SUBSTANTIVE
INDIVIDUAL	<i>Examples:</i> suggestion schemes, individual consultation, engagement surveys, etc.	<i>Examples:</i> job enrichment, job enlargement, self-management, etc.
COLLECTIVE	<i>Examples:</i> quality circles, groups d’expression, continuous improvement groups, etc.	<i>Examples:</i> work teams, autonomous groups, Total Quality Management, integrated factory, Learning Organisation, etc.

New productive and organisational models

The origins of employee involvement programmes, or what Bartezzaghi and Della Rocca defined as “functional participation”¹⁵⁷, have been attributed to the development of HRM during the 1980s, which is related to the affirmation of new productive and organisational models, following the decline of Taylorism¹⁵⁸. These new models can be ascribed to the

¹⁵⁵ Kim, J., MacDuffie, J. P., Pil, F. K., “Employee voice and organizational performance: Team versus representative influence”, in *Human Relations*, 2010, 63 (3): 371-394.

¹⁵⁶ Regalia, I., “Riflettendo ancora sulla partecipazione diretta”, in *L’impresa al plurale. Quaderni della partecipazione*, 2000, 6, 17.

¹⁵⁷ Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., “Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122.

¹⁵⁸ See, among the others, Baglioni, G., *Lavoro e decisioni nell’impresa*, Il Mulino, 2009; Della Torre, E., “High Performance Work Practices e caratteristiche delle imprese innovative”, in *Economia Politica*, 2009,

spread of a new industrial discourse, which is generally called “lean production”¹⁵⁹. Interestingly, Eurofound specifies the link between work organisation and HRM practices, by arguing that work organisation (concerning the ways in which work processes are organised) builds the context for innovative HRM practices (concerning job design and the motivation and/or control of workers). Among the models enhancing direct employee participation, there are lean production models (characterised by autonomous teams though still constrained by various hierarchical levels) and discretionary learning organisations (characterised by high-levels of autonomy, autonomous teams and project teams)¹⁶⁰.

Johansson *et al.* illustrate the affirmation of lean production and organisation philosophy. Interestingly, according to the Authors, since Taylor wrote *The principles of scientific management* in 1911, «industrial production has continually been on a diet, but its character has varied over time and this variation has been the key for the ideas on how work should be organised»¹⁶¹. During the 1980s, the so-defined Toyota Production System coming from Japan was perceived as the great saviour for European industry. As a result, concepts such as *Just-In-Time*, *Five S*, *Kanban*, *Kaizen* and *Total Productive Maintenance* entered the European industry’s discourse. In the early 1990s, Womack *et al.*’s volume *The machine that changed the world* marked the emergence of the concept of lean production, which was mainly based on the Toyota Production System and the Japanese transplants in the US. Johansson *et al.* specify that lean production was intended to promote an effective resource management, on the basis of a flow-based production structure and organisation, reducing waste and increasing standardisation. The concept of lean production gave birth to popular organisational and management models, such as *Total Quality Management*, *Six Sigma*, *Total Productive Maintenance* and *Time Based Management*¹⁶². Most of these models originated in Japan, though supported by several

XXVI (2): 315-352; Verma, A., McKersie, R. B., “Employee involvement: The implications for noninvolvement by unions”, in *ILR Review*, July 1987, 40 (4): 556-568.

¹⁵⁹ Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., “If you can’t beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production”, in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3): 445-460.

¹⁶⁰ Eurofound, *Innovative changes in European companies: Evidence from the European Company Survey*, 2017.

¹⁶¹ Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., “If you can’t beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production”, in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3), 448.

¹⁶² Ortiz, L., “Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain”, in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57.

US researchers and consultants. In the late 1990s, other models were even more Americanised, like *Business Process Re-engineering*, the *Boundaryless Organisation*, the *Individualised Organisation*, the *Learning Organisation* and *Knowledge Management*¹⁶³. The Authors observe that whereas lean production and other models from the early 1990s derived almost exclusively from rationalisation and efficiency strategies, the organisational techniques developed in the late 1990s were more comprehensive and learning based management strategies. Notably, they favoured a flat and integrated work organisation where objective-oriented work teams with opportunities for workplace learning played a central role¹⁶⁴. More precisely, Appelbaum and Batt identify two typologies of American organisation strategies developed in the 1990s: the *American lean production* and the *American team production*¹⁶⁵. Whereas the former is quite similar to Japanese lean production, though differing from it as regards human resource management and industrial relations policies, the latter is inspired by the socio-technical model and it is characterised by autonomous work teams and other techniques derived from other organisational models¹⁶⁶. According to the Authors, the former model has a centralised decision-making process, while in the latter the process is more decentralised. With regard to Europe, in 1993 Bonazzi identifies a sort of “European way to lean production”, which combines some key features of *Just-In-Time* with other four elements deriving from the peculiar socio-economic context: i) extensive deployment of advanced technologies which prevents the exploitation of the workforce; ii) the attempt to conclude collective agreements with trade unions for the involvement of workforce; iii) the use of

¹⁶³ More detailed insights on Total Quality Management and Re-engineering can be found in Schonberger, R. J., “Human Resource Management Lessons from a Decade of Total Quality Management and Re-engineering”, in *California Management Review*, 1994, 36 (4): 109-123.

¹⁶⁴ Ortiz, L., “Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain”, in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57.

¹⁶⁵ Appelbaum, E., Batt, R., *The New American Workplace: Transforming Work Systems in the United States*, ILR Press, 1994.

¹⁶⁶ It is worth specifying that socio-technology is considered as an organisational theory developed at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London in the 1950s as an answer to the constraints on workers due to feeling of alienation and low productivity; it is a theory of semi-autonomous groups as strategies of intervention in organisations to respond to the detrimental effects of production technology on the establishment of effective and healthy forms of work organisation. In other words, the socio-technical approach implies that alongside technical requirements, the social and psychological needs of workers have to be considered. This theory got a special hearing in Europe and the United States in the 1970s, given its ability to better flexibility within markets and workforces than the rigid Taylorist organisational styles. See, among others, Cohen-Rosenthal, E., “Sociotechnical Systems and Unions: Nicety or Necessity”, in *Human Relations*, 1997, 50 (5): 585-604; Sørensen, K. H., “Technology and Industrial Democracy An inquiry into some theoretical issues and their social basis”, in *Organization Studies*, 1985, 6 (2): 139-160.

forms of cellular manufacturing, which are necessary to deal with product and process anomalies; iv) the search for improvements in production, although they are not as considerable as in Japanese organisations¹⁶⁷. Overall, there are three major dimensions along which the production and organisation change has taken place over the last decades: i) production flexibility and standardisation of processes in a view of achieving high quality standards; ii) the importance of knowledge; iii) versatility and less direct control over the organisation of work; iv) flexibility and workers' commitment to achieving firms' objectives¹⁶⁸. Ponzellini observes that the reason behind the deployment of the expression "Post-Fordism" may lie in the fact that whereas Fordism emphasised the irrelevance of human cognitive skills for the efficiency of production processes, lean production methods are based on the acknowledgement of the importance of workers' skills and knowledge for the improvement of production and organisational processes¹⁶⁹. It is thus not by chance that Tronti comes to use the expression of *cognitive participation* to refer to «the willingness and ability to get, share and use knowledge (one own knowledge or that of the organisation) to improve workplaces, products and productive and organisational processes»¹⁷⁰.

Pursuant to Della Torre, it is reasonable to claim that whereas the Fordist paradigm has been challenged by a new competitive context and new production methods, such as those related to lean production, it has not been completely replaced. Conversely, it is proved to be compatible with the new economic scenario and this contributes to explaining why certain organisations are still reluctant to adopt the above-mentioned management techniques¹⁷¹. What Della Torre argues has been empirically proved in the 1990s by Osterman, who found that about 35 per cent of US manufacturing establishments with 50 or more employees made use of flexible work practices in 1992. Moreover, the Author discovered that some variables are positively associated with the adoption of flexible solutions: «a market with international competition; a high skill

¹⁶⁷ Bonazzi, G., *Il tubo di cristallo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993.

¹⁶⁸ Della Torre, E., *Imprese moderne, nuovi sistemi di lavoro e relazioni industriali*, Tesi di dottorato di ricerca, a.y. 2005/2006.

¹⁶⁹ Ponzellini, A. M., "Organizzazione del lavoro e relazioni industriali. Una rassegna degli studi degli ultimi 20 anni in Italia", in *Economia & lavoro*, 2017, 1, 147-164.

¹⁷⁰ Tronti, L., "Economia della conoscenza, innovazione organizzativa e partecipazione cognitiva: un nuovo modo di lavorare", in *Economia & lavoro*, 2015, 3, 16.

¹⁷¹ Ponzellini, A. M., "Organizzazione del lavoro e relazioni industriali. Una rassegna degli studi degli ultimi 20 anni in Italia", in *Economia & lavoro*, 2017, 1, 147-164.

technology; worker-oriented values; following a high-road strategy (emphasizing service, quality, and variety of products rather than low cost); and being part of a larger organisation»¹⁷². Accordingly, in 2017 Eurofound reported that across the EU28, more than half of the establishments (55%) experienced the introduction of new or significantly changed products and services, marketing strategies or processes over the period 2010-2013, and that in the majority of these cases, the probability of innovation was boosted when strong work organisation structures were combined with direct employee participation¹⁷³.

As regards the *learning organisation*, an interesting analysis can be found in a Pini's article in 2005¹⁷⁴. The Author traces the affirmation of the *learning organisation* back to the transition towards a *knowledge economy*, whose efficiency levels rely more heavily on workers' skills and abilities rather than on rigid and routine organisational structures¹⁷⁵. The Figure 7 illustrates the main characteristics of the J-firm (or *learning organisation*) compared to those of the A-firm. Despite the fact that both the organisations operate in a *knowledge economy*, it is possible to identify considerable differences between the models.

Figure 7. A comparison between the “A-firm” and the “Learning organisation”, according to Pini.

BUSINESS ORGANISATION	A-firm	J-firm or learning organisation
DECISION-MAKING PROCESS	Centralised / Hierarchical / Top-down	Decentralised / Horizontal / Bottom-up
FLEXIBILITY	Defensive flexibility by increasing managerial control and investing in technological innovation to cut labour cost	Innovative flexibility by investing in technological and organisational innovation as well as in workers' skills development
TRAINING	Task- and firm-specific	Multi-tasking / Transversal

¹⁷² Osterman, P., “How Common is Workplace Transformation and Who Adopts it?”, in *ILR Review*, 1994, 47 (2), 186.

¹⁷³ Eurofound, *Innovative changes in European companies: Evidence from the European Company Survey*, 2017.

¹⁷⁴ Pini, P., “Dinamiche innovative, partecipazione e risultati d’impresa in un sistema locale di produzione”, in *Economia politica*, 2005, XXII (1): 3-23.

¹⁷⁵ For a more precised explanation of the expression *knowledge economy*, see Tronti, L., “Economia della conoscenza, innovazione organizzativa e partecipazione cognitiva: un nuovo modo di lavorare”, in *Economia & lavoro*, 2015, 3, 7-20.

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION	Management driven (i.e. some workers are selected to exercise managerial functions; workers' representatives are not involved in the issues and structures of workers' direct participation)	Industrial relations driven (i.e. workers take part in work teams, that are entitled to decide over operational and organisational issues; workers' representatives are involved in the issues and structures of workers' direct participation)
VARIABLE PAY SCHEME	Output-oriented (i.e. workers' bonus is linked to productivity indexes)	Input-oriented (i.e. workers' premium is linked to workers' behaviour and competences)

As regards the organisation of work, the A-firm is marked by a strong hierarchy and a centralisation of the decision-making process. Professional figures at the top of the ladder usually plan times and methods of work, and deploy mechanisms for the appraisal of individual performances. This organisation implies a fragmentation of work activities and routine tasks demanded to employees. On the contrary, in the J-firm the allocation of roles and responsibilities is far less rigid and the communication across different levels and units is frequent. This kind of organisations usually operate within a very competitive international market, where high levels of competitiveness are dependent upon the quality of personalised products and services rather than on the reduction of costs. Workers' participation within the production process turns out to be very important, since the J-firm is a learning organisation, which develops and evolves as long as it is able to acquire new knowledge. Subsequently, the J-firm is associated with HRM practices devoted to employees' involvement and skills development. The workforce is expected to be autonomous and responsible. As far as flexibility is concerned, the A-firm is characterised by a defensive flexibility, intended to solve quality or productivity-related problems via restructuring and re-engineering methods. The A-firm faces critical situations by further centralising power, enhancing control and investing in technological innovations rather than on developing new organisational models. Conversely, the J-firm employs an innovative flexibility, depending on the ability to prevent problems and actively response to the external challenges. Innovative flexibility requires versatile human resources with

problem-solving skills. The J-firm combines technological with organisational innovations in a view of successfully compete in the international market¹⁷⁶.

In the A-firm training activities are usually aimed at developing firm-specific skills, while the J-firm intends to empower workers and provide them with transversal and multi-tasking competences. With regard to employees' participation, the A-firm is marked by a management driven approach, which does not imply an effective decentralisation of the decision-making process, yet merely the selection of some workers entitled to exercise managerial functions. Trade unions are not involved in the issues and structures of employee direct participation. On the contrary, the J-firm adopts an industrial relations-driven approach to workers' participation. Notably, workers are involved in work teams, which are allowed to discuss and decide over operational and organisational issues. Plus, labour representatives take part in the structures of employee direct participation. Finally, in face of internal economic uncertainties, the A-firm tends to deploy output-oriented pay schemes, where bonuses are linked to productivity or efficiency indexes. Conversely, the J-firm tends to prefer input-oriented pay schemes, which associate bonuses to workers' skills and performance. Faced by external financial uncertainties, organisations may adopt output-oriented pay schemes, which link workers' bonuses to the financial performance of the firm¹⁷⁷.

Both lean production and learning organisations have been considered as setting the stage for the affirmation of HRM practices enhancing direct employee participation. Emphasis on this issue has been put also by authors interested in new technologies and their interplay with organisational contexts. Even though, as previously mentioned, it is not reasonable to claim that the Fordist paradigm, albeit seriously challenged by new competitive pressures and production methods, has been completely replaced in today workplaces¹⁷⁸, the perspective of *Industry 4.0* has led some authors to foresee a future

¹⁷⁶ Pini, P., "Dinamiche innovative, partecipazione e risultati d'impresa in un sistema locale di produzione", in *Economia politica*, 2005, XXII (1): 3-23.

¹⁷⁷ Pini, P., "Dinamiche innovative, partecipazione e risultati d'impresa in un sistema locale di produzione", in *Economia politica*, 2005, XXII (1): 3-23.

¹⁷⁸ Danford, A., Richardson, M., Stewart, P., Tailby, S., Upchurch, M., *Partnership and the High Performance Workplace: Work and Employment Relations in the Aerospace Industry*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005; Della Torre, E., *Imprese moderne, nuovi sistemi di lavoro e relazioni industriali*, Tesi di dottorato di ricerca, a.y. 2005/2006.

paradigmatic break with “Taylorist” work techniques¹⁷⁹. Indeed, *Industry 4.0* is expected «to yield a paradigm shift in the use of manufacturing technology to parallel what are considered the first three industrial revolutions that evolved due to mechanisation, electricity and automation»¹⁸⁰. Within the factory, *Industry 4.0* is visualised as a collection of devices, machines, production centres and products that communicate with each other, exchange information and control each other within a Cyber-Physical System. Externally, *Industry 4.0* is expected to place the factory at the core of a highly distributed but heterogeneous network of customers, retailers, suppliers and many stakeholders through high speed internet access and the capability to store huge amounts of data. Described as such, *Industry 4.0* is conceived as perfectly compatible with a lean environment. More interestingly, a lean environment is regarded as an enabler to implementing *Industry 4.0*, thus leveraging a step change in operational performance within a company. On the other hand, *Industry 4.0* is expected to provide the infrastructure that potentially enhances the lean/six sigma capability of an organisation¹⁸¹. As a result, *Industry 4.0* is not supposed to overcome lean production methods yet to strengthen and further develop them, hence accelerating the transition towards an inclusive, open and employee-driven workplace innovation. These arguments evidently underlie a socio-technical approach to innovation, that, developed in the 1970s, challenges the technocentric model¹⁸² and is based on the consideration that organisational results are not embedded in technical choices, yet that different socio-organisational alternatives can result from the introduction of new technologies and thus, in order to achieve optimal outcomes, technical and socio-organisational aspects need to

¹⁷⁹ See, among others, Davies, R., Coole, T., Smith, A., *Review of socio-technical considerations to ensure successful implementation of Industry 4.0*, Paper presented at the 27th International Conference on Flexible Automation and Intelligent Manufacturing, FAIM2017, 27-30 June 2017, Modena, Italy; Seghezzi, F., *La nuova grande trasformazione: Lavoro e persona nella quarta rivoluzione industriale*, ADAPT University Press, 2017.

¹⁸⁰ Davies, R., Coole, T., Smith, A., *Review of socio-technical considerations to ensure successful implementation of Industry 4.0*, Paper presented at the 27th International Conference on Flexible Automation and Intelligent Manufacturing, FAIM2017, 27-30 June 2017, Modena, Italy.

¹⁸¹ Davies, R., Coole, T., Smith, A., *Review of socio-technical considerations to ensure successful implementation of Industry 4.0*, Paper presented at the 27th International Conference on Flexible Automation and Intelligent Manufacturing, FAIM2017, 27-30 June 2017, Modena, Italy.

¹⁸² For more information on the technocentric model which influenced the first phases of the computerization of work, see Schneider, L., “La partecipazione al cambiamento tecnologico. Stati Uniti ed Europa a confronto”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1986, 11, 1-84.

be jointly designed¹⁸³. The issue of users' (and hence, employees') participation in the design process of technical applications emerged particularly with the development of information technology, which has been regarded as highly rigid once the project is completed, thus calling for more flexibility in the phase of design¹⁸⁴. Therefore, according to this body of literature, users' participation in the design of new applications is relevant to ensure both a good functioning of the system and optimal results in terms of work quality. Subsequently, also at the time of *Industry 4.0*, a "participated" design of technologies, organisation and work has been recently highly recommended¹⁸⁵.

Finally, it is possible to find support for employee participation also in the works of sociologists focused, more generally, on workplace innovation. The high road of workplace innovation has, accordingly, been identified as relying on an inclusive and open dialogue between both internal and external stakeholders in order to achieve win-win outcomes such as organisational performance, employment and quality of working life¹⁸⁶. Conceived as the product of complex social interactions occurring inside the organisation as well as between the organisation and its stakeholders (e.g. trade unions, universities, business organisations, local authorities etc.), workplace innovation is thus assumed to produce economic and social consequences that reach far beyond the boundaries of individual organisations and are thus crucial for regional development¹⁸⁷. This conceptualisation appears to be in line with the so-called Open Innovation paradigm, that stresses the relevance of continuous and purposive inflows and outflows of internal and external ideas to boost workplace innovation, thus rejecting the previous vertical integration model according to which internal R&D activities lead to internally developed products¹⁸⁸. Accordingly, «ideas that once germinated only in large companies now may

¹⁸³ Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., "Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche", in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122.

¹⁸⁴ Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., "Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche", in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122.

¹⁸⁵ Butera, F., "Industria 4.0 come progettazione partecipata di sistemi socio-tecnici in rete", in Cipriani, A., Gramolati, A., Mari, G. (eds.), *Il lavoro 4.0: la quarta rivoluzione industriale e le trasformazioni delle attività lavorative*, Firenze University Press, 2018, 81-116.

¹⁸⁶ Totterdill, P., Hague, J., "Workplace innovation as regional development", in Fricke, W., Totterdill, P. (eds.), *Action Research in Workplace Innovation and Regional Development* (Dialogues on Work and Innovation), John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2004, 43-79.

¹⁸⁷ Totterdill, P., Hague, J., "Workplace innovation as regional development", in Fricke, W., Totterdill, P. (eds.), *Action Research in Workplace Innovation and Regional Development* (Dialogues on Work and Innovation), John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2004, 43-79.

¹⁸⁸ Chesbrough, H., *Open Innovation: The new imperative for creating and profiting from technology*, Harvard Business School Publishing, 2003.

be growing in a variety of settings – from the individual inventor or high-tech start up in Silicon Valley, to the research facilities of academic institutions, to spin-offs from large, established firms»¹⁸⁹. That is why R&D organisations must identify and connect to external knowledge sources as a core process of innovation. By focusing on internal relationships, it is important to state that the recipe for workplace innovation has been described as lying in the continual dialogue between management and employees and in those factors enabling employees to make full use of their competencies and creative potential. In this sense, it is possible to speak about employee-driven innovation, which, by relying on employees' motivation, autonomy and new participative structures, is likely to influence also the representation of employees' interests at the workplace level as well as the strategies and actions of local and national trade unions¹⁹⁰.

Work practices emphasising employee voice

There are several employee participation practices identified in literature. Among them, I will deepen the characteristics of quality circles (dated the late 1970s and early 1980s), teamworking, improvement groups, more recent high-performance work practices. Elements of these practices will be also found in the experiences led by FIM-CISL of Brescia at company level, as described in Chapter 3.

According to Kochan *et al.*, employee involvement policies pursue two basic objectives: i) to increase the participation of individuals and informal work groups so as to foster employee motivation and commitment, while overcoming adversarial labour relations; and ii) to modify work organisation, by simplifying work rules, lowering costs and increasing flexibility¹⁹¹. Participation policies take several labels, such as quality of working life (QWL), quality circles (QCs), employee involvement (EI), labour-management participation teams (LMPT), and operating teams. Overall, the foundations of these processes lie in the proposition «that increased employee involvement in task-related decisions and greater collaboration between workers and managers can help both

¹⁸⁹ Chesbrough, H., “Open Innovation: A New Paradigm for Understanding Industrial Innovation”, in Chesbrough, H., Vanhaverbeke, W., West, J. (eds.), *Open Innovation: Researching a New Paradigm*, Oxford University Press, 2006, 3.

¹⁹⁰ Sjø Rocha, R., “Shop stewards as coordinators of employee-driven innovation: implications for trade unions”, in *ETUI Transfer*, 2010, 16 (2): 185-196; Totterdill, P., Exton, R., “Trade unions as knowledgeable participants in workplace innovation”, in *Strategic Direction*, 2014, 30 (9): 31-34.

¹⁹¹ Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

groups»¹⁹². Among the various forms of QWL, QCs have been particularly assessed by literature. Detailed information on QCs can be found in the analysis of Kochan *et al.* on QWL processes at General Motors in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Data from fifty plants in two divisions of General Motors reveal that at the time of the research, QCs were primarily focused on improving the communication between workers and supervisors as regards housekeeping issues such as lighting or ventilation, and workplace production problems. QCs used to meet voluntarily for approximately one hour per week on paid time¹⁹³. Conversely, in the survey conducted by Verma and McKersie in a large unionised manufacturing plant in the 1980s, QCs were organised as follows. A circle started at the request of a line manager. After the manager's request was received, QC staff informed all the employees about the functioning of the circle. QC members were either volunteers or selected by lottery. Each circle contained about 10-12 members. Union shop stewards were allowed to join the circles. Since the union was asked to review the charter of the QC programme so that it did not infringe on the traditional role of the union, QCs did not address issues such as wages, fringe benefits, working time, grievances, hiring, firing, etc. Circles met once a week for an hour on paid time. The supervisor was considered as the leader of a circle¹⁹⁴. As regards, QWL and QCs, it's important to specify that, with specific regard to the telecommunication sector, their impact on workers' participation has been regarded as weaker compared to the expectations; particularly, they did not allow workers to have a concrete role in decision making processes¹⁹⁵.

Teamworking is another central component of the new organisational models, as identified by literature. There are five features that can be attributed to teamworking, according to Ortiz: i) horizontal flexibility, that is the ability of workers to perform all the tasks within the team; ii) vertical flexibility, which is the ability to perform indirect tasks, such as maintenance, cleaning up the area, etc.; iii) a "continuous improvement process", implying workers' capacity of solving problems in the team and suggesting

¹⁹² Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986, 148.

¹⁹³ Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

¹⁹⁴ Verma, A., McKersie, R. B., "Employee involvement: The implications for noninvolvement by unions", in *ILR Review*, 1987, 40 (4): 556-568.

¹⁹⁵ Schneider, L., "La partecipazione al cambiamento tecnologico. Stati Uniti ed Europa a confronto", in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1986, 11, 1-84.

improvements; iv) collective responsibility for the workload and quality standard assigned to the team; v) an ideological change, which is conceived as a precondition for the abovementioned elements¹⁹⁶. Ahlstrand and Sederblad describe the production system in Scania in the 2000s. As reported by the Authors, the teams in Scania are called “improvement groups”, due to their relevance for the “continuous improvement” strategy in the company. The improvement group size varies from three up to twenty workers, although they are generally composed of ten members. The groups are led by a “group coordinator”. Other roles in the teams focus respectively on customer issues, health and safety and waste elimination. Conversely, the so-called “Andon” role is aimed at solving problems coming up on the production line. The teams in the Scania Production System are described as “self-managing teams”. The next level in the organisation is characterised by departments, which are led by production leaders, responsible for two to four improvement groups. Up the ladder, there are six production managers and on the top, two factory managers. In every improvement group, meetings are held weekly and focused on suggestions of improvement. If the suggestion is evaluated as successful, it is integrated as a new standardised work method. “Steering meetings” take place every day at the departments, the production units and the factory level. Plus, all the production leaders and the factory manager meet every Monday. The objective is to ensure that problems and suggestions of improvement are well known in each factory¹⁹⁷. Finally, it is worth noting that the development of the Scania Production System was associated in 2003 with a comprehensive training programme for the first line managers. By and large, the team has been regarded as the micro-organisational structure in lean production systems. However, the intensity in the implementation of teamwork and the powers delegated to teams usually vary across workplaces; teams can be more or less numerous, voluntarily-based or imposed; team leaders can be elected or chosen by management; members can more or less frequently change their role in teams; etc.¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁶ Ortiz, L., “Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain”, in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57.

¹⁹⁷ Ahlstrand, R., Sederblad, P., “Teams, continuous improvement, the unions and conditional trust in the company Scania”, Paper to the 16th International Workshop on Team working, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, September 6-7, 2012, available at: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/15296> (accessed 18 June 2018).

¹⁹⁸ Ponzellini, A. M., “Organizzazione del lavoro e relazioni industriali. Una rassegna degli studi degli ultimi 20 anni in Italia”, in *Economia & lavoro*, 2017, 1, 147-164.

A more recent concept, that can be found in literature, is that of High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs). Della Torre reviews the literature on this topic and finds out that it lacks a unique definition¹⁹⁹. After clarifying conceptual differences between some related terms, such as High Commitment Model (HCM), High Involving Management (HIM) and High Performance Work System (HPWS), the Author specifies that the introduction of an HPWS has been related to the progressive awareness of the positive link between workers' involvement and organisational performance. Notably, this effect has been attributed to the combination of HCM and Total Quality Management. However, Della Torre clarifies that the positive relationship between HPWPs and economic performance has also been refuted by some empirical studies. Overall, Della Torre considers HPWPs as aimed at increasing workers' commitment in a view of achieving the objectives of the organisation²⁰⁰. Conversely, according to Pohler and Luchak, HPWPs are designed to encourage the individual proactive expression of ideas directly from employees²⁰¹. However, the Authors point out that these practices have been shown to lead to work intensification and burnout. Despite some inconsistent results²⁰², there is a consensus among scholars on the positive relationship between HPWPs and organisational competitiveness provided that they are effectively implemented²⁰³. Some studies suggest that as much as 20/40% of productivity differences between firms may be attributed to differences in HR practices²⁰⁴. Pursuant to Della Torre, it is quite hard to list specific practices that can be defined as "high performance", due to the fact they are likely to vary following the various characteristics of firms. Conversely, it is possible to identify some criteria that these practices have in common. Della Torre affirms that there are three main dimensions along which HPWPs are deployed: i) ways of organisation of operational activities; ii) ways of coordination of work organisation; iii) HRM practices. As regards the first dimension, HPWPs may involve autonomous or semi-autonomous

¹⁹⁹ Della Torre, E., *Imprese moderne, nuovi sistemi di lavoro e relazioni industriali*, Tesi di dottorato di ricerca, a.y. 2005/2006.

²⁰⁰ Della Torre, E., "High Performance Work Practices e caratteristiche delle imprese innovative", in *Economia Politica*, 2009, XXVI (2): 315-352.

²⁰¹ Pohler, D. M., Luchak, A. A., "Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice: The impact of unions and high-involvement work practices on work outcomes", in *ILR Review*, 2014, 67 (4): 1063-1094.

²⁰² Cappelli, P., Neumark, D., "Do "High-Performance" work practices improve establishment-level outcomes?", in *ILR Review*, 2001, 54 (4): 737-775.

²⁰³ Gill, C., "Union impact on the effective adoption of High Performance Work Practices", in *Human Resource Management Review*, 2009, 19 (1): 39-50.

²⁰⁴ Tamkin, P., *High Performance Work Practices*, Institute for Employment Studies, 2004, 1.

work teams, job rotation and multi-skilling. As far as the second dimension is concerned, HPWPs may entail non-hierarchical decision-making process, efficient information flows, frequent interactions between workers and management, and schemes for performance appraisal. Finally, HPWPs may be deployed in organisations characterised by investments in human capital and workers' training, performance-related pay schemes, non-economic incentives such as career development, work-life balance, job security, etc., and positive industrial relations, implying the labour-management cooperation in the design and implementation of new labour practices²⁰⁵. Similarly, Tamkin affirms that HPWPs tend to be ascribed to a broader managerial approach emphasising high quality goods and services, as well as an engaged and empowered workforce. HPWPs are linked to practices related to training and skills, participation, empowerment, and communication and compensation. HPWPs are described as practices that contribute to High-Performance Work Organisations (HPWOs), where people work in teams with greater autonomy, based on higher levels of trust and communication²⁰⁶. Finally, Addison contends that what constitutes high-performance work practices is a focus on employee involvement. Therefore, Total Quality Management programmes, quality circles, functional flexibility, and teamwork are all core elements of HPWPs²⁰⁷.

To sum up, it can be argued that some factors, such as intensified international competition, the saturation of traditional, mass markets and the introduction of advanced technology, have intensified pressures on management to create a more skilled and autonomous workforce²⁰⁸. Initiated in the 1980s, the discourse on the "new" forms of work organisation has acquired a positive value. Indeed, flexible work practices have been promoted as a good not only for management but also for employees who enjoy a greater sense of job satisfaction. More specifically, initiatives like quality circles and semi-autonomous work teams have been said to offer employees greater autonomy, responsibility and variety in their work tasks. By and large, it has been contended that

²⁰⁵ Della Torre, E., *Imprese moderne, nuovi sistemi di lavoro e relazioni industriali*, Tesi di dottorato di ricerca, a.y. 2005/2006.

²⁰⁶ Tamkin, P., *High Performance Work Practices*, Institute for Employment Studies, 2004.

²⁰⁷ Addison, J. T., "The determinants of firm performance: unions, works councils, and employee involvement / high-performance work practices", in *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 2005, 52 (3): 406-450.

²⁰⁸ Geary, J. F., "New Forms of Work Organization and Employee Involvement in Two Case Study Sites: Plural, Mixed and Protean", in *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 1993, 14 (4): 511-534.

new forms of work organisation contribute to creating, in Fox's words, «a high-trust dynamic»²⁰⁹. However, some scholars have been less enthusiastic about the significance and nature of change. As reported by Geary, Edwards contends that despite management's efforts to adopt more flexible work practices, employees do not identify any more closely with managerial goals than they did in the past²¹⁰. Furthermore, according to Kelly and Kelly, the "them and us" dichotomy is stubbornly persistent in workers' view of management²¹¹. This condition can be due to the fact that workers are not involved in the first steps of the adoption of these new practices. Plus, they tend to mistrust management's intentions. Interestingly, Geary points out that both employees' resistance to be flexible and accept new responsibilities and management inability (or unwillingness) to depart from control-based managerial practices to fully adopt an employee involvement approach, may cause a continuity in traditional work organisation practices. Therefore, the adoption of new participative forms of work organisation may not result in any significant upskilling or radical reorganisation in the flexibility and division of labour²¹². Other authors emphasise the risk of work intensification and greater pressure on employees following the adoption of these new work organisation practices²¹³. Focusing on the "dark-side" of lean production, Harrison highlights that lean firms tend to embrace production networks in which much of the work is conducted outside the corporate walls by subcontractors and suppliers²¹⁴. This phenomenon conceals a dark-side, to the extent that these networks allow large corporations to transform high-wage, full-time, good-benefits workers employed by the core firms into low-wage, part-time, no-benefits workers employed by their subcontractors. In other words, the Author sheds light on a dual labour market and greater inequalities deriving from networked lean production.

²⁰⁹ Fox, A., *Beyond Contract: Work, Power and Trust Relations*, London: Faber and Faber, 1974.

²¹⁰ Geary, J. F., "New Forms of Work Organization and Employee Involvement in Two Case Study Sites: Plural, Mixed and Protean", in *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 1993, 14 (4): 511-534.

²¹¹ Kelly, J., Kelly, C., "'Them and Us': Social Psychology and 'The New Industrial Relations'", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1991, 29 (1): 25-48.

²¹² Geary, J. F., "New Forms of Work Organization and Employee Involvement in Two Case Study Sites: Plural, Mixed and Protean", in *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 1993, 14 (4): 511-534.

²¹³ See, among others: Dawson, P., Webb, J., "New Production Arrangements: The Total Flexible Cage?", in *Work, Employment and Society*, 3 (2): 221-238; Turnbull, P. J., "The limits to Japanisation: 'Just-in-Time', Labour Relations and the UK Automotive Industry", in *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 3 (1): 7-20.

²¹⁴ Harrison, B., *Lean and Mean: The Changing Landscape of Corporate Power in the Age of Flexibility*, New York: BasicBooks, 1994.

As we can see, new organisational models have engendered a fruitful and interdisciplinary debate. Listing the essential features of the vast range of new work practices is not an easy task, since they tend to be adapted to the various characteristics of the establishments in which they are deployed. However, it has been possible to identify some common dimensions, which allow to highlight the current trajectory of change in work organisation. Although some commentators agree on the positive link between new organisational models and firms' economic performance, other lecturers have proved the inconsistency of this relationship. Moreover, despite some optimistic views of flexible production networks, it has been argued that lean firms can be mean, to the extent that they engender a peripheral, low-wage and part-time workforce, thus contributing to greater inequalities. In any case, lean methods do not seem to be bound to the extinction as they can be viewed, especially by supporters of a socio-technical approach, as enablers for *Industry 4.0* implementation, which in turn entails the potential to realise the extended lean enterprise²¹⁵.

Union attitudes and behaviour towards employee participation practices

After reviewing some of the organisational models that have been developed over the last decades, it would be important, for the purposes of this research, to deepen the orientation of trade unions towards firms' restructuring and reorganisation of work and the role they may play in the design and implementation of these new practices.

A quite positive attitude towards lean production and teamworking emerge from the articles of Johansson *et al.*, Ortiz, and Ahlstrand and Sederblad. Johansson *et al.* and Ahlstrand and Sederblad concentrate on Swedish unions. However, while the former article tells about the "good work" concept coined by the metalworkers' organisation, IF Metall, and its deployment at the times of affirmation of lean production, the second contribution describes the role played by the same organisation in legitimating teamwork in the Scania company. Similarly, Ortiz analyses union response to teamwork in Opel Spain. In addition, he attempts to identify some determinants, related to ideological and institutional factors as well as to power relations, of union positive attitude.

²¹⁵ Davies, R., Coole, T., Smith, A., *Review of socio-technical considerations to ensure successful implementation of Industry 4.0*, Paper presented at the 27th International Conference on Flexible Automation and Intelligent Manufacturing, FAIM2017, 27-30 June 2017, Modena, Italy.

More specifically, Johansson *et al.* tell about the developments over 50 years in the interaction between the rise and changing nature of lean production in Sweden and the union strategy²¹⁶. They observe that the Swedish trade union movement has usually preferred cooperation over confrontation. Indeed, since the affirmation of socio-technical experiments in work organisation in the 1960s, the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) started to develop proposals in support of more autonomous work groups at the enterprise level. Notably, it attempted to implement industrial democracy in cooperation with the Swedish Employer Association (SAF). Plus, since initial cooperation experiments did not work as smoothly as originally thought, LO carried out a lobbying action towards the Social Democratic Party and achieved the adoption of a new Codetermination Act in 1974. In the 1980s, the Swedish Metal Workers' Unions (Metall), which would merge with Industrifacket and become IF Metall in 2006, started to promote its concept of "good work". Founded around nine main principles (i.e. job security; a fair share of production earnings; co-determination in the company; a work organisation for cooperation; professional know-how in all work; training as a part of work; working hours based on social demands; equality at the work place; and a working environment without risks to health and safety), "good work" was evidently aimed at expanding the perspective of socio-technology from the workplace to the labour market. Few years later, in 1991, LO presented a report entitled *Developmental Work*, where further expanded the metal union's concept to working life and society. «The basis for this strategy was the recognition of new demands from union members in a changing workforce, expressed in terms of a transition from wages and social security to more existential expectations of life, taking the presence of a welfare society for granted»²¹⁷. Subsequently, four principles were designed to support social justice in working life: i) the elimination of class society, via the dismantlement of hierarchy in production; ii) the right to education, integrity and good health; iii) organising work in a way that it can contribute to more equal work tasks and wages between blue- and white-collar workers, and between men and women; iv) a fair distribution of financial earnings and capital at the national level. During the late 1980s, Sweden came to face serious issues such as low

²¹⁶ Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., "If you can't beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3): 445-460.

²¹⁷ Johansson, J., Abrahamsson, L., Johansson, S., "If you can't beat them, join them? The Swedish trade union movement and lean production", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2013, 55 (3), 447.

productivity and quality problems. The new solutions, mainly focusing on leadership and organisation, corresponded with trade union demands from the 1970s and early 1980s. In other words, Swedish working life curiously met a new industrial discourse, that is often called lean production. Lean production's popularity has risen and fallen since the early 1990s in Sweden, but over the last years the concept has experienced a renaissance. Although the effects of lean production have been often described as something good (i.e. coinciding with better quality and more time for innovation and development; improvements to the environment thanks to lower energy and material consumption), some negative tendencies have been visible too: burned-out personnel, no opportunities for learning and autonomy, increased risk of repetitive strain injuries, etc. Therefore, even though Swedish trade unions have a reputation for being open to technological and organisational change, the Authors observe that the relationship with lean production has been ambivalent, moving from an initial resistance to a welcoming. Notably, the unions have acknowledged that the implementation of lean production requires a balance between fulfilling demands from members (e.g. job security, a healthy and safe work environment, etc.) and employers (e.g. a competitive production system). That is why, they have tried to participate in the development process of lean production models. In line with the need to secure both good working conditions and high productivity, IF Metall introduced in 2008 the concept of "sustainable work". This concept can be reasonably conceived as an attempt to further improve the previous "good work" strategy, by focusing on work organisation as a means to achieve sustainable working conditions in competitive companies. «Sustainable work does not challenge lean production; rather, it puts limits on how far rationalisation strategies are allowed to affect the work environment». The main objective of the trade union is ensuring that a modified form of lean production (i.e. focused on individual's learning, development of competences and abilities, etc.) will be established in companies and that this will increase workers' employability. Other positive experiences that should not be overlooked come from another Scandinavian country, Norway, where in the late 1960s, unions acknowledged the failure of first QWL practices in fostering labour-management cooperation in the field of technological innovation and started to design their own strategy to innovation, also with the support of some experts in information technology. Shortly thereafter, Norwegian unions launched programmes for their own training and in the mid-1970s

were able to sign first “Technology Agreements”, that put emphasis on work organisation and employees’ participation²¹⁸.

An empirical study referring to lean production and teamwork in Sweden is described and analysed by Ahlstrand and Sederblad, and located in the truck producing company Scania²¹⁹. The Authors specify that the Scania Production System (SPS) is deployed in collaboration with Toyota. It was firstly introduced in the early 2000s. SPS includes elements from socio-technical models, such as the attention to quality, delivery and autonomy. Therefore, it was accompanied by a comprehensive training programme for the first line managers in 2003 and the introduction of the “Andon” (i.e. an individual provided with the capacity of immediately acting and solving problems, potentially arisen from the production lines) role in the work teams in 2007. The improvement groups are thus a central component of SPS. When SPS was adopted, the company was experiencing severe financial pressures and had a Tayloristic-type organisation. Swedish unions accepted the new system, by interpreting it as a way to boost the company’s competitiveness. Plus, they played a crucial role in implementing their “good work” concept, thus protecting workers from too hard pressures and intensification at work. Furthermore, it is worth specifying that the metalworkers’ organisation, IF Metall, and the company, signed important collective agreements which were aimed at addressing economic fluctuations. Notably, the so-called Flexibility Agreement ensured to permanently employed blue-collar workers a stronger position than before, thanks to a maximum notice period of 12 months. Conversely, it was set forth that temporary workers could only be employed for periods of maximum of six months and could not exceed 20% of the personnel in the assembly line and 10% of the “remaining personnel”. Importantly, in 2009, the company was facing another serious crisis and had to negotiate with the trade union to achieve the necessary savings. The company and IF Metall signed an agreement on a four-day work week at 90% of original wages. The agreement did not involve dismissals. However, employees had to accept curtailments in the bonus system and a delay in the payment of their vacation supplement for 2010. In addition, the agreement

²¹⁸ Schneider, L., “La partecipazione al cambiamento tecnologico. Stati Uniti ed Europa a confronto”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1986, 11, 1-84.

²¹⁹ Ahlstrand, R., Sederblad, P., “Teams, continuous improvement, the unions and conditional trust in the company Scania”, Paper to the 16th International Workshop on Team working, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, September 6 –7, 2012, available at: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/15296> (accessed 18 June 2018).

established that the competence development and the education programmes, initially carried out by Scania, had to continue. Given this union attitude and labour-management agreements, the Authors stress the relevance of the legitimating role played by unions, which ensured conditional trust between the management and the unions.

Like Ahlstrand and Sederblad, Ortiz examines union response to teamwork. However, his case study refers to Opel Spain in the 1990s²²⁰. The Author writes that, in spite of the negative result of the workers' ballot, unions leaders from both the Union General de Trabajadores (UGT) and Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) did not only accept but even actively cooperated in the introduction of teamwork. Plus, even though the Spanish system of industrial relations entails an acute rivalry between unions and albeit the initial CCOO's resistance, both unions ended up sharing common views on teamwork. The Author identifies three basic sources of explanations of the positive unions' response to teamwork at Opel Spain: unions' awareness of the disadvantages of teamwork and the subsequent ability to set guarantees against these dangers in an agreement with the company; unions' positive view on teamwork; the contribution of some factors extrinsic to teamwork. More specifically, Spanish unions were concerned about a possible fall in the level of employment after the introduction of teamwork, the potential intensification of work, the marginalisation of unions at the shopfloor notably following the appointment of a team leader able to solve all workers' problems, and the generation of productivity increases not redistributed to workers. Given the abovementioned concerns, unions were able to obtain some guarantees in the agreement with the company. Notably, teamwork would have been introduced on an experimental basis for one year, and workers would join the experiment only voluntary. Plus, it was agreed that the team leader had to be elected by the team members from three candidates selected by the foreman, and the members were entitled to dismiss her/him. Unions would have taken part in and closely monitor the introduction of teamwork. The members of the work committees were entitled to attend team meetings. Finally, a steering committee comprising management and unions was established to monitor the process. A second source of explanation of unions' response to teamwork at Opel Spain was represented by the unions' positive view on this organisational method. More precisely, unions thought that teamwork could

²²⁰ Ortiz, L., "Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1): 42-57.

contribute to the improvement of health and safety at work, greater workers' autonomy and increase in information available to both workers and unions, and that job rotation would have engendered workers' promotion and an increase in their wage. As mentioned before, some factors extrinsic to teamwork can be considered as responsible for Spanish unions' positive response to teamwork. In this regard, it is important to specify that the workers' attitude to teamwork, as perceived by the union leaders, did not represent a major factor in shaping the unions' response to teamwork. Indeed, workers voted against the introduction of teamwork in a ballot convened at the company. Conversely, unions used to see teamwork as something inevitable due to the competitive pressures in the automobile sector worldwide. It was not possible to contrast such a major change; trying to do so would have provoked the defeat of unions. Unions «did not want to be left out of a change they considered so important»²²¹. Ideology is identified as an important factor explaining unions' attitude. Indeed, the UGT, as a social-democrat union, is depicted by the Author as traditionally more inclined to share the objectives the company was pursuing with teamwork. Moreover, it is important to mention that UGT leaders might have influenced the change in CCOO's attitude to teamwork, thus permitting their subsequent positive response to change. Plus, the modification in CCOO's attitude might be ascribed also to power relations and political changes inside the workplace branch. Furthermore, Spanish unions foresaw a potential "enrichment of collective bargaining" following the introduction of teamwork. Finally, the Author argues that «union organisational strength, legal support in union activity at the workplace and the institutional definition of union power on the shopfloor»²²² are dimensions which may explain differences in national union responses to teamwork and the positive attitude of UGT and CCOO.

A quite different union orientation emerges from the famous volume edited by Kochan *et al.*, *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*. Kochan *et al.* dedicate one chapter to the examination of the changes introduced jointly by labour and management to respond to pressures on unionised workplaces as a result of innovations and lower costs

²²¹ Ortiz, L., "Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1), 52.

²²² Ortiz, L., "Union response to teamwork: The case of Opel Spain", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1997, 29 (1), 54.

found in many non-union workplace²²³. Notably, the Authors concentrate on Quality of Working Life (QWL), a broad label encompassing practices such as quality circles, employee involvement, labour-management participation teams and operating teams. According to the Authors, in the post-New Deal period, the introduction of these new systems of worker participation often met with resistance from union leaders and labour relations managers. Basically, this resistance was due to the challenge to the «basic assumptions of the traditional system of job-control unionism and workplace organisation»²²⁴ arisen from the earliest experiences of QWL programmes. More specifically, the Authors ascribe union leaders' and industrial relations professionals' scepticism to the different foci of QWL and collective bargaining, which mirror differences in underlying assumptions about the nature of the employment relationship. In other words, whereas collective bargaining focuses on the management of conflicts over individual and group rights and the assessment of the application of work rules, QWL is depicted as stressing the values of individual participation, cooperation, problem solving, and the building of trust through informal processes. Kochan *et al.* report that due to these differences, many unionists feared that QWL practices would have undermined the role of collective voice and the sanctity of the collective agreement. These fears were fostered by the fact that the earliest experiences of QWL had been introduced by American managers as a union-avoidance strategy. However, the Authors illustrate an interesting example of the expansion of QWL-type programmes, that took place in the American auto industry. In this sector, the experimentation of worker participation practices started in the late 1960s, notably to respond to increased absenteeism and a growth in grievance rates. Conversely, in the late 1970s and early 1980s QWL processes in the American auto industry expanded, since they started to be seen as drivers for organisational effectiveness, thus as potential solutions to external competitive pressures. Interestingly, the Authors observe that the success of QWL programmes in terms of organisational performance and workers' wellbeing were dependent upon the ability of companies to reinforce and sustain high levels of trust as well as to include major changes in work rules and work organisation. To achieve these changes, it became important to

²²³ Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

²²⁴ Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986, 148.

ensure tangible improvements to all parties (i.e. management, workers, union). That is why the expansion of worker participation programmes and the introduction of new forms of work organisation was often accompanied by changes in company-level collective agreements, that entailed increased job security and new pay outcomes. Moreover, Kochan *et al.* emphasise that the expansion of shop-floor worker participation was also fostered by increased worker and union involvement in strategic issues. This involvement was crucial as it assured the union that worker participation programmes did not represent attempts to prevent union representation; plus, it allowed management to rely on a convinced workforce. Finally, it is argued that the labour involvement in the strategic level of decision making was possible only in cases where unions were relatively strong. Ironically then the Authors conclude that non-union firms and those with weak unions are unlikely to develop or sustain this full and successful form of worker participation²²⁵.

By focusing on seven Italian metalworking companies, Signoretti comes to similar conclusions, by observing that trade unions are relevant to ensure workers' consensus towards the implementation of new organisational processes. However, unlike Kochan *et al.*, Signoretti points out that in the analysed companies, unions' involvement in strategic decision-making is not necessary to ensure a successful implementation of new organisational practices; to achieve this outcome, adequate information and consultation of trade union representatives are sufficient²²⁶.

By and large, with specific reference to the Italian context, some recent studies shed light on the fact that innovative organisational practices are not fully integrated in collective bargaining and that the role of unions in the promotion, regulation and management of these processes is still marginal. The reasons behind this condition can be ascribed to the lack of institutions supporting participatory industrial relations, and a resistance of a monistic culture in the management of firms and a defensive managerial approach

²²⁵ Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986, 177.

²²⁶ Signoretti, A., "Formazione, partecipazione diretta e ruolo del sindacato nell'implementazione della produzione snella", in *Studi Organizzativi*, 2017, 1, 40-66.

towards trade union representation, even though labour-management collaboration does take place in issues such as working time flexibility and work-life balance²²⁷.

An attempt to conceptualise local union responses to management-led work reorganisation is provided by Frost²²⁸. In 2001, after examining the experiences of three local unions engaged in workplace restructuring in the North American steel industry (especially towards post-Fordist models of work organisation), Frost observes the obsolescence of the simple “militant” – “cooperative” dichotomy and suggests a reconceptualisation of local union responses to management-led workplace restructuring. Frost concludes that differences in the substance of the negotiations on the workplace restructuring and in the depth of the involvement by the local unions and their members mirror two different union responses to management-led change in the workplace. The “Interventionist” response implies unions entering into negotiations with management at an early stage and their involvement in the design and implementation of new forms of work organisation. Conversely, the “Pragmatic” approach entails management making workplace-related decisions and unions negotiating with managers only as regards the implications of those decisions. Plus, the evidence presented in the Frost’s paper suggests that the “Pragmatic” response produces less optimal outcomes than those produced by the “Interventionist” approach. Moreover, Frost argues that other local union responses to workplace restructuring may be found in industrial relations literature. The “Apathetic” response is characterised by a failure of a local union to negotiate with management over workplace-related changes. This attitude may be due to either the perception that these changes do not affect members’ interests, or the conviction that there are no alternatives but to accept management’s proposal. By contrast, the “Obstructionist” response consists of the refusal of the local union to accept management-initiated workplace change. This attitude is explained by the union’s desire to retain the power and the benefits that the status quo provides to its members. Therefore, in these circumstances either management is forced to retract its proposal, or the union is forced to convene a strike.

²²⁷ Ponzellini, A. M., “Organizzazione del lavoro e relazioni industriali. Una rassegna degli studi degli ultimi 20 anni in Italia”, in *Economia & lavoro*, 2017, 1, 147-164; Signoretti, A., “Quale ruolo per il sindacato nell’innovazione organizzativa?”, in *Note di ricerca*, 2016, 4.

²²⁸ Frost, A. C., “Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564.

An interesting study is conducted by Fenwick and Olson, who examine support for worker participation among union and non-union workers using data from the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey in the US. The Authors show the validity of the “underdog” principle, thus proving that support for worker participation programmes is higher among those workers provided with fewest organisational and personal resources (e.g. education, age, etc.), expressing dissatisfaction with extrinsic rewards (i.e. pay, job security, benefits), and working in large plants. This explanation is valuable among both union and non-union members. However, union members tend to find their support for worker participation also on subjective evaluations of their work (i.e. meaningfulness or skill use, autonomy), coherently with the “job enlargement” perspective. These findings lead to some considerations concerning support for worker participation among union members. Firstly, the fact that unlike non-union members, non-work statuses and experiences barely affect union members’ attitude toward worker participation can be explained by the role of union membership in cutting across these external differences and creating common goals and interests among the workforce. Secondly, participation has a broader appeal among union members rather than among non-union members. This appeal can be ascribed not only to extrinsic grievances but also to subjective perceptions about work. Particularly, the interest in participation by union members with autonomy is interpreted in this study as the result of the fact that they tend to perceive their autonomy as resulting from collective bargaining. Therefore, they are likely to look to collective efforts to extend their control over their jobs. This attitude is not reported among union members with autonomy. To conclude, the Authors highlight the importance to consider the role of unions in fostering workers’ support for participation²²⁹.

Looking more closely at the reasons behind union response, both Gill and Pulignano and Stewart emphasise the role of labour-management relationships. However, while Gill stresses the impact of union power, Pulignano and Stewart emphasise the contribution of firms’ structural features.

More specifically, after reviewing the literature on this topic, Gill concludes that unions can remove existing barriers to the effective adoption of HPWPs by overcoming

²²⁹ Fenwick, R., Olson, J., “Support for worker participation: attitudes among union and non-union workers”, in *American Sociological Review*, 1986, 51 (4): 505-522.

management and employee resistance, thus contributing to greater organisational performance²³⁰. Independent union voice can encourage management to adopt a long-term, organisation-wide perspective, which is a pre-condition for a successful implementation of HPWPs. Plus, union voice is expected to prevent layoffs and favour a stable workforce, which is suited to labour-management cooperation in adopting HPWPs. Finally, unions can foster employee trust and commitment to management practices. Nevertheless, the Author specifies that the quality of industrial relations mediates the impact that unions have on the effective adoption of HPWPs, thus supporting Freeman and Medoff's view that «unionism per se is neither a plus nor a minus to productivity: what matters is how unions and management interact at the organisation»²³¹. Indeed, cooperative industrial relations are seen as more likely to facilitate the effective adoption of HPWPs, by encouraging management responsiveness to independent union voice as well as union commitment to management agendas. Moreover, union power is considered as a further element, which can moderate unions' impact on the adoption of HPWPs, by increasing either the adversarial or the cooperative nature of industrial relations. Therefore, it becomes important that management is responsive to independent voice and that strong unions choose a partnership approach to their relationships with management. Indeed, according to the Author, «the withdrawal of many unions to the pluralist tradition has meant that employees are more vulnerable to exploitation and less likely to share in the gains of effective HPWP adoption»²³².

Pulignano and Stewart explore the reasons behind local unions' strategic responses to company restructuring in the Netherlands, Italy and Ireland²³³. Unlike Frost, the Authors identify two distinct types of union strategies, that might be ascribed to the traditional “militant” – “cooperative” dichotomy: confrontation based on “job protection” and cooperation based on “job transition” (i.e. implying labour-management negotiations over redundancies but also requalification measures and retraining programmes that support employment transitions). Interestingly, it is argued that different patterns of

²³⁰ Gill, C., “Union impact on the effective adoption of High Performance Work Practices”, in *Human Resource Management Review*, 2009, 19 (1): 39-50.

²³¹ Freeman, R. B., Medoff, R., *What Do Unions Do?*, New York: Basic Books, 1984, 179.

²³² Gill, C., “Union impact on the effective adoption of High Performance Work Practices”, in *Human Resource Management Review*, 2009, 19 (1), 48.

²³³ Pulignano, V., Stewart, P., “Firm-level restructuring and union strategies in Europe: local union responses in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands”, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2013, 27 (5): 842-859.

workplace labour-management relations affect local union's responses to change. However, their influence is mediated by the firm's structural features. As a consequence, both types of union strategies (confrontational job protection and cooperative job transitions) should be interpreted as ways of dealing with the social effects associated with company restructuring. In particular, it is highlighted that when firm restructuring is driven by a radical cost-cutting agenda due to financial difficulties and labour-management relationships are traditionally adversarial, unions tend to oppose by protecting jobs. This attitude is more likely in firms dominated by a relatively young workforce. By contrast, a moderate management strategy of rationalisation, associated with a mature workforce and cooperative industrial relations, is likely to lead to union collaborative response of job transition.

Interestingly then, by focusing on the Italian context, Signoretti underlines the importance of cultural dimension and institutional support for participatory industrial relations as elements affecting the role of unions in organisational innovation²³⁴.

Finally, an important contribution concerning not only union attitude towards work organisation but also its effects on collective bargaining is provided by the 1977 article of Schlesinger and Walton. The Authors study work restructuring projects in eight US firms²³⁵. «The vehicle used for dealing with work restructuring issues in each situation was a joint labour-management committee separated and distinct from the bargaining committees. These committees had an equal number of management and union representatives. Management members were chosen by top management, and union members either were appointed by the leadership or elected by the membership»²³⁶. The Authors observe participants in the joint work restructuring efforts and report their main perceptions. With specific regard to local unions and union stewards, it is worth mentioning that many union officials were wary of management's true intentions and that union stewards, not unlike supervisors, feared that work restructuring could compromise their role. Schlesinger and Walton looked also at the impact of work restructuring on

²³⁴ Signoretti, A., "Quale ruolo per il sindacato nell'innovazione organizzativa?", in *Note di ricerca*, 2016, 4.

²³⁵ Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., "The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining", in *Monthly Labor Review*, 1977, 100 (4): 52-55.

²³⁶ Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., "The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining", in *Monthly Labor Review*, 1977, 100 (4), 52.

collective bargaining. First of all, they observe that the deployment of joint committees at the site level followed by bargaining committees at the top level was not unusual and that this procedure allowed the involvement of more people «in an open and spontaneous exploration of issues without preventing the parties from addressing the issues in a controlled and channelled decision-making process at a later point in time»²³⁷. However, such separation was not always achievable in practice. Therefore, work restructuring proved to affect collective bargaining in different ways. To describe the impact on collective bargaining, the Authors rely heavily on the framework designed by Walton and McKersie in 1965²³⁸. Firstly, it increased the ratio of problem solving to bargaining activity, which in turn placed a higher premium on structuring attitudes of mutual trust and respect. Secondly, work restructuring entailed problems for union leaders in seeking rank-and-file consensus for the agreements they conclude with management. Thirdly, it is contended that work restructuring tended to promote “participatory democracy” in the workplace. Indeed, it engendered a trend towards workers’ direct involvement in decision-making in small units within the same larger facility. This process provided workers with increased autonomy to determine what was best for them and brought about greater diversity among units and individuals, thus overcoming the concept that equity could only be achieved through uniformity. «Whereas, historically, work has tended to be progressively deskilled to accommodate some engineering conception of the “lowest common denominator” of human skills and motivation, the trend is being reversed in many cases in favour of providing challenge to employees to develop and then utilize their capacities. Obviously, the new trend will require that we take more account of individual differences in the workplace»²³⁹. The Authors conclude that this transition towards employee direct participation will require some revisions of both practices and theory of collective bargaining as it traditionally relies on representational influence systems and two-party decision-making.

The interaction of direct and representative employee voice and its effects at workplaces

²³⁷ Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., “The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining”, in *Monthly Labor Review*, 1977, 100 (4), 54.

²³⁸ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965. For further details of the framework conceived by Walton and McKersie, see the paragraph 2.2.1.1.1.

²³⁹ Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., “The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining”, in *Monthly Labor Review*, 1977, 100 (4), 54.

In 2005, stemming from the acknowledgement of the persisting poor performance of UK companies, Bryson *et al.* investigate the interaction between trade union representation and work organisation (notably, high-involvement management practices - HIM) in support of workplace productivity. They use data from the 1998 Workplace Relations Survey, conducted by the UK Department of Trade and Industry in 1999. This sample survey covers all economic sectors except agriculture and include the results of interviews conducted in 2,191 establishments between October 1997 and June 1998. The results of this research show that HIM practices (i.e. team-working, functional flexibility and human relations training) are positively associated with labour productivity. Further, this impact is even more clear within union setting. Conversely, there are indications that a move to HIM in the non-union sector leads to a deterioration in labour productivity, though not statistically relevant when compared to a Traditional (i.e. traditional management approach, characterised by one-way downward communication mechanisms) non-union setting. The Authors suggest that the positive workplace performance deriving from the implementation of HIM in union setting can be due to the role of union's voice and agency in allowing a more efficient HIM usage²⁴⁰. Similarly, by drawing on empirical studies conducted in the United States and Germany, Addison examines the effects of worker representation in unions and works councils, and of employee involvement work practices on firm performance and reports evidence of positive HPWP effects in both countries and positive interactions with worker representation. However, the Author specifies that the results should not have any pretence to precision due to the limitations of literature underscores by measurement difficulties²⁴¹. Though concentrating on the impact on workers' conditions, Pohler and Luchak analyse the interaction between unions and high-performance work practices, by taking data from the linked organisation-employee surveys of the longitudinal Workplace and Employee Survey, conducted by Statistics Canada in 2007. The Authors thus shed light on the role of unions in reducing intensification pressures on workers, thus allowing them to work less unpaid overtime, have fewer grievances and take fewer paid sick days. Consequently, job satisfaction turns out to be maximised under the combination of unions

²⁴⁰ Bryson, A., Forth, J., Kirby, S., "High-involvement management practices, trade union representation and workplace performance in Britain", in *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 2005, 52 (3): 451-491.

²⁴¹ Addison, J. T., "The determinants of firm performance: unions, works councils, and employee involvement / high-performance work practices", in *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 2005, 52 (3): 406-450.

and high-involvement work practices²⁴². Similar results emerge from the research performed by Bryson *et al.*, who explore the effects of organisational change (i.e. comprising a series of innovations, that include employee involvement methods as well as new working time arrangements, performance-related pay, etc.) on workers' wellbeing, by collecting data from 13,500 employees in 1,238 workplaces in the UK. More specifically, they conclude that organisational change leads to increased job-related anxiety and lower job satisfaction and that this impact on workers' wellbeing is ameliorated when workers are employed in a unionised setting and are involved in the introduction of the changes²⁴³. Conversely, labour productivity is the research focus of Kim *et al.*, who draw upon data collected through the International Automotive Plant Study in 1994 and 2000 in order to study the effect of team and representative voice on this variable. Interestingly, and unlike Bryson *et al.*, Kim *et al.* find out that there is no synergistic effect between employee involvement through teams and worker representation. More specifically, «team voice and representative voice interact negatively on labour productivity and the contribution of team voice to improving labour productivity decreases when plants have strong worker representation. However, having strong team voice is always good for labour productivity and having high levels of both team and representative voice yields better productivity than the combination of low team and low representative voice». Finally, high team voice appears to be associated with better performance in the presence of low representative voice, thus suggesting that these forms of voice do not complement each other. Nevertheless, the Authors recognise the potential role of institutional setting in changing this pattern across countries²⁴⁴. A similar consideration is developed by Signoretti after exploring lean production in seven Italian metalworking companies. The Author observes that the involvement of unions in the implementation of new organisational practices emphasising direct employee participation is essential to ensure workers' consensus and maximise the success of those practices. However, the involvement of unions doesn't need to take place at the strategic level; adequate procedures of information of workers' representatives on these issues are

²⁴² Pohler, D. M., Luchak, A. A., "Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice: The impact of unions and high-involvement work practices on work outcomes", in *ILR Review*, 2014, 67 (4): 1063-1094.

²⁴³ Bryson, A., Barth, E., Dale-Olsen, H., "The effects of organizational change on worker well-being and the moderating role of trade unions", in *ILR Review*, July 2013, 66 (4): 989-1011.

²⁴⁴ Kim, J., MacDuffie, J. P., Pil, F. K., "Employee voice and organizational performance: Team versus representative influence", in *Human Relations*, 2010, 63 (3): 371-394.

sufficient to promote workers' commitment in the implementation of lean production methods²⁴⁵.

Overall, what emerges from literature is the positive and mutual reinforcing impact of both representative and direct employee voice on workers' conditions and wellbeing, while the effect of the interaction of these two forms of employee voice on firms' productivity is still controversial.

The role of institutional setting in changing the above-mentioned patterns is addressed by Marchington, who analyses the role that "hard" (e.g. legislation) and "soft" (e.g. government-funded initiatives, semi-autonomous organisations) and intermediary forces (e.g. employers' associations, professional associations) play in shaping different forms of employee involvement and participation (EIP) at organisational level in Anglo-American economies (the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand). The Author distinguishes between representative EIP, realised through trade union delegates or joint consultative committees, direct EIP, in the form of team briefing, problem-solving committees, suggestion schemes and so on, and informal EIP, comprising ad hoc interactions between line managers and their staff in the search of new ideas, information and suggestions. Importantly, this paper demonstrates that multiple channels of EIP are self-reinforcing, that EIP is more sustainable when backed by CEOs who also promote a culture of openness, trust and integrity (in other words, HRM processes are just as important as HRM practices²⁴⁶), that "hard" and "soft" institutional and intermediary forces operate across the analysed countries and that «the less space occupied by the former, the more is available for the others»²⁴⁷. That is why intermediary forces play a more important role in the UK than in other economies, where the legacy of centralised employment relations ends up limiting their impact²⁴⁸. Another article considering the relevance of institutional structures is that produced by Doellgast in 2010, though

²⁴⁵ Signoretti, A., "Formazione, partecipazione diretta e ruolo del sindacato nell'implementazione della produzione snella", in *Studi Organizzativi*, 2017, 1, 40-66.

²⁴⁶ Bowen, D., Ostroff, C., "Understanding HRM-firm performance linkages: The role of the 'strength' of the HRM system", in *Academy of Management Review*, 2004, 29 (2): 203-221.

²⁴⁷ Marchington, M., "The role of institutional and intermediary forces in shaping patterns of employee involvement and participation (EIP) in Anglo-American countries", in *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2015, 26 (20), 2613.

²⁴⁸ Marchington, M., "The role of institutional and intermediary forces in shaping patterns of employee involvement and participation (EIP) in Anglo-American countries", in *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2015, 26 (20): 2594-2616.

focusing on work reorganisation processes and differences among high-involvement employment systems. Notably, the Author draws on a case-study comparison of negotiations over work reorganisations in call centres located in Germany and the US, in order to answer to whether and how industrial relations institutions influence employment systems. Findings show that whereas the German call centres adopted high-involvement work schemes relying on workers' skills and discretion, the US centres experienced an increase in managerial control and tight discipline. Doellgast argues that these differences can be ascribed to differences in the degree of institutional support for workplace- and firm-level collective voice. Indeed, in Germany, works councils were able to limit the use of monitoring and discipline, while in the US unions did not manage to do so as they lack institutionalised participation rights. Interestingly, «within each country, investments in workers' discretion and participation were highest in those companies where unions enjoyed stronger bargaining power and were integrated into decision-making»²⁴⁹. Subsequently, and in line with Pohler and Luchak's findings, it can be stated that collective voice represents a crucial element for the introduction of high-involvement work systems in those settings where pressures to rationalise work are strong and other institutional forms of support are eroding.

These findings lead to consider the specific role of unions in bargaining and then in managing work systems enhancing direct employee participation. An interesting paper on this topic is that drafted by Bacon and Blyton. The Authors deal with the union critical issue of negotiating workplace change in a sense that it both ensures higher productivity and secures workers' gains from improvements. They look at the negotiations occurred in 21 departments in two integrated UK steel plants and classify them according to a theoretical framework stemming from Walton' and McKersie's book *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations*, which identifies four patterns of negotiations: i) Type 1: Cooperation (Cooperative approach to problem solving; "Soft" bargaining to divide gains); ii) Type 2: Conflict (Conflictual approach to problem solving; "Hard" bargaining to divide gains); iii) Type 3: Mixed situation – cooperation > conflict (Cooperative approach to problem solving; "Hard" bargaining to divide gains); iv) Type 4: Mixed

²⁴⁹ Doellgast, V., "Collective voice under decentralized bargaining: a comparative study of work reorganization in US and German call centres", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2010, 48 (2), 376.

situation – conflict > cooperation (Conflictual approach to problem solving; “Soft” bargaining to divide gains). Findings show that «even when the economic position of a firm forces unions to accept change, bargaining strategies play an important part in influencing the extent to which employees benefit from that change»²⁵⁰. Moreover, unlike partnership advocates, the Authors find no evidence that cooperation delivers mutual gains. By contrast, in the analysed negotiations, union cooperation failed to deliver gains for employees as it tended to neglect the potential conflict of interest over the division of the productivity increases. Consequently, the Authors shed light on the rationality of conflict as a strategy of worker representation also in negotiations over new employee involvement practices and the distribution of the gains from this change. Similarly, Garaudel *et al.* draw on Walton’ and McKersie’s model to investigate to what extent and under which conditions it is possible to achieve an integrative process when negotiating about restructuring. The Authors develop a case-study analysis focused on two French restructuring experiences in two different companies (the first is a medium-sized enterprise operating in the textile industry; the second is a large insurance company) and find out that a serious crisis in the first company implied that a purely distributive approach would not have maintained the status quo, as it would have probably led to bankruptcy and the loss of all jobs. The Authors particularly rely on Walton and McKersie when they contend that this kind of situations encourages a more cooperative and integrative approach to negotiation grounded on a mutual recognition of common aims and interests. Conversely, the zero-sum (distributive) game appears to be improbable as it would lead to the total destruction of utility for both parties. However, as stated by Bacon and Blyton, Garaudel *et al.* confirm that integrative bargaining will not necessarily result in the improvement of the positions of the two parties but in the limitation of losses. Moreover, they attribute an important role to attitudinal structuring and more specifically, to conflict, explicitly evoked as a threat by unions, that had a dissuasive role and fostered cooperation hence balanced gain (or loss) sharing²⁵¹.

As previously mentioned, an attempt to conceptualise union responses to management-led workplace restructuring has been made by Frost in 2001, moving from the assumption

²⁵⁰ Bacon, N., Blyton, P., “Conflict for Mutual Gains?”, in *Journal of Management Studies*, 2007, 44 (5), 831.

²⁵¹ Garaudel, P., Noël, F., Schmidt, G., “Overcoming the risks of restructuring through the integrative bargaining process: Two case studies in a French context”, in *Human Relations*, 2008, 61 (9): 1293-1331.

that it is local union behaviour that shapes both process and outcomes of these changes. The Author examines the experiences of three local unions involved in workplace restructuring in the North American steel industry. Research findings lead to a reconceptualisation of local union responses, that moves away from the traditional militant vs. cooperative approach dichotomy. More precisely, a typology comprising four distinct approaches emerges from the study of Frost. An Interventionist attitude is exemplified by the actions of a union that entered into negotiations with management over workplace change at an early stage, thus engendering outcomes that benefitted all stakeholders (i.e. management, workers, union). A Pragmatic response is exemplified by a union that relied on management to make relevant decisions on restructuring, while negotiating over the implications of the change, hence producing less than optimal outcomes (i.e. workers were less committed to workplace change, management did not have access to all relevant information, etc.). An Apathetic approach involves the failure of a local union to negotiate over the workplace change. This response may derive from the fact that the union either fails to see the work-related implications of this change or perceive itself as powerless in the face of management, hence forced to accept management's proposals. This approach does not allow to achieve neither workers' interests nor management's utilities. Finally, an Obstructionist behaviour is characterised by a refusal of the local union to accept and negotiate the change. This attitude may be explained by the willing of the union to maintain the status quo. Overall, the research allows to both understand the implications of union attitudes on the process and outcomes of workplace change and to reconceptualise local union responses to management-initiated restructuring «as a set of ideal types rather than as points along a unidimensional continuum»²⁵². A similar research interest inspires the work of Pulignano and Stewart, who draw on an empirical study on the processes of firm restructuring in three different national settings in Europe (i.e. Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands) to investigate variations among union strategies in response to restructuring and the reasons behind this variety. After classifying union responses as either confrontational (hence based on job protection) or cooperative (hence based on job transition), the Authors find out that divergences in both national institutional patterns and firm-level conditions do affect

²⁵² Frost, A. C., "Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, December 2001, 39 (4), 561.

union strategies in response to workplace change. Particularly, a “confrontational job protection” union strategy is associated with cases characterised by international cost-cutting restructuring, which lead to adversarial union-management relationships especially in concomitance with firm’s economic difficulties and a relatively young workforce. Conversely, the empirical study shows that where companies adopt a moderate rationalisation programme, focused on creating cross-border synergies and boosting corporate expansion into foreign product markets rather than concentrating on labour cost reduction and “regime shopping”, unions engage in a proactive cooperation with management over jobs transition, notably in the presence of a predominantly ageing workforce²⁵³. By contrast, while examining employee involvement programmes in the unionised paper and pulp industry in North America, Kriesky and Brown shed light on the role of management in affecting local union’s attitude toward these programmes. Particularly, they highlight the relevance of historical bargaining relationship in explaining union behaviour toward employee involvement programmes. Plus, it emerges a positive link between union autonomy and power in decision-making processes at company level and union support for employee involvement programmes and its related implications, such as job classification changes²⁵⁴. As previously mentioned, the results of an empirical research on seven Italian metalworking companies conducted by Signoretti, lead to stress the relevance of both institutional support for participatory workplace industrial relations and managerial partnership culture (against a monistic vision of firms’ management) in influencing the role of unions in organisational innovation²⁵⁵.

Conversely, with the aim of deepening those internal union characteristics that may explain workplace restructuring’s outcomes, Grenier develops a qualitative analysis based on interviews, participant observation and the study of company and union documents referring to the experiences of restructuring in two Canadian plants of the same multinational corporation. The Author concludes that union capabilities and the way unions respond to managerial challenges to work rules play a role in shaping the

²⁵³ Pulignano, V., Stewart, P., “Firm-level restructuring and union strategies in Europe: local union responses in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands”, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2013, 27 (5): 842-859.

²⁵⁴ Kriesky, J., Brown, E. L., “Implementing Employee Involvement: How Paper Companies Gain Local Union Support”, in *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 1992, 5 (2): 117-130.

²⁵⁵ Signoretti, A., “Quale ruolo per il sindacato nell’innovazione organizzativa?”, in *Note di ricerca*, 2016, 4.

outcomes. Notably, the analysis provides some key lessons for local unions that are willing to govern and control management-initiated workplace restructuring within the framework of a multinational corporation. Firstly, it is essential that local unions strengthen communication channels with their members and recreate unity among the rank-and-file prior to adopting a response to the workplace change. Secondly, local unions should identify the real decision-maker in the areas of labour relations, by gathering first-hand information on the management style and corporate programmes and deeply analysing the relevant documents. Finally, it is important that unions establish relationships with other local unions operating in the other plants of the same corporation²⁵⁶. A quite similar research is conducted by Lévesque and Murray, who investigates the sources of local union power to deal with workplace change, by developing 18 case studies and a survey in the auto and metalworking industries in Mexico and Canada. Their analysis suggests that greater internal solidarity and democracy, stronger articulation with other levels of union and links with the community, and the pursuit of an autonomous agenda all provide the basis for enhances local union bargaining power in the context of globalisation. By and large, the Authors contend that in a globalised context, the capacity to mobilise different power resources is a necessary condition for the union to effectively influence workplace change process²⁵⁷.

The effects of direct employee voice on unions and their constituents

A quite less widespread research topic is the impact of employee involvement programmes on unions and unionised workers. However, an interesting qualitative study on this theme is conducted by Leana *et al.*, drawing on the experience of a medium-sized steel manufacturer with approximately 600 employees, where an employee involvement programme was developed in late 1990. The Authors examine «differences in perceptions and attitudes regarding work, the union, and preferences for decision-making structures among three groups: participants and nonparticipants in an employee involvement programme, and employees who had volunteered for the programme but had not yet had

²⁵⁶ Grenier, J. N., “Local unions and the restructuring of work within the multinational company: internal solidarity and local context”, in *Labor Studies Journal*, 2006, 31 (3): 65-84.

²⁵⁷ Lévesque, C., Murray, G., “Union involvement in workplace change: a comparative study of local unions in Canada and Mexico”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 43 (3): 489-514.

the opportunity to participate»²⁵⁸. Interestingly, the research shows that in the analysed case employee involvement volunteers had more positive attitude toward their company, jobs, and union than did participants and nonparticipants, thus stressing the relevance of employees' interest in the programme rather than their actual participation in it. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that compared to nonparticipants, programme participants reported greater differences between the expected level of influence in decision making and the level they perceived during the implementation of the programme. Notably, in the eyes of participants, the programme did not allow employees to exercise their desired influence. The Authors attempt to explain these results by arguing that participants are provided with greater information and knowledge and are thus enabled to see how little influence they actually have. However, the study demonstrates that participation is associated with greater support for employee-involvement programme as a preferred decision-making structure, even at the expense of collective bargaining. Even though this result may provide some concerns to unions, the Authors precise that in the research, employee involvement, collective bargaining and management action were presented to employees as mutually exclusive methods (although in reality they may coexist), and that collective bargaining was still the preferred decision-making structure as regards bread-and-butter issues (e.g. pay and benefits). In other words, the preference for employee involvement programmes, expressed by participants, was mainly referred to those issues, that were traditionally decided by management alone, such as investment and strategic decisions. Conversely, in those cases, nonparticipants continued to prefer collective bargaining. Finally, the Authors precise that even though all the analysed groups of workers expressed satisfaction with the union, these favourable attitudes appeared to be antecedents rather than consequences of the introduction of an employee involvement programme²⁵⁹. A similar research is conducted by Reshef *et al.* in 1999 who collect data through questionnaires in a large US telephone company, in order to test «the effects of participation in employee involvement (EI) programmes on employee desires for union

²⁵⁸ Leana, C. R., Ahlbrandt, R. S., Murrell, A. J., "The effects of employee involvement programs on unionized workers' attitudes, perceptions, and preferences in decision making", in *Academy of Management Journal*, 1992, 35 (4), 861.

²⁵⁹ Leana, C. R., Ahlbrandt, R. S., Murrell, A. J., "The effects of employee involvement programs on unionized workers' attitudes, perceptions, and preferences in decision making", in *Academy of Management Journal*, 1992, 35 (4): 861-873.

involvement in the future development and diffusion of EI and the perceived durability of an EI programme as a possible moderator of these effects»²⁶⁰. The Authors find out that positive attitudes toward EI are accompanied by a desire for union involvement in these programmes. Nevertheless, this desire is considerably reduced when participants believe in the durability of the programmes²⁶¹. Conversely, by collecting data from a questionnaire submitted to 924 employees represented by unions at electrical power generation facilities in Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia, Hoell proves that union commitment (i.e. expressed via union loyalty, responsibility to the union, willingness to work for the union, and belief in unionism) increases in relationship to greater participation in EI programmes. However, workers' commitment to unions decreases as levels of workers' commitment to the firms grow²⁶².

Interestingly, in 1987 Verma and McKersie investigate the implications of non-involvement by unions in EI programmes, by using a survey of workers in a large unionised manufacturing plant where quality circles were introduced. Overall, the findings of this research support the idea that EI programmes enhance employee identification with the firm and its goals. Moreover, it emerges that workers participating in EI programmes are less interested in union activities than nonparticipants. However, they show more interest in seeing greater union involvement in the programme. Therefore, the Authors conclude that unions should look beyond their fears that EI programmes could undermine unionism and promote EI programmes, thus appealing to a broader constituency of workers, who search for new avenues of creative expression. In addition, it is suggested that union partnership in sponsoring EI programmes could reinforce workers' identification with the union as much as with the company. Nevertheless, Verma and McKersie point out the trade-off for union leaders represented by the potential gain of becoming identified with a programme that many workers support versus alienating a proportion of workers who are opposed to or uninterested in employee

²⁶⁰ Reshef, Y., Kizilos, M., Ledford, G. E., Cohen, S. G., "Employee Involvement Programs: Should Unions Get Involved?", in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1999, XX (4), 557.

²⁶¹ Reshef, Y., Kizilos, M., Ledford, G. E., Cohen, S. G., "Employee Involvement Programs: Should Unions Get Involved?", in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1999, XX (4): 557-569.

²⁶² Hoell, R. C., "How Employee Involvement Affects Union Commitment", in *Journal of Labor Research*, 2004, 25 (2): 267-277.

involvement²⁶³. Nine years after this research, Allen and van Norman decide to prove the validity of the findings of Verma and McKersie as well as of other authors suggesting negative consequences associated with non-involvement of unions in this kind of programmes. Notably, the Authors conduct a qualitative research (through the submission of questionnaires to employees) on six different plants of a large and predominantly unionised electric utility company and find out that not only union opposition to EI programmes sharply influence workers’ willingness to take part in these processes but also that unions do not benefit from non-involvement in the EI programmes in terms of participants’ attitudes towards them. Therefore, like Verma and McKersie, Allen and van Norman invite unions to overcome their reservations about employee involvement. They also suggest that management should encourage unions to take part in these processes as their engagement can increase employees’ interest in the programmes. Consequently, EI programmes seem to offer unions and employers the potential for mutual gain that can be achieved through cooperation in these processes²⁶⁴.

Figure 8. Mapping the literature on direct employee voice and unions.

	KEY FINDINGS	AUTHORS
DEFINITION	Direct employee voice relates to the operational level, i.e. concerning the influence of workers in day-to-day operational decisions, the degree of workers’ autonomy in executing tasks and solving problems.	Baglioni 2009; Kim, <i>et al.</i> 2010; Della Torre 2006.
ORIGINS	The origins of employee participation programmes trace back to the development of Human Resource Management during the 1980s, which is related to the affirmation of new productive and organizational models, all potentially ascribed to a new industrial discourse, called “lean production”. Other authors stress the relevance of the transition towards a knowledge economy.	Johansson <i>et al.</i> 2013; Appelbaum, Batt 1994; Bonazzi 1993; Della Torre 2006; Pini 2005; Tronti 2015.
FAVOURABLE FACTORS	Some factors influencing the adoption of employee participation programmes are: a market with international competition; a high skill technology;	Osterman 1994; Geary 1993.

²⁶³ Verma, A., McKersie, R. B., “Employee involvement: The implications for noninvolvement by unions”, in *ILR Review*, 1987, 40 (4): 556-568.

²⁶⁴ Allen, R. E., van Norman, K L., “Employee Involvement Programs: The Noninvolvement of Unions Revisited”, in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1996, 17 (3): 479-495.

	worker-oriented values; following a high-road strategy (emphasizing service, quality, and variety of products rather than low cost); and being part of a larger organisation.	
OBJECTIVES	To increase the participation of individuals and informal work groups so as to foster employee motivation and commitment, while overcoming adversarial labour relations; to modify work organisation, by simplifying work rules, lowering costs and increasing flexibility; to boost organisational performance.	Kochan <i>et al.</i> 1986; Della Torre 2006.
FORMS	Quality of Working Life, Quality Circles, Employee Involvement, Labour-Management Participation Teams.	Kochan <i>et al.</i> 1986; Verma, McKersie 1987.
	Teamworking, improvement groups.	Ortiz 1997; Ahlstrand, Sederblad 2012.
	High-Performance Work Practices (practices related to training and skills, participation, empowerment, communication and compensation).	Della Torre 2006; Pohler, Luchak 2014; Gill 2009; Tamkin 2004.
	Learning organisation.	Pini 2005.
EFFECTS	Increased organisational performance.	Tamkin 2004; Della Torre 2006.
	Increased pressures on work.	Pohler, Luchak 2014; Harrison 1994.
	No increase in organisational performance.	Cappelli, Neumark 2001.
	High-trust dynamics in labour-management relationship.	Eurofound 2017; Kochan et al. 1986.
	Persistent “them and us” dichotomy.	Kelly, Kelly 1991.
UNION ATTITUDES	Proactive attitude / Interventionist approach (Frost, 2001) / Cooperation based on job transition (Pulignano, Stewart, 2013).	Johansson <i>et al.</i> 2013; Ahlstrand, Sederblad 2012; Ortiz 1997; Frost 2001; Pulignano, Stewart 2013; Schneider 1986.

	Pragmatic approach (unions negotiate over the implications of organizational change).	Frost 2001.
	Apathetic approach.	Frost 2001.
	Obstructionist attitude (Frost, 2001) / Confrontation based on job protection (Pulignano, Stewart, 2013).	Frost 2001; Pulignano, Stewart 2013.
	Skepticism (unions fear that direct employee voice undermines the collective voice; unions are wary of management's true intentions).	Kochan <i>et al.</i> 1986; Schlesinger, Walton 1977.
FACTORS INFLUENCING UNION ATTITUDES	Cognitive frames (e.g. openness to technological innovation, fears of incompatibility between direct and collective employee voice).	Johansson <i>et al.</i> 2013; Ahlstrand, Sederblad 2012; Ortiz 1997; Kochan <i>et al.</i> 1986; Frost 2001.
	Environmental pressures (e.g. socio-economic, competitive pressures).	Ortiz 1997; Pulignano, Stewart 2013.
	Power relations (e.g. historical industrial relations).	Ortiz 1997; Kochan <i>et al.</i> 1986; Frost 2001; Pulignano, Stewart 2013.
	Institutional structures (e.g. presence or lack of legal support for union activity).	Ortiz 1997; Signoretti 2016.
UNION MEMBERS' ATTITUDES	The "underdog" principle: support for worker participation programmes is higher among those workers provided with fewest organisational and personal resources (e.g. education, age, etc.), expressing dissatisfaction with extrinsic rewards (i.e. pay, job security, benefits), and working in large plants; + the "job enlargement" perspective: union members provided with autonomy over their work tend to support worker participation programmes.	Fenwick, Olson 1968.
THE INTERACTION OF UNIONS AND DIRECT	Positive effects in terms of organisational performance.	Bryson <i>et al.</i> 2005; Kochan <i>et al.</i> 1986; Geary 1993; Frost 2001

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION	Team and representative voice interact negatively on labour productivity.	Kim <i>et al.</i> 2010.
	Positive effects in terms of workers' wellbeing.	Pohler, Luchak 2014; Bryson <i>et al.</i> 2013; Doellgast 2010; Geary 1993; Frost 2001.
	Increase in the chances of integrative bargaining and trust in labour-management relations.	Schlesinger, Walton 1977; Allen <i>et al.</i> 1996; Ahlstrand, Sederblad 2012; Geary 1993.
FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INTERACTION BETWEEN UNIONS AND DIRECT EMPLOYEE VOICE	External: Institutions.	Marchington 2015; Doellgast 2010; Pulignano, Stewart 2013.
	External: Firm-level conditions.	Pulignano, Stewart 2013; Garaudel <i>et al.</i> 2008.
	External: The role of management and historical industrial relations.	Kriesky, Brown 1992; Geary 1993; Signoretti 2016.
	Internal: Bargaining techniques.	Bacon, Blyton 2007; Garaudel <i>et al.</i> 2008.
	Internal: Union attitudes.	Frost 2001.
	Internal: Union capabilities and resources.	Grenier 2006; Lévesque, Murray 2005; Geary 1993; Bryson <i>et al.</i> 2005.
THE EFFECTS OF DIRECT EMPLOYEE VOICE PROGRAMMES ON UNIONS AND COLLECTIVE VOICE	Employee involvement programmes become preferred decision-making structures, though as regards previous managerial issues; Collective bargaining remains relevant for bread-and-butter issues.	Leana <i>et al.</i> 1992.
	Positive attitudes toward employee involvement are associated with the desire for an increased union involvement in these programmes.	Reshef <i>et al.</i> 1999; Verma, McKerse 1987.
	Workers' commitment to unions decreases.	Hoell 2004.

	Unions do not benefit from their non-involvement in direct employee participation programmes.	Allen, van Norman 1996.
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CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Ontology, epistemology, theoretical framework and methodology

Inductive and qualitative research based on case study

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the main questions underpinning this research project are: how and why do trade unions in traditional industries come to promote forms of work organisation enhancing direct employee participation at workplaces? How and why do institutional factors (i.e. formal and informal norms, organisational structures), environmental constraints (i.e. market conditions, innovation pressures and power relations) and cognitive frames (i.e. trade union identity) interplay to affect trade union orientation in this field and the outcomes of union-*organised disintermediation* in workplaces? How and why does *organised disintermediation* impact on union purposes, identity and organisation, and interact with collective bargaining in workplaces?

To answer to this question, and against a background depicted as an ongoing shift in IR research towards more deductive, quantitative and discipline-oriented methodologies¹, I choose to develop an inductive and qualitative analysis based on case study, which is regarded as the most suitable methodological approach to answer to “how” and “why” research questions², and overall, to investigate «contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships»³. Particularly, the Italian metalworkers’ organisation, FIM-CISL of Brescia, is selected as the case study of this research project. The reason behind this choice lies in the fact that during my first year of the Ph.D. programme, I had the opportunity to come into contact with this metalworkers’ organisation and cooperate with its officials in daily research activities concerning collective bargaining. This circumstance allowed me to know the main concerns and activities of this organisation. Notably, one of the issues most frequently raised by the officials of FIM-CISL in Brescia was related to non-union employee voice in work organisation. When I started to work in FIM-CISL of Brescia, in May 2016, the metalworkers’ organisation had just begun to

¹ Whitfield, K., Strauss, G., “Methods Matter: Changes in Industrial Relations Research and their Implications”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2000, 38 (1): 141-151.

² Yin, R. K., *Case study research: Design and methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009.

³ Zainal, Z., “Case study as a research method”, in *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*, 2007, 5 (1): 1-6.

carry out some initiatives in this field and employee involvement in work organisation had just become a priority in the trade union policy agenda. Even though one year later, I moved to Milan to collaborate with FIM-CISL of Lombardia (the Italian region where the city of Brescia is located) within the framework of my industrial Ph.D. programme, I had the chance to stay in contact with Brescia's unionists and meet them several times in order to keep track of their activities in this field.

The epistemological principles of knowing through doing

Given this situation, it can be argued that this research project incorporates some core elements of *action research*, as described by Bradbury and Reason⁴. Indeed, it is grounded in lived experience, developed in partnership with FIM-CISL of Brescia; it addresses issues of pressing concern to the Italian trade union, and implies working with (rather than simply studying) metalworkers' representatives. As explained by Butera, action research allows to tackle issues arising from unique situations (specific organisations, social groups, people); to contemporarily study a problem and social relationships around that problem; to include in the analysis also the knowledge of players that participate in it; and so on⁵. The adoption of the features of action research has inevitable repercussions from the epistemological point of view. Indeed, action research draws inherently on the idea that knowledge may be produced not merely through *thinking* but also through *doing*. In other words, action research offers «an alternative to the trenchant gap between research and its application»⁶ and attempts to reconnect the two domains, by both researching over issues of pressing concern for people and developing new ways to interpret the reality, thus leaving infrastructure in its wake. Therefore, the epistemological foundations of this research relate to the role of experience, action and practice in producing knowledge.

A context-sensitive theoretical framework

⁴ Bradbury, H., Reason, P., "Action Research: An Opportunity for Revitalizing Research Purpose and Practices", in *Qualitative Social Work*, 2003, 20 (2): 155-175.

⁵ Butera, F., "La ricerca-intervento sull'organizzazione. Rivoluzionare modelli e metodi", in *Sviluppo & Organizzazione*, May/June 2017, 86-98.

⁶ Bradbury, H., Reason, P., "Action Research: An Opportunity for Revitalizing Research Purpose and Practices", in *Qualitative Social Work*, 2003, 20 (2), 157.

Given the fundamental research questions underlying this project (how and why do trade unions in traditional industries come to promote forms of work organisation enhancing direct employee participation at workplaces? How and why do institutional factors (i.e. formal and informal norms, organisational structures), environmental constraints (i.e. market conditions, innovation pressures and power relations) and cognitive frames (i.e. trade union identity) interplay to affect trade union orientation in this field and the outcomes of union-organised *disintermediation* in workplaces? How and why does *organised disintermediation* impact on union purposes, identity and organisation, and interact with collective bargaining in workplaces?) and the pluralism of analytical foci and objectives in research in industrial relations that I have described in the literature review, I adopt a theoretical framework which is structured as follows.

To answer to the “why” question, in order to make hypotheses on the reasons behind the trade union’s willingness to promote non-union employee voice, I draw on the Dunlopian systems theory and new-sociological institutionalism, by taking into account the former’s focus on the environmental context (i.e. comprised of the technology, the market or budgetary constraints, and the power relations) to explain the relationships between actors⁷, and the latter’s interest in understanding organisational behaviour according to rules, conventions, customs and ideas⁸. The relevance of these dimensions is also well proved by the literature investigating the interplay between trade unions and direct employee participation⁹.

To answer to the “how” question, in order to shed light on the trade union’s action as regards non-union employee voice in work organisation, I rely on the findings from the literature review and especially on the part summarising the scope of the action and the objectives of trade unions. Therefore, I assess the trade union’s initiatives as regards its internal (referring to internal democratic processes, union organisational structure and internal relationships with the rank-and-base) and external (referring to relationships with

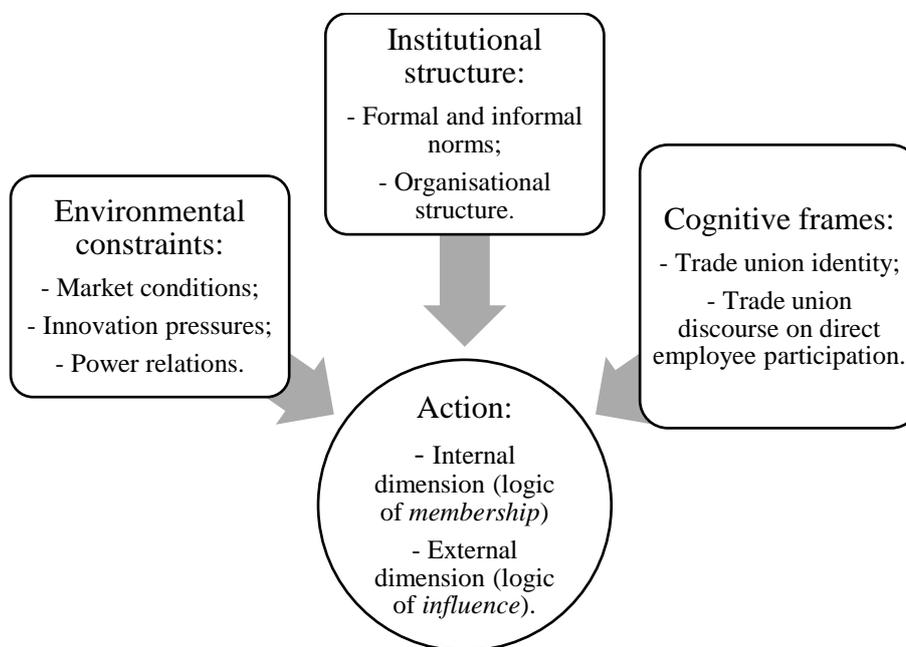
⁷ Dunlop, J. T., *Industrial Relations System*, New York: Holt and Company, 1958.

⁸ Scott, W. R., *Institutions and Organizations*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001.

⁹ See paragraph 2.2.2.

employers and the state) dimension¹⁰: halfway between the logic of *membership* and the logic of *influence* in the Schmitter and Streeck's model¹¹.

Figure 9. Theoretical framework.



Desk research, participant observation and semi-structured interviews as methods

By mainly relying on desk research, conducted both internally (i.e. via documents available at the premises of FIM-CISL of Brescia) and externally (i.e. on the Internet), and participant observation (mainly implying direct participation in daily activities of FIM-CISL of Brescia, such as internal meetings, discussions, collective negotiations and assemblies, and the conduction of semi-structured interviews with 5 local union officials¹², 2 members of the secretarial body and 10 union delegates), I gather the relevant information to answer to “how” and “why” research questions. Moreover, 4 local companies are subject to a longitudinal case study analysis, conducted via participant

¹⁰ See, among others, Dufour, C., Hege, A., “The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal”, in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16, 351-361; Hodder, A., Edwards, P., “The essence of trade unions: understanding identity, ideology and purpose”, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2015, 29 (5): 843-954; Mundlak, G., “We create spots from which we shine to others: Organizing as bridging practice between distinct meanings of association”, in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 2017, 38 (2): 291-317.

¹¹ Schmitter, P. C., Streeck, W., “The Organization of Business Interests: Studying the Associative Action of Business in Advanced Industrial Societies”, *WZB Discussion Paper IIM/LMP 81/13*, 1981.

¹² It is important to specify that from May 2016 to April 2018, there were two different General Secretaries: the former was in charge until March 2018; the second was elected on March 27, 2018.

observation, that lies in the analysis of primary documents (i.e. collective agreements, business plans, etc.), on-site visits (1), attendance at the negotiating tables and internal meetings (at least 6 occasions), and semi-structured interviews with local union officials (8 interviews), shop stewards (4 interviews) and an external expert supporting the trade union in these projects (1 interview), in a view of comparing approaches and practices adopted by FIM-CISL of Brescia in different local companies with regard to work organisation and non-union employee participation. The selection of these companies is explained by the fact that during my stay at the premises of FIM-CISL of Brescia, the trade union developed processes of work reorganisation in these firms. The on-field research is conducted from May 2016 to April 2018.

A critical realist ontology

In so doing, I take critical realism as the ontology underlying this research project. As explained by Edwards, this perspective has the potential to both incorporate new issues, such as gender condition, into the field of industrial relations and make connections between industrial relations and wider social science disciplines¹³. Critical realism takes a stance against both positivism and relativist approaches such as constructivism, by assuming that even though regularities and causal phenomena do exist, and individual choices do play a role in the social world, the institutional context is crucial to understand the reasons behind empirical regularities. In this sense, it is reasonable to claim that context-sensitive (or embedded) institutional research, like the one that I perform following the above-mentioned theoretical framework, fits the critical realism approach. As contended by Wry, both critical realism and neoinstitutional theory are interested in understanding patterns of action within delimited social contexts. Both approaches stress the importance of institutional “structures” (according to critical realism), or logics (according to neoinstitutionalism), orienting, shaping and justifying action¹⁴. Moreover, Easton argues that critical realism is compatible with different research methods, which may be both extensive (i.e. employing large scale surveys, questionnaires, statistical

¹³ Edwards, P., “The challenging but promising future of industrial relations: developing theory and method in context-sensitive research”, in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 2005, 36 (4): 264-282.

¹⁴ Wry, T. E., “Does Business and Society Scholarship Matter to Society? Pursuing a Normative Agenda with Critical Realism and Neoinstitutional Theory”, in *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2009, 89 (2): 151-171.

analyses, etc.) and intensive (i.e. employing qualitative analyses, case studies, interviews, etc.)¹⁵. Case study is thus entirely consistent with a critical realist ontology.

Figure 10. Ontology, epistemology, theoretical framework and methodology.

ONTOLOGY	The view on what explains action, which underpins the research project	Critical realism
EPISTEMOLOGY	The approach to produce knowledge, which is adopted in the research project	Knowing through doing (Action research)
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	The frame to use to get knowledge	Context-sensitive theoretical framework, drawing on Dunlopian system theory and new-sociological institutionalism
METHODOLOGY	The procedure chosen to answer to the research questions	Inductive and qualitative research based on case study
METHODS	The methods to collect data and information	Desk research, Participant observation, Semi-structured interviews

3.2. Case study development

As previously mentioned, the Italian metalworkers’ organisation FIM-CISL of Brescia is chosen as the case study of this research project. Indeed, since the first year of the Ph.D. programme, I had the opportunity to move to the city of Brescia and start to collaborate with the trade union on a daily basis in the implementation of some research activities concerning decentralised collective bargaining. Major concerns and issues raised by FIM-CISL of Brescia provided me with the inspiration to conduct a research project in the field of trade union and direct employee involvement in work organisation. The research

¹⁵ Wry, T. E., “Does Business and Society Scholarship Matter to Society? Pursuing a Normative Agenda with Critical Realism and Neoinstitutional Theory”, in *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2009, 89 (2): 151-171.

project is grounded in lived experience, developed in partnership with FIM-CISL of Brescia and addressing issues of major concern to the trade union.

Before deepening factors and pressures that might have affected union actions in this context, it is important to mention that FIM-CISL of Brescia constitutes a territorial branch (covering the province of Brescia, in Northern Italy) of the Italian Federation of Metalworkers, FIM-CISL (*Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici*). FIM-CISL was founded on March 30, 1950, in order to gather all the metalworkers «who are willing to defend their common interests and fight for the promotion of a democratic society made up of free and responsible people, while respecting their own personal, philosophical, moral, religious and political opinions»¹⁶. Since its foundation, FIM-CISL adheres to the Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions (*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori*, CISL), founded in 1950 after the split of the former General Italian Confederation of Labour (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, CGIL) into the current three most representative workers' confederations (namely CGIL, CISL and UIL).

3.2.1. Environmental constraints

In order to understand the action of FIM-CISL of Brescia, it sounds reasonable to deepen the environmental context where it operates and in particular the economic conditions and crucial challenges in the area. Environmental constraints are indeed a component of the theoretical framework designed for the development of this research.

3.2.1.1. Market conditions

The area of Brescia is particularly dependent on industry, which hosts 34.8% of workers, compared to the national average of 20.2%¹⁷, and notably manufacturing activities, gathering 42.1% of private employees: a proportion which is more than 13 percentage points above the Italian figure. The relevance of Brescia manufacturing production within

¹⁶ *La Fim riunisce tutti i lavoratori metalmeccanici decisi – nel reciproco rispetto delle proprie opinioni personali, filosofiche, morali, religiose e politiche – a difendere i loro comuni interessi e a lottare per rafforzare una società democratica di persone libere e responsabili*. Article 3 “General Principles”, FIM-CISL Statute, available at http://www.fim-cisl.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Statuto_Definitivo2017.pdf (accessed 27 June 2018).

¹⁷ Miniaci, R., *Analisi di scenario dell'economia bresciana*, Report commissioned by FIM-CISL of Brescia to the University of Brescia, April 2015, 2-15.

the Italian economy is also proved by the fact that Brescia's manufacturing employees account for 3.9% of all Italian workers in the sector¹⁸.

Brescia's people are characterised by a strong propensity for entrepreneurial activities. In late March 2015, there were 108,000 undertakings, corresponding to one company for every 8.6 inhabitants, compared to a national average of one company for every 11.6 inhabitants. Manufacturing companies are about 14,500 and though standing for only 13.7% of the total, they are responsible for a value creation of 10,150 million Euro, standing for 19% of the total added value generated in the area of Brescia and 3.88% of that produced by the national manufacturing sector. 35.5% of manufacturing enterprises are involved in the manufacture of metal products. It is important to mention that the entire manufacturing sector has lost 9% of its enterprises during the last economic crisis, but contemporarily has experienced an increase in the number of limited companies (+ 4%)¹⁹.

Even though limited companies are generally quite large companies, Brescia's business fabric still appears as characterised by small and micro enterprises. Particularly, Brescia's companies with 50 employees or more account for only 3.2% of the total amount, and only 38 manufacturing establishments have more than 250 workers²⁰. Only in metallurgy and automotive sector, the dimensions of Brescia's productive units are significantly greater than those in the rest of Italy. Nevertheless, it is essential to state that the presence of a myriad of family-managed micro and small enterprises is a peculiarity of the entire Italian productive structure and probably, one of the reasons behind the non-presence of Italy in high-technology and knowledge-intensive sectors. Moreover, if we take into consideration the region of Lombardy (which Brescia belongs to), it can be noticed that only 1.1% of its employees are involved in R&D activities²¹. However, Lombardy remains one of the four best-performing regions in Europe. Overall, Italian manufacturing enterprises surprise for their ability to innovate without large investments in R&D and

¹⁸ Miniaci, R., *Analisi di scenario dell'economia bresciana*, Report commissioned by FIM-CISL of Brescia to the University of Brescia, April 2015, 2-17.

¹⁹ Miniaci, R., *Analisi di scenario dell'economia bresciana*, Report commissioned by FIM-CISL of Brescia to the University of Brescia, April 2015, 4-30.

²⁰ Miniaci, R., *Analisi di scenario dell'economia bresciana*, Report commissioned by FIM-CISL of Brescia to the University of Brescia, April 2015, 4-32.

²¹ Miniaci, R., *Analisi di scenario dell'economia bresciana*, Report commissioned by FIM-CISL of Brescia to the University of Brescia, April 2015, 4-34.

also for their ability to compete in international markets. They apparently have an inclination for foreign trade which is more evident than that of Germany. As regards the export of Brescia, its composition mirrors the productive specialisation of the territory: of the approximately 14,000 million Euro exported in 2014, 5,000 (corresponding to 35.5%) derived from metal products and metallurgy, 3,500 were from machinery, 1,400 from automotive and other means of transport. All manufacturing sectors have experienced an increase in the value of the exports since 2013. On average, this increase is of about 3.8 percentage points. The exports are particularly directed towards the European Union (62%), North America (7%) and BRICS (7%)²².

Returning to the subject of companies' dimension, it is important to mention that despite a general decline in the revenues from 2007 to 2013 (at least 60% of Brescia's enterprises report revenues which are lower than those in 2007), in almost all sectors, with the exception of metallurgy and the sector of rubbers and plastics, almost 20% of the companies have experienced a raise in their revenues of at least 50%: these are generally large companies. Overall, it is possible to state that those companies which were large before the onset of the crisis have best withstood the crisis and seized growth opportunities²³.

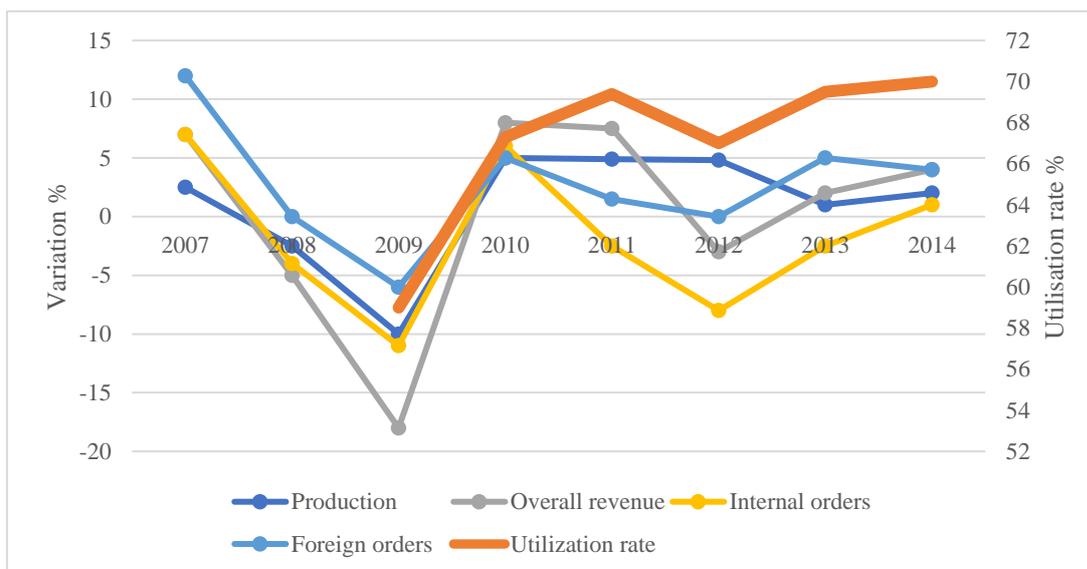
After the economic crisis, started in 2007, it is possible to discern some encouraging signals. For instance, the utilisation rate is 70%, compared to 59% in 2009, and a positive trend in internal orders is perceivable²⁴.

Figure 11. Indicators of the industrial sector's condition in Brescia.

²² Miniaci, R., *Analisi di scenario dell'economia bresciana*, Report commissioned by FIM-CISL of Brescia to the University of Brescia, April 2015, 4-40.

²³ Miniaci, R., *Analisi di scenario dell'economia bresciana*, Report commissioned by FIM-CISL of Brescia to the University of Brescia, April 2015, 4-46, 4-47.

²⁴ Miniaci, R., *Analisi di scenario dell'economia bresciana*, Report commissioned by FIM-CISL of Brescia to the University of Brescia, April 2015, 5-59.



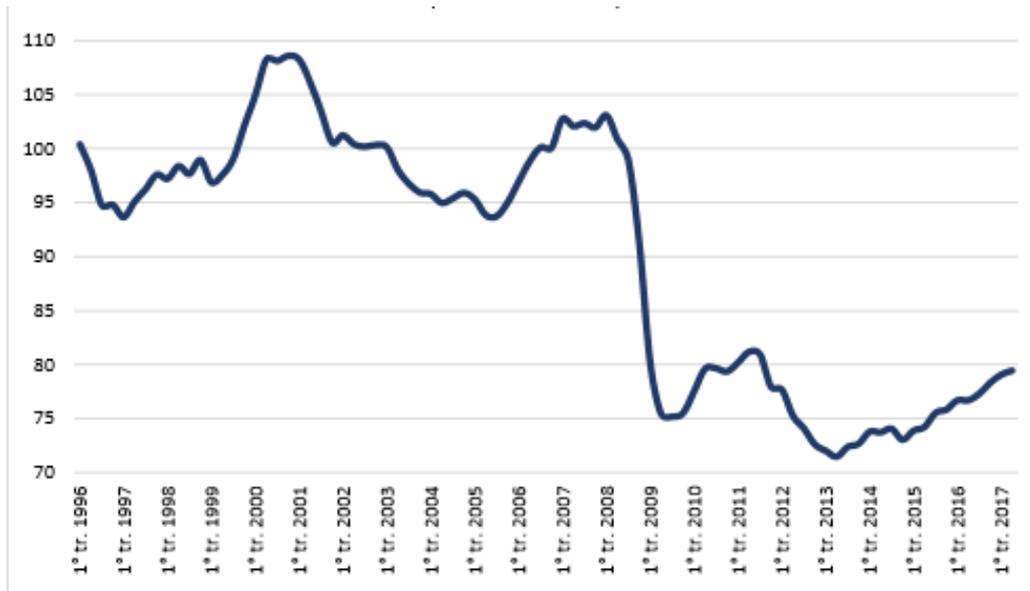
Source: Unioncamere Lombardia in Miniaci, R., *Analisi di scenario dell'economia bresciana*, Report commissioned by FIM-CISL of Brescia to the University of Brescia, April 2015

Moreover, the employers' association for the industrial sectors, AIB (*Associazione Industriale Bresciana*) reveals that in the second trimester of 2017 industrial production has experienced an increase of 3.6% compared with the previous year²⁵ (see Figure 12), thus confirming the recovery of the local industry. Plus, the exports grow at an annual rate of 8.7%²⁶.

Figure 12. Index of production in manufacturing industry (year 1995=100).

²⁵ Brescia's Industrial Association, Chamber of Commerce, press statement, July 27, 2017, available at http://www.aib.bs.it/Allegati/2017/wdm_doc_allegati_61397_allegati.pdf (accessed 1 August 2017).

²⁶ Brescia's Industrial Association, Chamber of Commerce, press statement, June 13, 2017, available at http://www.aib.bs.it/Allegati/2017/wdm_doc_allegati_61221_allegati.pdf (accessed 1 August 2017).



Source: Brescia's Industrial Association, seasonally adjusted data.

Signs of recovery have also been detected by FIM-CISL of Lombardy, one of the most representative trade union organisations representing metalworkers throughout the region. Indeed, the 43rd Semiannual Report on the company crises in the metalworking sector in Lombardy sheds light on a remarkable decrease in the number of enterprises facing a crisis situation (-16.83% compared to the second semester of 2016 and -51.80% compared to the first semester of 2016)²⁷. Even though this trend, proved by a considerable fall in the use of the Extraordinary wages guarantee fund (*Cassa integrazione straordinaria*), demonstrates that some metalworking companies have been able to re-position themselves in the market place and adapt to the new economic situation, the Report specifies that some structural crises are still ongoing, and that the metalworking industry has not fully moved on from the previous difficulties. Within this scenario, Brescia emerges as the third area most affected by the crisis (following Milan and Bergamo), with 49 metalworking companies (employing more than 2,500 workers) making use of social shock absorbers²⁸. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that a report released by AIB in 2018 shows an increase in the number of hours paid by the

²⁷ Crisis and Employment Observatory of FIM-CISL Lombardy, 43rd Semiannual Report: data of the first semester 2017, July 2017, available at <http://lombardia.cisl.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Nota-FIM-CRISI-1-sem-2017.pdf> (accessed 22 July 2017).

²⁸ Crisis and Employment Observatory of FIM-CISL Lombardy, 43rd Semiannual Report: data of the first semester 2017, July 2017, available at <http://lombardia.cisl.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Nota-FIM-CRISI-1-sem-2017.pdf> (accessed 22 July 2017).

Extraordinary wages guarantee fund in the first three months of 2018, by 83.3% compared to those of 2017²⁹.

As far as employment trends are concerned, from 2016 to 2017, the proportion of workers in the industrial sectors (except project-based and temporary agency-based workers) increased by 7.0%. This dynamic was driven by a raise in fixed-term employment contracts (+32.4%), whereas open-ended employment contracts decreased by 27.1%. In 2017, the unemployment rate accounted for 6.2% (3.2% in 2008), compared to 6.4% in Lombardy (3.7% in 2008) and 11.2% in Italy (6.7% in 2008)³⁰.

The recovery of Brescia's economy is particularly evident among the 60 main manufacturing groups (49 belonging to metalworking sectors) operating in Brescia. In 2015, these groups' revenues reached a value of 10.9 billion Euro, while their employment dimension accounted for 37,000 units. Indeed, a report released by AIB in 2017 shows that despite the difficulties of the last years, the industrial groups' labour force and investments have remained relatively unaffected by the crisis. Particularly, in the period 2007-2015 employment grew by 2.3%, with respect to a 14% decrease registered in the entire Brescia's manufacturing sector³¹. Plus, the propensity to invest has remained quite high and in 2015 reached the highest level since 2009 (22.2%)³².

This particular situation whereby large manufacturing groups are leading Brescia's economy and small and medium enterprises are still making use of social shock absorbers seems to suggest that value creation is still an endogenous process in most Brescia's enterprises³³. This ensures the success of multinational corporations, while prevents small and medium companies from efficiently competing in the market place. On the other

²⁹ Brescia's Industrial Association, *Booklet Economia: La provincia di Brescia nel confronto nazionale*, May 2008, 2, available at http://www.aib.bs.it/Allegati/2018/wdm_doc_allegati_62829_allegati.pdf (accessed 27 June 2018).

³⁰ Brescia's Industrial Association, *Booklet Economia: La provincia di Brescia nel confronto nazionale*, May 2008, 2, available at http://www.aib.bs.it/Allegati/2018/wdm_doc_allegati_62829_allegati.pdf (accessed 27 June 2018).

³¹ Centro Studi AIB, *Le dinamiche economico-finanziarie dei gruppi industriali bresciani*, Rapporto 2016, available at http://www.aib.bs.it/Allegati/2016/wdm_doc_allegati_60318_allegati1.pdf (accessed 1 August 2017).

³² Centro Studi AIB, *Le dinamiche economico-finanziarie dei gruppi industriali bresciani*, Rapporto 2016, available at http://www.aib.bs.it/Allegati/2016/wdm_doc_allegati_60318_allegati1.pdf (accessed 1 August 2017).

³³ Marelli, E., Barucco, R., *Economia e mercato: Brescia alla prova del terzo millennio*, Provincia di Brescia, Comedit group, 2009.

hand, by relying on Gereffi and others' "global commodity chains" theory³⁴, this dualism in Brescia's economic system can be explained by the so-called "disintegration of production" in the global economy³⁵ and the position a company occupies within the global value chain it takes part in: that is, its ability to extract surplus for economic upgrading and upward mobility along the chain, thus orienting its activities towards higher value-added production. Pursuant to this theoretical framework, the "low-road" and "high-road" to productivity and innovation can perfectly coexist within a country, a territory and even an enterprise or group of enterprises, since they are the inevitable result of the governance structure and power relations occurring in a same global value chain. Accordingly, the advent of new technologies is not supposed to equally extend organisational innovation throughout the whole value chain, but it is likely to consent an even better coexistence and management of different organisational models (from Taylorist to lean ones) within the chain³⁶.

With specific regard to Brescia, the danger is that of the creation of a two-speed territory. To contrast this scenario, three lines of action have been suggested: i) to promote an education that meets companies' needs, though contemporarily being grounded on a long-term perspective, thus building up new competencies and stimulating firms' demand for a high-skilled workforce; ii) to promote industrial research and the transfer of technological innovations throughout the area; iii) to promote a new entrepreneurial culture against the prevailing individualism and to create institutional catalysts able to gather commitment and resources for pursuing collective projects³⁷.

3.2.1.2. Innovation pressures

These solutions, which are depicted as likely to overcome Brescia's traditional obstacles to growth (e.g. scant demand for and use of qualified labour force, concentration on productive sectors with low value added, companies' competitiveness based on offshoring and outsourcing, excessive industrialisation and productive fragmentation

³⁴ Gereffi, G., Korzeniewicz, M. (eds.), *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism*, 1994, Westport: Praeger.

³⁵ Feenstra, R., "Integration of Trade and Disintegration of Production in the Global Economy", in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 1998, 12 (4): 31-50.

³⁶ Rinaldini, M., "Foxconn e *smart factories*: frammenti di un mondo della produzione sempre più integrato", in *Quaderni di Rassegna Sindacale*, 2017, 3, 143-154.

³⁷ Provasi, P. (eds.), *Tra desideri e paure. Sguardi su Brescia e sul presente*, Confronti Grafo, 2011.

determining high social and environmental costs, endogenous model of value creation, etc.), are also in line with the most recent theoretical perspectives on industrial development and workplace innovation. Indeed, against the previous vertical integration model according to which internal R&D activities lead to internally developed products, the Open Innovation paradigm³⁸ argues that internal innovation is the result of purposive inflows and outflows of both internal and external ideas. Accordingly, «ideas that once germinated only in large companies now may be growing in a variety of settings – from the individual inventor or high-tech start up in Silicon Valley, to the research facilities of academic institutions, to spin-offs from large, established firms»³⁹. That is why R&D organisations must identify and connect to external knowledge sources as a core process of innovation. Similarly, the high road of workplace innovation has been identified as relying on an inclusive and open dialogue between both internal and external stakeholders in order to achieve win-win outcomes such as organisational performance, employment and quality of working life⁴⁰. Conceived as the product of complex social interactions occurring inside the organisation as well as between the organisation and its stakeholders (e.g. trade unions, universities, business organisations, local authorities etc.), workplace innovation is thus assumed to produce economic and social consequences that reach far beyond the boundaries of individual organisations and are thus crucial for regional development⁴¹. By focusing on internal relationships, it is important to state that the recipe for workplace innovation lies in the continual dialogue between management and employees and in those factors enabling employees to make full use of their competencies and creative potential. In this sense, it is possible to speak about employee-driven innovation, which, by relying on employees' motivation, autonomy and new participative

³⁸ Chesbrough, H., *Open Innovation: The new imperative for creating and profiting from technology*, Harvard Business School Publishing, 2003.

³⁹ Chesbrough, H., "Open Innovation: A New Paradigm for Understanding Industrial Innovation", in Chesbrough, H., Vanhaverbeke, W., West, J. (eds.), *Open Innovation: Researching a New Paradigm*, Oxford University Press, 2006, 3.

⁴⁰ Totterdill, P., Hague, J., "Workplace innovation as regional development", in Fricke, W., Totterdill, P. (eds.), *Action Research in Workplace Innovation and Regional Development* (Dialogues on Work and Innovation), John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2004, 43-79.

⁴¹ Totterdill, P., Hague, J., "Workplace innovation as regional development", in Fricke, W., Totterdill, P. (eds.), *Action Research in Workplace Innovation and Regional Development* (Dialogues on Work and Innovation), John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2004, 43-79.

structures, is likely to influence also the representation of employees' interests at the workplace level as well as the strategies and actions of local and national trade unions⁴².

These processes seem particularly relevant in the analysed environmental context as Brescia is approaching to *Industry 4.0*⁴³: from February 2017, the local newspaper *Il Giornale di Brescia* has dedicated a section to interviews with entrepreneurs, reports and dossiers, all centred on *Industry 4.0*; the employers' association AIB engaged in a cooperation with the employers' associations of Cremona and Mantova and the University of Brescia, for the creation of a Digital Innovation Hub⁴⁴ (the national plan on *Industry 4.0* conceives the Digital Innovation Hubs as aimed at providing support, information and training to companies dealing with the challenge of the digital transformation⁴⁵). Defined not merely as a technological process but also as a social revolution due to the impact of the Internet on the various spheres of our economic, political and social interactions, *Industry 4.0* is expected to produce a new geography of both production and work, whereby regions and territories are seen as focal points for innovation and competitiveness in international markets, thanks to their ability to act as catalysts of economic opportunities, material and immaterial infrastructures, human resources and culture, by enabling an ecosystem of multi-stakeholder dialogue and cooperation⁴⁶. However, what emerges from existing actions in the field of *Industry 4.0*

⁴² Sø Rocha, R., "Shop stewards as coordinators of employee-driven innovation: implications for trade unions", in *ETUI Transfer*, 2010, 16 (2): 185-196; Totterdill, P., Exton, R., "Trade unions as knowledgeable participants in workplace innovation", in *Strategic Direction*, 2014, 30 (9): 31-34.

⁴³ In this regard, it is worth noting that on September 21, 2016, in Milan, the Italian National Industry 4.0 plan (so-called *Piano Calenda*) was presented in the presence of the then Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, and the then Minister of Economic Development, Carlo Calenda. The plan includes a set of systemic measures aimed at stimulating investments for innovation and competitiveness: some of the most qualifying points of the plan have been promptly merged into the Budget Law for 2017 and 2018. In substance, the plan includes concrete measures based on three inspiring principles, namely: to operate with a logic of technological neutrality; to intervene with horizontal and not vertical or sectorial actions; to influence enabling factors. At the same time, there are four strategic plans of action, two of which are called "key lines" (Innovative investments, Skills and Research) and the other two are called "accompanying lines" (Enabling infrastructures, Public support tools). Besides the above-mentioned accompanying lines, a further line is indicated in the website of the Ministry of Economic Development. The reference is to "Awareness and Governance", aimed at spreading knowledge, potential and applications of *Industry 4.0* technologies, and at guaranteeing public-private governance for the achievement of pre-established objectives.

⁴⁴ Brescia's Industrial Association, *Open-Dossier "Industria 4.0"*, May 23, 2017, available at http://www.aib.bs.it/uploads/allegati/pagine_500_allegati16.pdf (accessed 20 July 2017).

⁴⁵ Agenzia delle Entrate, Circolare n.4/E del 30/03/2017, available at <http://www.camera.it/temiap/allegati/2017/03/31/OCD177-2828.pdf> (accessed 22 July 2017).

⁴⁶ Fricke, W., Totterdill, P., "Introduction", in Fricke, W., Totterdill, P. (eds.), *Action Research in Workplace Innovation and Regional Development* (Dialogues on Work and Innovation), John Benjamin

in Brescia is that they are mainly led by employers and their associations, promoting seminars, training sessions, and conferences⁴⁷. The involvement of trade unions in this context appears to be quite marginal. The only exception can be represented by the attempt promoted by Apindustria, the association representing small and medium enterprises operating in the industrial sectors, to build a governance structure for *Industry 4.0*: the so-called “Tavolo 4.0” (*Working Table on Industry 4.0*) involves several local stakeholders, such as the Chamber of Commerce, public local authorities, the two main Universities located in Brescia, the confederation representing artisan companies and the three main trade union confederations CGIL, CISL and UIL⁴⁸. However, AIB is not involved in this initiative. Moreover, on August 2, 2018, Apindustria of Brescia and the local structures of CGIL, CISL and UIL signed a collective agreement establishing the procedures for companies to get access to the fiscal incentives, introduced by the 2018 Budget Law and then further specified in the Interministerial Decree of May 4, 2018, for workers’ training activities focused on the use of new technologies. A similar agreement was previously signed by AIB and CGIL, CISL and UIL of Brescia on July 27, 2018. However, it is important to specify that these deals have been signed by social partners in many Italian territories and spurred by a specific requirement included in the above-mentioned legislative provisions: to access the incentives, the training activities need to be defined in territorial or company-level collective agreements.

Therefore, despite these limited experiences, it seems reasonable to affirm that overall, internal organisational logics, power relations and traditional frictions are influencing Brescia’s path towards *Industry 4.0* and preventing an effective coordination of existing initiatives as well as the establishment of a solid multi-stakeholder network.

3.2.1.3. Power relations

As regards power relations, it is not easy to find adequate information. Reliable data on social partners’ representativeness are still hard to find and if properly gathered, they are

Publishing Company, 2004, 1-11; Seghezzi, F., *La nuova grande trasformazione: Lavoro e persona nella quarta rivoluzione industriale*, ADAPT University Press, 2017.

⁴⁷ For further information, see the section dedicated to *Industry 4.0* in the website of Brescia’s Industrial Association: http://www.aib.bs.it/progetti_speciali/industria_4_0 (accessed 20 September 2017).

⁴⁸ *Industria 4.0, il tavolo raddoppia l’impegno*, Bresciaoggi, December 22, 2016 available at http://www.bresciaoggi.it/home/economia/industria-4-0-il-tavolo-raddoppia-l-impegno-1.5370635?refresh_ce#scroll=1000 (accessed 20 July 2017).

not made public. However, according to data available respectively in an online cooperation area of CISL and in the website of CGIL of Brescia, it emerges that FIOM-CGIL is the most representative metalworkers' organisation in Brescia with about 16,000 members in 2015, compared to about 9,000 members of FIM-CISL of Brescia in the same year. Particularly, it seems that whereas FIM-CISL of Brescia experienced an increase in its membership in the years of the economic crisis (many workers needed the assistance of a trade union during company crises and closures), followed by a slight decline since 2014 (in 2017, only 8,641 Brescia's metalworkers were affiliated to FIM-CISL⁴⁹), the rate of membership of FIOM-CGIL did not vary during the economic crisis and continued a slow decline begun in 2005. With regard to the so-called "electoral data" (referring to the process of the election of the members of the RSU in companies), the process of registration and validation has just started. Nevertheless, according to data released in December 2017 referring to the elections held in 81 metalworking companies in Brescia, it comes out that members affiliated to FIOM-CGIL received the majority of votes, followed by FIM-CISL and UILM-UIL. The relationships between the different metalworkers' organisations are generally confrontational at the local level, as I will better clarify later in this chapter. Therefore, they do not carry out joint projects or initiatives in the areas of work, economic development or industrial relations.

With reference to the relationships with local public authorities, the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia revealed in an interview⁵⁰ that with the exception of company crises, local trade union confederations, employers' associations and public institutions do not usually cooperate with each other to find solutions to joint problems or reach common goals. The General Secretary mentioned the attempt in 2014 to sign a territorial cross-sectoral collective agreement between CGIL, CISL, UIL and the employers' association, AIB. The agreement, known as "The pact for Brescia", was intended to overcome the past contrasts and rivalries to the benefit of the economic and social development in an area that was deeply hit by the economic crisis. However, the negotiations went into a stalemate in late 2014 and the agreement was never signed:

⁴⁹ This data has been provided to me by the national secretarial body of FIM-CISL.

⁵⁰ The interview was conducted on December 15, 2017.

symptom of the impossibility for Brescia at that time of experiencing a new, more cooperative phase of industrial relations⁵¹.

In an interview held in December 2017, the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia affirmed that despite the absence of formal joint projects, the trade union is currently engaging into a dialogue with AIB on some relevant issues such as school-to-work transition, especially thanks to the recent change in the leadership of AIB and the election of a new President. However, it is worth mentioning that AIB is depicted by the trade union as quite weak, since affiliated companies tend to manage industrial relations internally and consider AIB as a mere consultant or service provider. This situation apparently undermines the opportunity to establish fruitful and long-lasting relationships between the union and the employers' association.

As regards the interactions with educational institutions, it is worth mentioning that despite some projects involving both experts from the University of Brescia and AIB officials in an attempt to provide enterprises with the necessary support to embark into the digital revolution⁵², social partners, and notably trade unions, do not often and fruitfully cooperate with the University of Brescia. Indeed, even though an agreement was signed in 2016 by AIB, CGIL, CISL, UIL, the Association of Employment Consultants (ANCL) and the University of Brescia for the establishment of an "Observatory of territorial and company-level collective bargaining in the area of Brescia" within the University⁵³, the fact that these actors do not traditionally interact with each other, is weakening the potential of the instrument. A representative of UIL confessed during a Seminar held at the University of Brescia in December 2017, that the Observatory could gather more collective agreements if all the trade union organisations did send them regularly, and that the content of the researches released by the Observatory

⁵¹ For further information, see: Giulietti, R., *Patto per Brescia, nulla di fatto, si torna a discutere in fabbrica*, Corriere della Sera, November 26, 2014, available at http://brescia.corriere.it/notizie/economia/14_novembre_26/patto-brescia-nulla-fatto-si-torna-discutere-fabbrica-6b2a841c-7555-11e4-b534-c767e84e1e19.shtml (accessed 23 July 2017).

⁵² See, for instance, *Laboratorio RISE*, <https://www.rise.it/> (accessed 23 December 2017).

⁵³ See, *Sottoscrizione Convenzione "Osservatorio sulla contrattazione collettiva decentrata nel territorio bresciano"*, Università degli Studi di Brescia, <https://www.unibs.it/eventi/sottoscrizione-convenzione-osservatorio-sulla-contrattazione-collettiva-decentrata-nel-territorio-bresciano> (accessed 23 December 2017).

could be even more interesting to social partners, if they did ask the experts of the University to concentrate on issues of pressing concern to them.

Overall, it emerges that FIM-CISL of Brescia does not play a relevant role at the local level, in the implementation of projects for the economic and social development. Unilateralism seems to prevail in the actions of the main local stakeholders (e.g. public institutions, trade unions, employers' associations), since they do not usually establish relationships with external actors (e.g. Universities, consulting firms, etc.) and cooperate with each other to achieve common goals. This sounds as a paradox at the times requiring more participatory forms of work organisation as drivers for increased performance and competitiveness.

3.2.2. Institutional structure

3.2.2.1. Formal and informal norms

Industrial relations in Italy are described as characterised by two main features: low degree of legal institutionalisation (in the sense that legislation and the state play a limited role in the regulation of collective bargaining) and high degree of voluntarism (in the sense that trade unions and employers' associations are voluntary organisations regulated by private law, and that industrial relations are largely dependent on power, rather than determined by external recognition of their role)⁵⁴, at least in the private sector, while in the public sector law regulates most of its aspects. These conditions have made larger organisations subject to the pressures and opposition from their constituents, which tend to compromise the development of cooperative industrial relations and pave the way to the growth of independent autonomous unions. Moreover, the absence of mutually

⁵⁴ See, among others, Cella, G. P., "Criteria of regulation in Italian industrial relations: A case of weak institutions", in Lange, P., Regini, M. (eds.), *State, Market and Social Regulation: New Perspectives on Italy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 167–185; Cella, G. P., Treu, T. (eds.), *Le nuove relazioni industriali*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998; Cella, G. P., Treu, T. (eds.), *Relazioni industriali e contrattazione collettiva*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009; Colombo, S., Regalia, I., "Changing joint regulation and labour market policy in Italy during the crisis: On the edge of a paradigm shift?", in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2016, 22 (3): 295-309.

accepted procedures forces organisations to resort to conflict in order to test and demonstrate power in labour relations⁵⁵.

Trade unions and employers' associations

Union pluralism is a further important element of industrial relations in Italy. There are three main trade union confederations: the General Confederation of Italian Workers (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, CGIL), established in 1906 and historically linked to the left-wing and communist party; the Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions (*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori*, CISL), established in 1948 and traditionally close to Catholic Christian values; the Union of Italian Workers (*Unione Italiana del Lavoro*, UIL), established in 1950 and historically close to the socialist and Republican political positions. Even though all union statutes have affirmed the incompatibility of the offices of union officials and political representatives since the end of the 1960s, the links with political parties have persisted, especially as regards CGIL, influencing union relationships with governments⁵⁶. With specific regard to the metalworking sector, three main trade union federations (representing both blue-collar and white-collar workers) adhere respectively to the aforementioned confederations: the Federation of Employees and Metalworkers (*Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici*, FIOM-CGIL), the Italian Metalworkers' Federation (*Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici*, FIM-CISL) and the Union of Italian Metalworkers (*Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici*, UILM-UIL). It is not only political sympathy that explains union pluralism, but also variations in the logics of collective action play a role in this regard. More specifically, whereas CGIL has adopted a *logic of class*, by making little distinction between members and non-members and acting as representative of the whole working class, CISL (and to a certain extent also UIL) has preferred a *logic of association*, pursuant to which only members are endowed with the right to influence and determine union orientations and actions. Although some original views are currently more nuanced, a pluralism of identities has persisted and led to some cases of separate agreements (those collective agreements that have not been

⁵⁵ Colombo, S., Regalia, I., "Changing joint regulation and labour market policy in Italy during the crisis: On the edge of a paradigm shift?", in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2016, 22 (3): 295-309.

⁵⁶ Leonardi, S., "Trade unions and collective bargaining in Italy during the crisis", in Lehndorff, S., Dribbush, H., Schulten, T. (eds.), *Rough waters – European trade unions in a time of crises*, ETUI, 2017, 83-107.

signed by all the three main workers' organisations), thus weakening the union fortress and paving the way, in the absence of legal rules of representation and bargaining, to a quasi-anomic situation in industrial relations⁵⁷.

Smaller organisations and independent autonomous unions, such as the General Union of Workers (*Unione Generale del Lavoro*, UGL) and the Italian Confederation of Autonomous Workers' Unions (*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Autonomi Lavoratori*, CISAL), operate mainly in the transport and public services sector⁵⁸. Conversely, the Italian Federation of Metalworking and Connected Sectors' Unions (*Federazione italiana sindacati metalmeccanici e industrie collegate*, FISMIC), the Intersectoral Union of Self-Organised Workers (*Sindacato lavoratori autorganizzati intercategoriale*, SLAI-COBAS), the metalworkers' federation adhering to the General Union of Workers (*i metalmeccanici dell'Unione Generale del Lavoro*, UGL metalmeccanici) and the Italian Autonomous Federation of Metalworkers and Service workers (*Federazione Autonoma Italiana Metalmeccanici Servizi*, FAILMS-CISAL) operate in the metalworking sector.

Overall, union density has declined in Italy, but the downward trend has been slower and much more contained than in the other EU countries⁵⁹. According to the latest OECD data available, union density in Italy reached 36.8% in 2013, while it stood for 35.8% in 2011 and decreased to 34.4% in 2016⁶⁰: in 1980, it accounted for 49.6%⁶¹. However, it is interesting to point out that even though nearly 2 million members were lost among the active workforce between 1981 and 2014, in the same period the total number of people affiliated to a union increased by 33%. This apparent paradox can be explained by the high proportion (about 46%) of retirees who are union members. Notably, retirees do not subscribe to their previous industry federations, but the special federations for retired

⁵⁷ *Industrial relations in Italy: background summary*, ETUI Reforms Watch, <http://www.etui.org/ReformsWatch/Italy/Industrial-relations-in-Italy-background-summary> (accessed 15 May 2017).

⁵⁸ *Industrial relations in Italy: background summary*, ETUI Reforms Watch, <http://www.etui.org/ReformsWatch/Italy/Industrial-relations-in-Italy-background-summary> (accessed 15 May 2017).

⁵⁹ Leonardi, S., "Trade unions and collective bargaining in Italy during the crisis", in Lehdorff, S., Dribbush, H., Schulten, T. (eds.), *Rough waters – European trade unions in a time of crises*, ETUI, 2017, 83-107.

⁶⁰ *Trade union density*, OECD Stat, <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TUD> (accessed 28 June 2018).

⁶¹ Visser, J., ICTWSS Data base. version 5.1. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS), University of Amsterdam, October 2015.

workers, which are engaged in providing services for the improvement of the quality of life of the elderly people⁶². The largest trade union confederation is CGIL with 5,539,472 members in 2015. CISL, with 4,302,352, is the second-largest trade union in Italy. The third is UIL, with 2,196,443 members⁶³. With specific regard to the metalworking sector, union density is 32.8%⁶⁴: this data has been declining over the past years⁶⁵.

As confirmed by ETUI, the main employers' association is the General Confederation of Italian Industry (*Confederazione Generale dell'Industrial Italiana*, Confindustria), which was founded in 1910 and represents more than 150,000 manufacturing and service companies. Confindustria negotiates with trade unions at cross-industry level and in tripartite negotiations on behalf of private employers. Furthermore, there are specific confederations representing small and medium enterprises, such as the Italian Confederation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (*Confederazione Italiana della Piccola e Media Industria*, Confapi), and artisans, such as Confartigianato and the National Confederation of Crafts and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (*Confederazione Nazionale dell'Artigianato e della Piccola e Media Impresa*, CNA)⁶⁶. Employers' organisations are organised both vertically (according to the various industries and economic sectors) and horizontally (at the regional and local levels). While employers' federations negotiate with trade union federations national collective agreements at the sectoral level, local employers' associations provide services in the support of their members' business activities, engage in tripartite dialogue with local political institutions and local workers' organisations, and sometimes assist private employers in company-level collective bargaining. While there exists roughly a dozen of

⁶² Carrieri, M, Feltrin, P., *Al bivio. Lavoro, sindacato e rappresentanza nell'Italia d'oggi*, Donzelli, 2016.

⁶³ Leonardi, S., "Trade unions and collective bargaining in Italy during the crisis", in Lehndorff, S., Dribbush, H., Schulten, T. (eds.), *Rough waters – European trade unions in a time of crises*, ETUI, 2017, 83-107.

⁶⁴ Leonardi, S., Ambra, M. C., Ciarini, A., "Italian collective bargaining at a turning point", in *WP CSDLE "Massimo D'Antona".INT*, 2017, 139.

⁶⁵ See, Carrieri, M, Feltrin, P., *Al bivio. Lavoro, sindacato e rappresentanza nell'Italia d'oggi*, Donzelli, 2016; Federmeccanica, *L'industria metalmeccanica in cifre*, 2017, available at <https://www.federmeccanica.it/images/files/industria-metalmeccanica-in-cifre-giugno-2017.pdf> (accessed 28 June 2018).

⁶⁶ *Industrial relations in Italy: background summary*, ETUI Reforms Watch, <http://www.etui.org/ReformsWatch/Italy/Industrial-relations-in-Italy-background-summary> (accessed 6 June 2017).

sector/branch peak federations on the side of unions, there are hundreds of sector/branch peak federations on the employer side.

Employers' density is esteemed around 50% with several employers' associations⁶⁷. With reference to the metalworking sector, the largest and most influential one is Federmeccanica (affiliated to Confindustria); the second is Unionmeccanica (affiliated to the confederation Confapi), representing small and medium enterprises. In 2013, a new employers' confederation, Confimi Industria, was founded by local and sectoral employers' associations from Confapi and Confindustria. Plus, cooperatives and craft industry have their own sectoral federations.

Finally, it should be noted that to date in Italy, in the private sector, there is no law which establishes the criteria to follow when determining trade union representativeness. An intersectoral agreement on representativeness was reached on June 28, 2011 by Confindustria, CGIL, CISL and UIL, which set criteria for industry-wide as well as company-level bargaining. These criteria were confirmed in the cross-industry collective agreement signed on January 10, 2014. Nevertheless, the system agreed in these documents has not been fully implemented yet. Indeed, on February 28, 2018, Confindustria, CGIL, CISL and UIL signed another agreement where stressing the relevance to make effective the criteria for the measurement of trade union and employers' association representativeness, also in a view of contrasting pay and social dumping via collective agreements signed by non-representative workers' and employers' organisations. To achieve this purpose, social partners agreed on strengthening powers and responsibilities of the tripartite body CNEL (the National Economic and Labour Council) in this field.

Collective bargaining

The foundations of trade union freedom of organisation can be found in Article 39 of the Constitution, dated 1948. Though not directly regulated, the right to collective bargaining is regarded by jurisprudence as deriving from the same Article. In line with the substantial voluntarist nature of the system, collective bargaining structure is not determined by law, yet it derives from the rules agreed by social partners and from their mutual recognition

⁶⁷ Leonardi, S., Ambra, M. C., Ciarini, A., "Italian collective bargaining at a turning point", in *WP CSDLE "Massimo D'Antona".INT*, 2017, 139.

as negotiating agents. Collective agreements do not have *erga omnes* effect, since they are acts of private law (subject to the general provisions of the Civil Code of 1942 applied to all private contracts) and enforceable by the signatories' affiliates only. The law prevails over a collective agreement, and the collective agreement prevails over an individual one. Statutory rights and conventional minimum standards can be derogated by lower collective or individual agreements only *in melius*. Finally, whether more than one collective agreement cover a same contractual unit, the Courts privilege the one signed by the “comparatively most representatives”. However, their identification is not always easy⁶⁸.

National sectoral collective bargaining is the core of the system. Among its main tasks, it sets up the sectoral minimum wages according to the different job levels. Since there is no a legal extension mechanism of the effects of the agreements, a problem could emerge in terms of equal treatment among workers employed in the same sector, territory or company. However, the Courts solve this issue, by interpreting the concept of *commensurate and sufficient pay*, expressed in Article 36 of the Italian Constitution, as corresponding to the wage floors set up by the national sectoral collective agreements, with which the individual worker relates to. The collectively agreed minimum wage is thus specified in each individual employment contract, and in this way, the system manages to combine a “constitutional” minimum wage with the trade union sovereignty over wage bargaining⁶⁹. «The lack of a legal extension mechanism has not impeded a very high collective bargaining coverage, never esteemed by international and national sources below 80-85%»⁷⁰. This high proportion is guaranteed by voluntary extension mechanism in individual employment contracts and case law.

As regards the metalworking sector, the majority of companies, excluding those belonging to the FCA group and some of its associated companies, apply the national collective agreement of the metalworking industry, signed by Federmeccanica and Assital (the National Association of Plants' Manufacturers) on the one hand, and FIOM-

⁶⁸ Leonardi, S., Ambra, M. C., Ciarini, A., “Italian collective bargaining at a turning point”, in *WP CSDLE “Massimo D’Antona”.INT*, 2017, 139.

⁶⁹ Leonardi, S., Ambra, M. C., Ciarini, A., “Italian collective bargaining at a turning point”, in *WP CSDLE “Massimo D’Antona”.INT*, 2017, 139.

⁷⁰ Leonardi, S., Ambra, M. C., Ciarini, A., “Italian collective bargaining at a turning point”, in *WP CSDLE “Massimo D’Antona”.INT*, 2017, 139.

CGIL, FIM-CISL and UILM-UIL on the other hand. Nevertheless, as observed by Tomassetti, industrial relations in the metalworking industry have begun to disintegrate and this has led to the rapid multiplication of collective bargaining systems which are in serious competition with one another⁷¹. Together with FCA's exit from Federmeccanica and the respective national collective agreement, not only was Confimi Industria created as the fourth competing party for the representation of small and medium-sized enterprises in the manufacturing sector, but also the trade union front split in late 2000s. Consequently, a single commodity-related sector is now being regulated by five different collective agreements in addition to that of Federmeccanica, whose latest renewal was in 2016: NCLA Confimi Impresa Meccanica, FIM-CISL, UILM-UIL (latest renewal in 2016); NCLA Unionmeccanica Confapi, FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL, UILM-UIL (latest renewal in 2017); NCLA metalworking cooperatives (ANCPL Legacoop, Federlavoro e Servizi, Confcooperative, AGCI Produzione e Servizi), FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL, UILM-UIL (latest renewal in 2017); NCLA craft industry, FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL, UILM-UIL (latest renewal in 2018); FCA collective agreement, FIM-CISL, UILM-UIL, UGL Metalmeccanici, FISMIC, Quadri e Capi Fiat (latest renewal in 2015, though a welfare plan was agreed in 2017).

«Over time, alongside the highly centralized arena for cross-sectoral (or interconfederal) negotiations on very general topics between the union and employers' confederations, the bargaining system evolved a two-tier structure: the national industry (or sectoral) level, which periodically redefined industry-wide pay and conditions and the company (or sometimes also territorial) level, devoted to negotiation on workplace-related issues, usually subject to a favourability principle»⁷². This structure was clearly set forth in the so-called "Giugni Protocol", signed by government, Confindustria and trade union confederations in July 1993, and in the following tripartite agreement of December 1993. The Protocol provided for two separate, non-overlapping tiers of collective bargaining. According to this structure, decentralised bargaining (at either company or territorial level) should deal with issues that are either not regulated by the national industry level (the principle of "ne bis in idem") or precisely devolved by the national industry level to

⁷¹ Tomassetti, P., *National report, ITALY, Project Bargaining for Productivity*, 2017.

⁷² Colombo, S., Regalia, I., "Changing joint regulation and labour market policy in Italy during the crisis: On the edge of a paradigm shift?", in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2016, 22 (3), 296.

decentralised bargaining parties (the principle of “delegation”). As regards wage bargaining, the Protocol established that the goal of the national, industry-wide collective bargaining, was to preserve workers’ purchasing power, by setting wages in line with the inflation rate, while decentralised bargaining should regulate the growth of wages according to productivity levels at either company or local level⁷³. Moreover, “opening clauses” in decentralised bargaining were firstly introduced on January 22, 2009 in the *Tripartite Agreement for the Reform of Collective Bargaining*, which allowed second level bargaining to freely deviate from national agreements (a decentralisation model that can be defined as weakly organised⁷⁴). Probably due to this provision, this agreement was not signed by the largest trade union confederation, CGIL. Later, on June 28, 2011, Confindustria and the three main union confederations (CGIL included) signed an inter-confederation agreement, which both defined criteria for measuring union representativeness and the binding validity of company-level agreements, and consented second level collective agreements to modify (also *in peius*) the regulations contained in the national collective agreements, but «within the limits and in line with the procedure that the national company agreements themselves permit». In addition, it was specified that before national industry-level collective agreements regulate the variations set forth by company-level bargaining, the latter is allowed to modify national-level terms regarding «work performance, working time and work organisation», in order to deal with «crisis situations or where there is significant investment benefitting the company’s economic or employment development». Interestingly, in September 2011 government took action on collective bargaining, by introducing the Legislative Decree No 138/2011, converted into Law No 148/2011, whose Article 8 consents decentralised bargaining (either at company or territorial level) not only to agree worse terms than those established in industry-level collective agreements, but also to derogate from minimum terms set in national legislation on a range of topics, such as working time, flexible employment contracts, recruitment procedures, work organisation and job classification and the introduction of new technology. Finally, the provisions stated in the 2011 inter-confederal agreement concerning the coordination between contractual levels, were confirmed on

⁷³ Tronti, L., “The Italian productivity slow-down: the role of the bargaining model”, in *International Journal of Manpower*, 31 (7): 770-792.

⁷⁴ Leonardi, S., Ambra, M. C., Ciarini, A., “Italian collective bargaining at a turning point”, in *WP CSDLE “Massimo D’Antona”*.INT, 2017, 139.

January 10, 2014 in an agreement on representativeness, signed by Confindustria, CGIL, CISL and UIL, which addressed four main issues: extent and recognition of representation for the purpose of national sectoral-level collective bargaining; rule of representativeness at company level; entitlement and effectiveness of collective bargaining at sectoral (i.e. to be admitted to national collective bargaining rounds, trade unions need to pass a threshold of 5% consensus, calculated as an average between the votes obtained at the elections of the unitary workplace union structure, RSU, and the union members in the sector; to be binding, a sector-level collective agreement needs to be signed by unions representing at least 50%+1 of the workforce and after a «certified consultation» of workers, if approved by the simple majority) and company level (i.e. the employees' representative body at company level is the RSU, elected by all workers through lists presented by those trade union organisations which have signed the framework or sector agreement applied to the company; to be valid and binding, a company-level agreement needs to be approved by the majority of the RSU members); provisions in case of non-compliance (i.e. the signatory parties are obliged to influence their affiliated in order to make the agreement enforceable and binding; cool down procedures, set forth by sector-level collective agreements, should prevent and punish those potential behaviours that can compromise the enforceability and efficacy of the agreements). However, the effects of this system, so far, have not been satisfying, especially as regards the issue of signatories' representativeness⁷⁵. Indeed, as before mentioned, on February 28, 2018, Confindustria, CGIL, CISL and UIL signed another agreement where stressing the relevance to make effective the criteria for the measurement of trade union and employers' association representativeness, also in a view of contrasting pay and social dumping via collective agreements signed by non-representative workers' and employers' organisations.

With specific reference to the metalworking sector, and notably to the main national collective agreement signed by Federmeccanica and Assital, and covering more than 1.6 million workers⁷⁶, it is important to specify that the NCLA expressly requires company collective bargaining to deal with «matters delegated, in whole or in part, by the national

⁷⁵ Leonardi, S., Ambra, M. C., Ciarini, A., "Italian collective bargaining at a turning point", in *WP CSDLE "Massimo D'Antona".INT*, 2017, 139.

⁷⁶ FIM-CISL press release: *Speciale contratto metalmeccanici*, November 26, 2016.

collective agreement or by the law» in line with the criteria and modalities indicated therein. The sectors' social partners therefore outline a model of organized decentralization, recognizing, however, considerable room for autonomy in the company-level collective bargaining. Article 5, Section III of the metalworking NCLA, entitled "Agreed modifications to the NCLA", states that «in order to promote economic and employment development by creating useful conditions and new investments or to launch new initiatives, or better, in order to contain the economic and employment effects arising from situations of company crisis, specific modifications, even experimentally or temporarily, can be made to one or more elements governed by the NCLA and the agreements referred to therein». Such agreements, in order to be valid and effective, must comply with the following procedures: (A) they must be defined at the company level with the assistance of employers' associations and the local representatives of the relevant trade unions; (B) they must indicate the goals to be accomplished, the duration (in the case of an experimental or temporary measure), the exact references to the articles of the NCLA being amended, the arrangements made to guarantee the eligibility of the agreement with measures to be fulfilled by both parties; (C) they cannot relate to wage-tariff minimums, seniority pay and the economic element of guarantee, as well as individual rights deriving from legally binding regulations; (D) where promoted by multi-localised companies, the employers' associations and local trade-union representatives must arrange appropriate means of coordination wherever necessary; (E) in order to be valid, they must be communicated to the NCLA parties and, in the absence of a decision, after 20 calendar days from receiving them, will enter into effect and modify the relevant NCLA clauses for the matters and duration defined⁷⁷.

Whereas collective bargaining coverage was never esteemed by international and national sources below 80-85% (particularly thanks to voluntary extension mechanisms in individual employment contract and case law, in a context characterised by the lack of a legal extension mechanism), it should be noted that as regards second-level collective bargaining, only 35% of employees in the private sector are covered by company or territorial collective agreements. In smaller companies, most employees are not covered by any workplace representation and subsequently, by any company-level collective

⁷⁷ Tomassetti, P., *National report, ITALY, Project Bargaining for Productivity*, 2017.

agreement. However, it has been reported that due to the higher number of companies in the metal sector with more than 250 employees, second-level bargaining has a higher incidence there than in the rest of the economy⁷⁸.

Importantly, it should be mentioned that a problem of vertical coordination of collective bargaining (referring to the lack of conformity between parameters agreed at the central level and what is actually negotiated at subordinate levels⁷⁹) persists in Italy, as local trade union representatives and employers' associations tend to negotiate, and sign decentralized collective agreements that are not always coherent with coordination rules established at the central level⁸⁰. This problem has been described in international literature as taking the form of concession bargaining, the increasing adoption of derogation clauses and the subsequent reconfiguration of the favourability principle⁸¹. Nevertheless, a more recent study on the Italian context has concentrated on violations of coordination rules that comply with the principle of favour⁸². Interestingly, with specific reference to wage bargaining, the study points out that the non-compliance with the demarcation of competence of the sector and company levels, is also reflected in a number of decentralised collective agreements, signed in Italy between 2012 and 2015, and introducing fixed-rate economic elements (i.e. collective extra pay or fixed-rate bonuses) with no connection to objective performance parameters. Moreover, the metalworking industry emerges from that research as the sector with the least effective wage coordination system. In addition, the problem of vertical coordination between bargaining

⁷⁸ Leonardi, S., Ambra, M. C., Ciarini, A., "Italian collective bargaining at a turning point", in *WP C.S.D.L.E. "Massimo D'Antona" .INT*, 2017, 139.

⁷⁹ Marginson, P., Sisson, K., "Coordinated Bargaining: A Process for Our Times?", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2002, 40 (2): 197–220.

⁸⁰ See, among others: Regalia, I., Regini, M., "Between Voluntarism and Institutionalization: Industrial Relations and Human Resources Practices in Italy", in Locke, R., Kochan, T., Piore, M. (eds.), *Employment Relations in a Changing World Economy*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998, 131-163; Tomassetti, P., "From Fixed to Flexible? Wage Coordination and the Collective Bargaining System in Italy", in *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 2017, 33 (4): 527–552.

⁸¹ See, among others: Cappelli, P., "Plant-Level Concession Bargaining", in *ILR Review*, 1985, 39 (1): 90-104; Haipeter, T., "Works Councils as Actors in Collective Bargaining: Derogations and the Development of Codetermination in the German Chemical and Metalworking Industries", in *Economic & Industrial Democracy*, 2011, 32 (4): 679-695; Keune, M., "Decentralising Wage Setting in Times of Crisis? The Regulation and Use of Wage-Related Derogation Clauses in Seven European Countries", in *European Labour Law Journal*, 2011, 2 (1): 86-94; Marginson, P., "Coordinated Bargaining in Europe: From Incremental Corrosion to Frontal Assault?", in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2015, 21 (2): 97-114; McKersie, R. B., Cappelli, P., "Concession Bargaining", *MIT Working Paper*, 1982, 1322-1382.

⁸² Tomassetti, P., "From Fixed to Flexible? Wage Coordination and the Collective Bargaining System in Italy", in *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 2017, 33 (4): 527-552.

levels in Italy needs to be analysed by taking also into account the issue of low collective bargaining governability⁸³, deriving from the absence of legal enforceability of collective agreements and the scant diffusion of peace obligations during the validity of collective agreements. The combination of these two factors evidently puts in jeopardy the role of a two-tier collective bargaining system in achieving one of the goals of Italian employers and their associations, namely safeguarding *managerial control*, thus ensuring certainty and governability of labour standards⁸⁴. The 2011 FCA's exit from Federmeccanica and the respective national collective agreement can be partly interpreted as a result of these deficiencies in the Italian collective bargaining system⁸⁵, especially at a time when industrial relations at the factory floor were deteriorating following the introduction of more severe managerial practices intended to align the Italian plants with the World Class Manufacturing and Ergo-UAS standards. The change at the shop floor encountered opposition from workers and their representatives even in the form of work stoppages, making management perceive a sense of instability and a deterioration of the *managerial control* that multi-employer bargaining is expected to guarantee⁸⁶.

Workplace representation

As previously mentioned, a peculiarity of the industrial relations system in Italy is the high degree of voluntarism and the abstention of the law. Within this framework, the only broad-ranging law that provides principles and rules in the area of employees' rights is the Workers' Statute, passed in 1970. It establishes the employees' right to elect workplace representatives and freely exercise union rights in companies with more than

⁸³ Traxler, F., Kittel, B., "The Bargaining System and Performance: A Comparison of 18 OECD Countries", in *Comparative Political Studies*, 2000, 33 (9): 1154-1190.

⁸⁴ Managerial control refers to the employers' need to secure union assistance «in making and upholding rules to regulate work and wages for the sake of gaining employee consent and co-operation and avoiding costly strikes». See: Flanders, A. D., "The Tradition of Voluntarism", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1974, 12 (3), 356; Sisson, K., *The Management of Collective Bargaining*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987, 5.

⁸⁵ Tomassetti, P., "From Fixed to Flexible? Wage Coordination and the Collective Bargaining System in Italy", in *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 2017, 33 (4): 527–552.

⁸⁶ Other determinants though contributed to the singularity of the FCA's case (i.e. an effective whipsawing strategy by management, the company's uniquely strong position in the Italian labour market). For a more in-depth analysis of these elements, see: Tomassetti, P., "Moving towards Single-employer Bargaining in the Italian car sector: Determinants and Prospects at FIAT", in *E-Journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies*, 2013, 2 (1): 93-111.

15 workers⁸⁷. Below that threshold, there is no right or obligation to elect union representatives. Notably, according to the Workers' Statute, it is the unions who are signatories of the collective agreement applied in the company who have the right to appoint the members of the RSA, the original form of trade union representation at company level. Even though the RSA continues to exist in some sectors (e.g. banking and insurance), since 1993 social partners have agreed to set up the new structure, RSU, which represents a unified committee for all the unions in the workplace with members elected by the whole workforce. It is important to state that «whether workers are represented through RSUs or RSAs, it is the trade unions that play the central role. Although RSUs are elected by the whole workforce, they remain primarily union committees»⁸⁸. Once set up, the RSU has both participatory and bargaining rights. Given this common framework, details can be negotiated by social partners in different sectors. Indeed, as far as the metalworking sector is concerned, specific rules on the election of the RSU were agreed by the three most representative trade union federation, FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL and UILM-UIL on November 24, 2016, and then, on July 19, 2017, they were included in the renewal of the national collective agreement. Accordingly, an electoral commission (composed of one representative per each trade union who has signed the NCLA) is constituted and charged with handling the voting process from the receipt of the electoral lists (presented by the unions) to the announcement of the members of the RSU. A national safeguards committee (composed of representatives from FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL and UILM-UIL) deals with appeals against the results of the voting process and the decisions made by the electoral commission. This committee shall unanimously decide. However, whether it fails to make a unanimous decision, a local safeguards committee is in charge of solving the issue. On November 24, 2016, a further agreement was reached by FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL and UILM-UIL regarding the functioning of the RSUs and democracy at workplaces. Besides confirming the rules established by the confederations, the agreement for the metalworking sector establishes that: bargaining rights at company level are acknowledged to both RSUs and local trade union federations; the referendum

⁸⁷ Leonardi, S., “Trade unions and collective bargaining in Italy during the crisis”, in Lehndorff, S., Dribbush, H., Schulten, T. (eds.), *Rough waters – European trade unions in a time of crises*, ETUI, 2017, 91.

⁸⁸ *Industrial relations in Italy: key facts and institutions*, ETUI Reforms Watch <http://www.etui.org/ReformsWatch/Italy/Industrial-relations-in-Italy-background-summary> (accessed 13 July 2017).

represents the tool for the approval of union platforms and the delegation of bargaining powers to the RSU; the RSU decisions are made by majority; it is possible to elect RSAs (with a one-year mandate) only in specific cases (e.g. in newly unionised companies) before setting up the RSU. Health and safety representatives (RLS) and their rights are set forth by law, after the transposition of the EU directives. Accordingly, the RLS have the legal right to access workplaces, receive all documentation concerning risk assessment and prevention measures, and call in the authorities if the prevention/protection measures are not adequate. Alongside the RLS and the RSU, other interesting bodies are represented by joint committees, which may be established via collective bargaining and aimed at promoting non-confrontational relations and dealing with single issues⁸⁹.

Participation rights

With specific regard to employee participation, it is essential to mention that Article 46 of the Constitution is dedicated to workers' right to collaborate in the management of enterprises, in the ways and within the limits established by law. «Article 46 could have been a pillar of a system of economic and industrial democracy, but that never materialized»⁹⁰. The reasons behind this condition are both semantic and political. On the one hand, the deployment of the expressions “to collaborate” and “in harmony with the needs of production” were interpreted as too close to the Fascist corporatist ideology of idyllic labour-capital relations. On the other hand, the public registration of trade unions as a precondition for signing *erga omnes* collective agreements was also perceived as a legacy of the former regime⁹¹.

Despite this background, some forms of employee participation did emerge and evolve in Italy. An interesting narration of their development is provided by Leonardi and briefly summarised in the following lines.

⁸⁹ Leonardi, S., “Employee participation and involvement: the Italian case and trade union issues”, in *ETUI Transfer*, 2016, 22 (1): 81-99.

⁹⁰ Leonardi, S., “Employee participation and involvement: the Italian case and trade union issues”, in *ETUI Transfer*, 2016, 22 (1), 85.

⁹¹ Leonardi, S., “Employee participation and involvement: the Italian case and trade union issues”, in *ETUI Transfer*, 2016, 22 (1): 81-99.

The aftermath of World War II was dominated by the rejection of the *Consigli di gestione*, essentially joint management councils that can be intended as the most important experience of employee participation in Italian workplaces, and the reaffirmation of managerial prerogatives and unilateral practices. In this scenario, it is not by chance that the communist-driven CGIL developed a confrontational approach to industrial relations, which prevailed for a long time. Many things started to change in the 1980s, when Italian scholars and unionists began looking with growing interest at neo-corporatism. “From conflict to participation” became the new mantra and the framework agreement of July 23, 1993 endorsed the value of employee participation as a key element of company-level collective bargaining. Some attempts to establish systems of employee participation and particularly, of information and consultation were made especially in public companies (i.e. IRI and ENI). Plus, unlike the metalworking industry, where antagonistic labour-management relations traditionally prevailed, social partners in the energy and chemical sector engaged in cooperative industrial relations. Nevertheless, Leonardi claims that the failure of any attempt to build any formal system of employee participation derives from the variety of cultures and objectives (e.g. CISL’s scepticism towards the intervention of the law in industrial relations, CGIL’s original reluctance for board-level employee representation, the hostile attitude of employers’ organisations)⁹². Within this context, the EU law has played an important role in legal changes concerning employees’ information and participation. A first generation of EU-driven laws in Italy concerned collective dismissals, transfer of undertakings, and health and safety. A second generation of EU-driven laws, often anticipated by a peak-level joint statement by social partners, referred to the transposition of the Directives on European Works Councils, the European Company Statute and information and consultation. Directive 2002/14/EC, establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees in the European Community, was transposed into Italian law via Legislative Decree No. 25/2007. As reported by Leonardi, the Italian reception of the EU Directive has not implied any innovative feature or added value. There are two main limitations in this regard. First, the Legislative Decree established that the rules apply to undertakings employing at least 50 employees (instead of 20), thus excluding approximately two-thirds of Italian employees.

⁹² Leonardi, S., “Employee participation and involvement: the Italian case and trade union issues”, in *ETUI Transfer*, 2016, 22 (1), 88.

Secondly, the administrative sanctions foreseen by the Legislative Decree for the enterprises that violate workers' rights, are regarded as very limited and not representing an adequate deterrent. Plus, the Legislative Decree No. 188/2005, which transposes Directive 86/2001/EC on the Statute for a European Company concerning the involvement of employees, is regarded as equally disappointing⁹³.

Finally, though, it's important to state that thanks to recent governmental measures, new opportunities of employees' and their representatives' participation are apparently opening in the area of the quality of work organisation and conditions at shop-floor level. Indeed, by acknowledging the positive link between direct employee participation and firms' economic performance as well as the beneficial impact on this relationship potentially played by trade union representation⁹⁴, the 2016 Budget Law (then confirmed for 2017 and 2018) introduced not only a tax reduction for those variable pay schemes, established via collective agreements at company or territorial level and linked to increases in productivity, profitability, quality, efficiency and innovativeness, but also an increase in the maximum amount of these bonuses subject to decreased taxation if accompanied by ways and instruments of employee involvement in work organisation (e.g. via work groups where managers and employees operate on the same footing for the improvement of performance levels and via bilateral permanent structures for the monitoring of the results achieved). The fiscal intervention on employee involvement has been recently replaced by contributory incentives for employers who establish and implement ways and instruments of employee involvement in work organisation, in agreement with trade unions. These incentives, in the form of reductions in social security contributions, are applied to variable bonuses up to 800 Euro. This legislative measure is bringing about an increase in the number of decentralised collective agreements introducing forms and practices of direct employee participation also in the metalworking

⁹³ Leonardi, S., "Employee participation and involvement: the Italian case and trade union issues", in *ETUI Transfer*, 2016, 22 (1), 89.

⁹⁴ Some evidence on these links are also provided by the following academic works: Bryson, A., Forth, J., Kirby, S., "High-involvement management practices, trade union representation and workplace performance in Britain", in *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 2005, 52 (3): 451-491; Frost, A. C., "Reconceptualizing Local Union Responses to Workplace Restructuring in North America", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (4): 539-564; Geary, J. F., "New Forms of Work Organization and Employee Involvement in Two Case Study Sites: Plural, Mixed and Protean", in *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 1993, 14 (4): 511-534 ; Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., McKersie, R. B., *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York: Basic Books, 1986.

sector⁹⁵. Finally, even though employee share ownership plans are also encouraged by tax incentives inserted in recent budget packages, their frequency in collective agreements seems to be still low.

3.2.2.2. Organisational structure

Deepening the organisational structure of CISL is pivotal to understand the room of manoeuvre of FIM-CISL of Brescia, a metalworking organisation adhering to CISL, and to understand the degree to which the confederation and union structures at higher levels impact on the strategies and actions performed by FIM-CISL of Brescia with regard to employee participation in work organisation.

As stated by Lama, «the CISL organisational model combines industrial unions, according to the relevance of workplace activities, with horizontal unionism. It is a national confederation which coordinates the action of sector federations, bargaining with government about general issues on behalf of its members and workers' common interests as a workforce»⁹⁶. This model was considered as suitable to the development of modern businesses and society in the 1950s and coherent with practices of collective bargaining at many levels.

Figure 13 illustrates CISL organisational and operational structure. Every three years, union members and non-member workers vote to elect the unitary workplace union structure (RSU) on lists presented by different trade unions. Every four years, the entire CISL convenes a congress aimed at electing the new leading group. The process is quite complex and usually lasts some months. It starts at the lower levels with meetings of members in workplaces or in geographical areas in the case of small companies and few members. After discussing the congress main document and advancing proposals, members elect their delegates to the territorial federation congress. Here, delegates elect the territorial federation general council members, the secretarial group and the general secretary, delegates to the regional federation congress, representing the following structure in the vertical organisation's line, and to the territorial confederation union

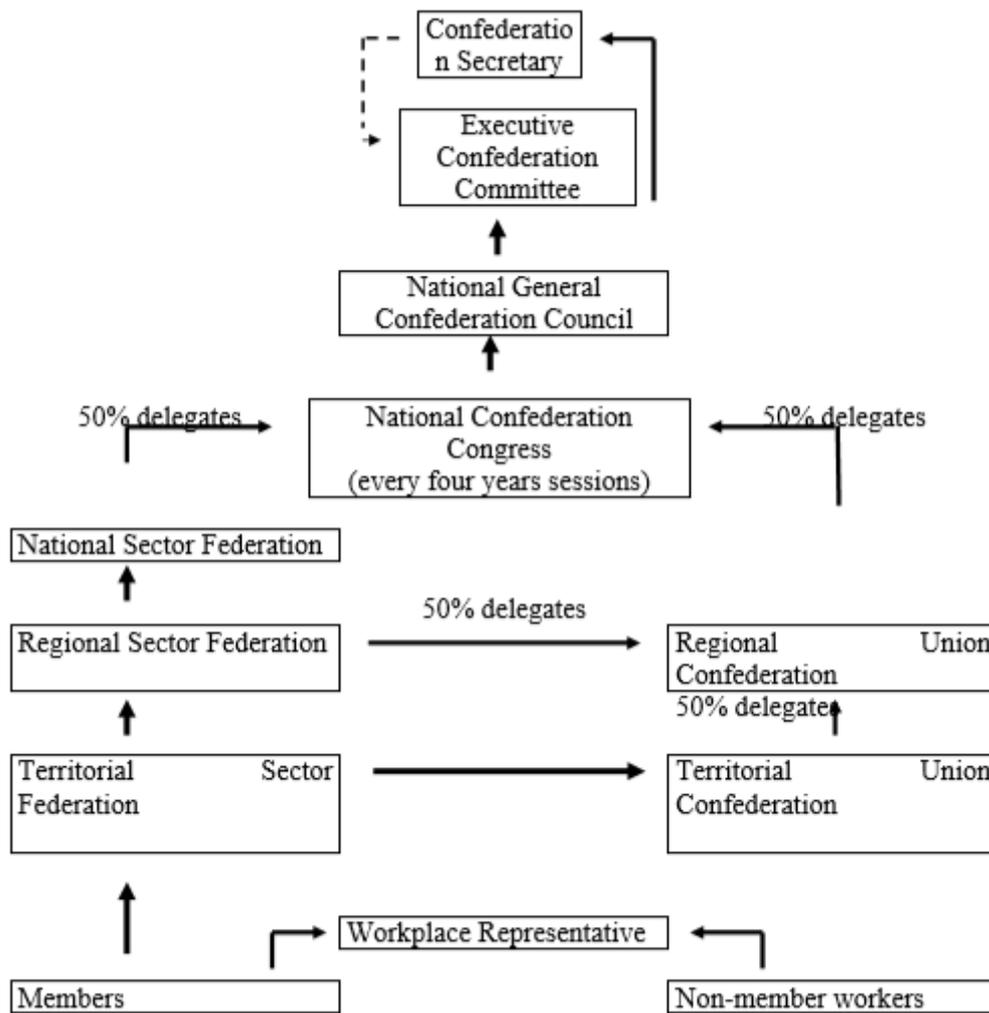
⁹⁵ ADAPT, *IV Rapporto sulla contrattazione collettiva (2017)*, ADAPT University Press, 2018.

⁹⁶ Lama, L., "The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union", *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.

congress, which constitutes the horizontal structure gathering all local sector federations. Therefore, the process follows parallel paths, by involving sector federations on the one hand, and territorial confederations on the other hand. The process concludes in the national confederation congress, which is attended by delegates elected both at national federation and regional confederation congresses, who elect the national general confederation council and the national secretary. At each congress, the number of delegates is proportional to the number of members. This is a leadership selection process going from bottom to top. The economic resources of CISL come from membership fees in the same bottom-top direction. However, there are small differences among sector federations, which are allowed to decide the proportion of money that will be provided to their different organisational structures. As regards the metalworking sector, 79.5% of the members' fees are distributed at the federation structures at all levels (65% to territorial, 6% to regional and 8.5% to national). The remaining 20.5% is distributed among the confederation structures at all levels (11.65% to territorial, 3.9% to regional and 4.95% to national)⁹⁷.

Figure 13. CISL organisational and operational structure.

⁹⁷ Lama, L., "The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union", *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.



Source: Lama, L., “The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union”, *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.

The statute of FIM-CISL of Brescia

The statute of FIM-CISL of Brescia⁹⁸, signed in 2013 after the merger with the former FIM-CISL of Valle Camonica (a geographical area within the territory of Brescia), allows to better understand the role of a territorial sector federation and the specific objectives pursued by the trade union, representing the case study of this project.

In Article 3, the statute specifies that FIM-CISL of Brescia is responsible for the implementation at the territorial level of the directives established by the Congress and

⁹⁸ FIM-CISL of Brescia Statute, available at <http://www.fimbrescia.it/data/UserFiles/File/statuto2013depositato.pdf> (accessed 29 June 2018).

the leading organs of the sector federation. In order to perform all its tasks, FIM-CISL of Brescia is articulated in small areas (currently, *Brescia centro*, *Val Camonica*, *Val Sabbia*, *Lumezzane/Val Trompia*, *Bassa orientale*, *Bassa occidentale*, *Bassa centrale*), whose characteristics are set by the General Council. It is possible for FIM-CISL of Brescia to convene in each area meetings (*Collettivi di zona*) among union members working in companies located in the area. Each area is commonly managed by an official (*operatore*) from FIM-CISL of Brescia, who is engaged in recruiting and representing members and collectively bargaining with companies situated in the area. However, as stated in the Statute, rotation among areas as well as among roles is particularly welcome. Article 22 specifies that non-compliance with the Statute could provide a reason for disciplinary action against union delegates and officials. Article 23 lists the existing bodies within FIM-CISL of Brescia: the Congress (whose task, among others, is to set forth the general objectives of FIM-CISL of Brescia in a way that they are coherent with regional and national directives), the General Council, the Executive Committee (that has to ensure the implementation of the directives established by the General Council), the Secretarial Body, the Statutory auditors' board. An important role is attributed to the members' meetings for the definition of union platforms at company level. FIM-CISL of Brescia is also the editor of a magazine "New Union Commitment" (*Nuovo Impegno Sindacale*), aimed at informing its members. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Statute attributes a crucial role to the so-called works council (*Consiglio di fabbrica*), which is defined as the fundamental structure of the trade union, representing workers at the workplace accordingly with legal and contractual norms. In practice, the works council is represented by the meetings of the unitary workplace union structure (*RSU*).

At the time of this research, FIM-CISL of Brescia was composed of 14 people: one General Secretary (replaced by another person in March 2018), other two members of the Secretarial Body, eight union officials (operating in different local zones within the area of Brescia) and three people dedicated to administrative issues (e.g. collecting data of membership). Importantly, the union's internal organisation does not follow a mere hierarchical order and since 2014/2015 it is structured according to different functional processes⁹⁹. Indeed, the activities of FIM-CISL of Brescia are grouped in three different

⁹⁹ The information below are gathered via an interview conducted with 2 union officials on April 10, 2017.

processes: the training process, aimed at promoting workers' lifelong learning as well as sustaining unionists' skills development; the negotiating process, including both collective bargaining and the management of work reorganisation project at workplaces; and the organisational process, focused on communication activities via social networks and the recruitment of new members. These processes and their sub-processes are led by different unionists, irrespective of their position in the organisation's hierarchy and simply considering people's own interests and abilities. The unionists responsible for the processes are in charge of working closely with their colleagues and helping them perform the activities linked to the respective process. Plus, they are asked to report the results of the activities to the Secretarial Body for a constant monitoring. Interestingly, the articulation in processes generated in late 2014 and the first process developed was the "associational" one, aimed at increasing union members. To achieve that purpose, a person (endowed with skills in methods for social researches) was hired and required to analyse the unionists' approach to recruitment. After highlighting the emergency approach to recruitment, the lack of specific objectives and action plans and the feelings of stress and anxiety concerning the issue, the General Secretary decided to invest time and resources in training his/her unionists, thus providing them with the necessary skills and autonomy to figure out solutions to existing problems and suggestions for the continuous improvement of the organisation. Later, thanks to a specific analysis on union membership in the area of Brescia, it was possible to highlight those zones and companies where FIM-CISL of Brescia could have increased its members. Therefore, all unionists, grouped in two working teams, were asked to identify companies where recruiting new members, hence specifying the expected results of the organising campaign, planning the activities to be performed and the resources needed. This approach produced positive results (in 2016, the percentage of new affiliates deriving from membership projects was considerably greater than that of new members not deriving from projects) and was then extended also to the other above-mentioned processes.

3.2.3. Cognitive frames

3.2.3.1. Trade union identity

In order to understand the impact of union identity and ideology on the actions currently carried out by FIM-CISL of Brescia with regard to new models of work organisation and employee involvement, it is important to deepen the traditional values of CISL, FIM-CISL and FIM-CISL of Brescia.

The identity of CISL

As previously mentioned, CISL was founded in 1950 following the split of the original General Italian Confederation of Labour into three union confederations (CGIL, CISL and UIL). The “Unification Democratic Trade Unions Pact”, signed in April 1950 and representing the final act of the process leading to the creation of CISL, sets the three main pillars of the organisation. The reference is to autonomy (intended as the choice to be free and independent from all external powers, whether they be economic, political or cultural), associationism (founded on the belief that the trade union is made through the will of workers and composed only of those workers who join the organisation as members, thus directly contributing to the definition of the trade union directives) and collective bargaining (meant as the main method of action which provides the parties with the maximum level of autonomy from law and the highest level of accountability)¹⁰⁰. Interestingly, as regards autonomy, it has been argued that CISL broke the traditional connection between trade unions and political parties in Italy, in the belief that trade unions should play a role in building democracy, intended as an arena of free collective action around shared interests, purposes and values, hence an expression of different self-organising subjects. Trade union autonomy regards also the economic sphere. «Work is not just a commodity because it can never be divided from persons and their dignity. This character gives to work the supremacy over capital and the right to conflict, even if its goal is to reach an agreement and cooperate with it»¹⁰¹. However, it is worth mentioning that autonomy does not prevent the necessity of intervention in politics and bargaining with the government to improve workers’ conditions. Finally, according to CISL, trade union autonomy entails two elements: i) to have sufficient material and immaterial

¹⁰⁰ Lama, L., “The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union”, *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.

¹⁰¹ Lama, L., “The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union”, *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.

resources to act; ii) to make decisions without any compulsory influence of economic and political powers¹⁰². With regard to associationism, the CISL model consists of two main characteristics: i) the trade union is created and operates thanks to those workers who join and support it¹⁰³; ii) the CISL is a confederation of sector federations, which organise all workers from the same economic sector. In the 1950s, the CISL model combining industrial unions (or vertical unionism) with horizontal unionism (via territorial structures) was quite innovative compared to the two traditional Italian trade unions, which were craft unions and territorial organisations. CISL acknowledged the need to review the organisational structure in line with the industrial development. A training booklet of that period stated: «Besides the horizontal organisation (which maintains its relevance) what is needed is to develop a more and more widespread vertical sector federation as well as strong union's representatives in each workplace. Only if CISL's workplace representatives, expression of union members' will, is able to be effective, it can generate efficiency which passes through the territorial sector federation up to the national level»¹⁰⁴. This concept has lasted until now. To sum up, pursuant to CISL, a trade union is the more effective the more it gets members and offers them opportunities to contribute to the determination of their pay and working conditions. This consideration leads to sector federations as the basis of representation, coherently with the characteristics of Italian capitalistic development. Workers organise collectively and create trade unions to overcome the asymmetry between the bargaining power of the company and that of the single worker. CISL sustains the idea that the best solution to ensure solidarity and organisational effectiveness is «to have several integrated levels of collective bargaining, going from the company to the national, each with its specific subjects and interlocutors»¹⁰⁵. Which brings me to the third CISL's pillar, collective bargaining. As mentioned above, collective bargaining is intended as the formula that guarantees the maximum level of autonomy of all the actors involved and the highest

¹⁰² For deepening this pillar of CISL's identity, see Carera, A., "Sindacato libero e economia mista: la scelta della Cisl", in *Le scissioni sindacali. Italia e Europa*, in BFS Edizioni, 1999, 145-172.

¹⁰³ For deepening this consideration and understanding the links between the contribution of individuals within CISL and the autonomy of the trade union organisation from all external powers, see Carera, A., "Giulio Pastore: per la crescita civile degli "uomini del lavoro", in *Storia economica*, 2013, 211-232.

¹⁰⁴ Lama, L., "The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union", *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Lama, L., "The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union", *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.

level of accountability. Collective bargaining is aimed at the definition of the rules regulating relations between workers and employers. «The strength of collective bargaining lies in the reciprocal legitimisation of the counterparts, the full recognition of their right to represent different but legitimate interests»¹⁰⁶. CISL decided to carry out collective bargaining both at the national and decentralised level (territorial or company) in the belief that this articulation could ensure a better labour market governance within a context where workers are provided with specific competences. Conversely, the rejection of differences among workers and their individual specificities would be, according to CISL, a way to push toward individual bargaining. Therefore, CISL states the difference between solidarity and egalitarianism. Solidarity, intended to improve workers' conditions, implies the acknowledgment of workers' differences and peculiarities concerning pay, professional roles, legal protection and bargaining power. Finally, collective bargaining is about finding a mediation between the criteria of equity and solidarity, thus allowing workers from specific sectors or companies to benefit from a salary increase as well as preventing union action towards some workers from damaging others. Furthermore, there is an additional principle that can be ascribed to CISL, the principle of non-denomination. Though not officially declared, this principle refers to autonomy from all church and religious convictions. This issue was pivotal among the top leadership of CISL for a decade after Fascism, since most of CISL's leaders came from the Christian component of CGIL and adopted a Christian social thought, affirming an inter-class vision where every class can give a positive contribution to society. As emerged by the General Secretary, Giulio Pastore, during the Constituent Assembly in April 1950, Christian social thought implied «the themes of the social illness of capitalism, the participation of workers in company outcomes, both as employees and shareholders, and an anti-capitalist ethic based on the denial of individualism and economic naturalism in the name of solidarity and social fairness in order to allow workers to develop completely as persons»¹⁰⁷. Plus, CISL members rejected the Communist ideology (the best-known feature of CGIL at that time) and refused any forms of dictatorship. As a consequence, they embraced the “western” choice represented by

¹⁰⁶ Lama, L., “The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union”, *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Lama, L., “The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union”, *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.

American trade unions. Lately, the non-denomination choice implied that although religious convictions were deeply linked to their social and political choices as a personal guide and contribution to defining the trade union's values, they did not have to be criteria for exclusion or inclusion of members.

The identity of FIM-CISL

As stated in its Statute, the Italian Federation of Metalworkers, FIM, adheres to CISL and gathers all male and female metalworkers «who are willing to defend their common interests and fight for the promotion of a democratic society made up of free and responsible people, while respecting their own personal, philosophical, moral, religious and political opinions»¹⁰⁸. In Article 3, the Statute establishes that FIM-CISL promotes equal dignity and opportunities in the workplace and society. FIM-CISL contributes to the development of the human personality, via the satisfaction of its material, intellectual and moral needs. To do so, FIM-CISL engages itself in the following activities: i) settling on fundamental directives concerning union, economic and organisational policies; ii) promoting workers' participation in decision-making and accumulation processes at company level; iii) promoting workers' participation in decision-making processes concerning economic and social matters at the national level; iv) reaffirming the autonomy and democratic freedoms of the associations, including trade unions; v) strengthening organisational structures in the workplaces and beyond, and enhancing training directed to its members and leaders, so as to guarantee a democratic process in deciding on and performing union activities; vi) producing and disseminating magazines, documents, newspapers, etc. with the aim of informing its members and all citizens on the initiatives carried out by FIM-CISL, even in cooperation with other actors; vii) signing collective agreements and protocols at different levels. In addition, FIM-CISL confirms its autonomy from any political organisation. Its organisational structures, both centralised and decentralised, must not be the same as those of political parties and movements. Its financial and material resources must not be deployed to the benefit of

¹⁰⁸ *La Fim riunisce tutti i lavoratori metalmeccanici decisi – nel reciproco rispetto delle proprie opinioni personali, filosofiche, morali, religiose e politiche – a difendere i loro comuni interessi e a lottare per rafforzare una società democratica di persone libere e responsabili*. Article 3 “General Principles”, FIM-CISL Statute, available at http://www.fim-cisl.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Statuto_Definitivo2017.pdf (accessed 27 June 2018).

both political parties and their activists or leaders¹⁰⁹. Franco Bentivogli, who was General Secretary of FIM-CISL from 1974 to 1983, describes the affirmation of FIM-CISL identity in the second half of the Twentieth century, by revealing some important features¹¹⁰. More specifically, Bentivogli explains that in the 1960s, FIM-CISL started to acknowledge the relevance of social and economic transformations, such as the rise of the industrial sector and the rural to urban migration, and to recognise the need of a change in union strategies. Drawing on the principles of autonomy, democracy, laicity and pluralism, FIM-CISL tried to actualise the values expressed in the Statute of CISL and in its own Statute, its conceptions of the person, social justice, solidarity and common good. To do so, FIM-CISL allocated resources to the training and cultural growth of trade unionists. In 1962, Luigi Macario was elected as General Secretary of FIM-CISL and since the beginning of his mandate, he focused on trade union training and tried to emphasise the role of workers and young people, in an attempt to renew union organisational structures and protect them from the risks of routinisation, bureaucratisation and decay. It was in the 1960s that the organisational vertical line of CISL developed, thus enforcing sector federations and FIM-CISL, and the relationship between union leaders and workers. Worker participation and democracy were enhanced. First Congresses were pivotal events where discussing and directing future changes. FIM-CISL started to produce and disseminate magazines in order to inform workers about political and industrial issues as well as matters related to international solidarity and people's freedom. Contemporarily, thanks to the dynamism of collective bargaining and changes in union organisational structure, first experiences of workers' representation and participation at company level (i.e. via shop stewards and works councils) emerged. FIM-CISL actively contributed to the affirmation of CISL's autonomy from political parties and movements and the incompatibility between union and political functions. In 1969, the three main metalworkers' federations (FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL and UILM-UIL) began the unitary process that would have led to the signature of the national collective agreement for the metalworking sector. This political and union ferment allowed FIM-CISL to increase its constituency, from 83,996 members in 1959 to 258,792 members in

¹⁰⁹ FIM-CISL Statute, available at http://www.fim-cisl.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Statuto_Definitivo2017.pdf (accessed 27 June 2018).

¹¹⁰ Bentivogli, F., "Epopoea e declino dei consigli di fabbrica", in Andriani, G., Costa, G. (eds.), *Fimmini: La Fim Cisl dal '69 ad oggi tra democrazia e innovazione contrattuale*, BiblioLavoro, 2010, 33-54.

1970¹¹¹. Bentivogli concludes that the 1960s forged FIM-CISL identity, notably its innovative and reformist nature and its willingness to pursue and achieve compromises against dogma and ideologies¹¹².

An important contribution to the development of FIM-CISL identity over the past three years has been given by the new General Secretary, Marco Bentivogli (son of the former General Secretary, Franco Bentivogli). Importantly, in his book *Abbiamo rovinato l'Italia?*, he stresses some essential features of workers' representation from the perspective of FIM-CISL: the ethical dimension of trade unionism, as an organisation which promotes social, moral and democratic values in society; the human-centred perspective of collective action, intended to promote human wellbeing and development; the principles of solidarity and cooperation against the affirmation of an individualistic society; the concept of sustainability in industrial relations against a short-term approach aimed at avoiding contingent problems; workers' participation as a way to boost firms' productivity, a more equal income redistribution, workers' skills and employability; the transition from a work-salary exchange to a work-wellbeing exchange via the promotion of welfare initiatives in the workplaces; an enhancement of industrial federations adhering to CISL due to the emergence of global supply chains that undermine local production systems¹¹³.

The identity of FIM-CISL of Brescia

The crucial role of the local structure of FIM-CISL in Brescia is underlined by Franco Bentivogli, who mentions Franco Castrezzati, General Secretary from 1958 to 1977, and the contribution of FIM-CISL of Brescia to the innovative turn of the trade union in the 1960s¹¹⁴. FIM-CISL of Brescia was founded in October 1951, during the first national congress of FIM-CISL, and its identity was considerably shaped by Franco Castrezzati, partisan during the Second World War, catholic politician in Cellatica (Brescia) and union

¹¹¹ Bentivogli, F., "Epopoea e declino dei consigli di fabbrica", in Andriani, G., Costa, G. (eds.), *Fimmini: La Fim Cisl dal '69 ad oggi tra democrazia e innovazione contrattuale*, BiblioLavoro, 2010, 33-54.

¹¹² Bentivogli, F., "Epopoea e declino dei consigli di fabbrica", in Andriani, G., Costa, G. (eds.), *Fimmini: La Fim Cisl dal '69 ad oggi tra democrazia e innovazione contrattuale*, BiblioLavoro, 2010, 33-54

¹¹³ Bentivogli, M., *Abbiamo rovinato l'Italia?*, Lit Edizioni, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Bentivogli, F., "Epopoea e declino dei consigli di fabbrica", in Andriani, G., Costa, G. (eds.), *Fimmini: La Fim Cisl dal '69 ad oggi tra democrazia e innovazione contrattuale*, BiblioLavoro, 2010, 33-54

activist in CISL of Brescia from the 1950s¹¹⁵. When elected as General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia, Castrezzati had to deal with the paternalistic approach of Brescia's entrepreneurs, who were more interested in contrasting the presence of communist labour organisations in the workplaces, rather than in contributing to modern and cooperative industrial relations. Therefore, he chose to affirm FIM-CISL autonomy from employers and from CISL of Brescia (which was in favour of a centralisation of power to the detriment of the vertical development of the organisation across industries) and he tried to carry out joint actions with FIOM-CGIL. These strategies were pursued notably during the struggle against the anti-strike bonus in OM (today Iveco) and the strikes for the negotiation of productivity-related pay (e.g. in the weapons factory named Beretta). In those years, FIM-CISL of Brescia became a model for other local structures of FIM-CISL, particularly in Milan and Turin. The late 1960s are known as the "hot autumn", characterised by a series of large strikes and manifestations in Northern Italy. Brescia experienced a huge degree of workers' participation in mobilisations, which led to the signature of the 1969 collective agreement for the metalworking sector. Wage increases, 40 working hours per week, expansion of collective rights (e.g. assembly, delegates' recognition), the right to decentralised collective bargaining were some of the outcomes of the agreement. In the 1970s, Italy was harshly hit by a wave of fascist terrorism, struggling against the increasing role of workers and unions. In Brescia, sticks of TNT were positioned at CISL premises. Fortunately, the attack was thwarted. Following this attempted attack, a national manifestation was convened in Piazza della Loggia in Brescia on May 28, 1974. At 10.12 a.m. during the speech of Castrezzati, a bomb exploded in the square and provoked 8 dead and 103 injured people. However, important goals for workers were achieved in the 1970s. In 1970, the "Workers' Statute" was approved and in 1973 the "right to study" (i.e. represented by 150 hours per year) was introduced in a new collective agreement in the metalworking sector. Moreover, those years were characterised by the development of company-level collective bargaining, the increasing power to works councils, the salary growth and the improvement of workers' conditions, despite the opposition of employers and their association in Brescia. In 1985, the unitary experience of the Federation of Metalworkers (FLM), started in 1972 and gathering FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL and UILM-UIL, ended. FIM-CISL of Brescia suffered from the

¹¹⁵ *La Fim di Brescia: per una storia dei metalmeccanici bresciani*, BiblioLavoro, 2008.

failure of the experience, as only 5,000 workers chose to become members of the organisation. In the 1980s, while Brescia's companies were troubled by the increasing international competition and asked workers for more concessions at the bargaining table, the so-called "Brescia's anomaly" came out. It is characterised by a strong ideological polarisation between the major labour federations in the metalworking sector: FIOM-CGIL of Brescia usually distinguishes itself for a more militant and confrontational approach to negotiations, while FIM-CISL of Brescia tends to establish cooperative industrial relations and promote workers' participation in the decision-making process in companies. The main employers' association in the industrial sector in Brescia is AIB (*Associazione Industriale Bresciana*), which in the 1980s shew a certain resistance against company-level collective bargaining. Unlike the employers' associations in the other areas of Northern Italy, AIB appeared very intransigent and intolerant towards labour-management relations at the workplace level. However, in a view of containing workers' strikes, AIB ended up with leaving room for the demands from the most radical components of workers' representation, identified by FIOM-CGIL. Here are the foundations of the long hegemony of FIOM-CGIL in industrial relations in the metalworking sector in Brescia¹¹⁶. Only in more recent times, as the interview conducted with a union official revealed¹¹⁷, FIM-CISL of Brescia has succeeded in distinguishing itself from FIOM-CGIL via the promotion of instances such as decentralised collective bargaining, performance-related pay schemes, employee participation in work organisation and welfare initiatives at company level. Over the past ten years, the attempt to pursue these objectives has implied public and harsh disputes between FIM-CISL and FIOM-CGIL in Brescia, which have commonly led to the presentation of different union platforms (one promoted by FIOM-CGIL and the other one promoted by FIM-CISL in those companies where both unions are present) and the conclusion of "separate agreement" (i.e. collective agreement not signed by all the unions operating in the company) at the company level.

¹¹⁶ *La Fim di Brescia: per una storia dei metalmeccanici bresciani*, BiblioLavoro, 2008.

¹¹⁷ The interview was conducted on January 23, 2017.

3.2.3.2. Trade union discourse on direct employee participation

According to the Secretary General of FIM-CISL of Brescia and another member of the secretarial body¹¹⁸, there are three main motives behind the choice to pursue greater employee participation in work organisation. Firstly, there is an aspect that derives from the acknowledgement of the external socio-economic condition and the necessity of keeping pace with these changes in order to better represent workers' interests and rights. Notably, there is the perception, particularly expressed by a member of the secretarial body of FIM-CISL of Brescia, that the external macro-economic factors (notably, the transition towards a *knowledge economy*, where competitiveness rely on workers' skills and abilities, increased product quality and responsiveness to customer) will necessarily lead to increased companies' interest in developing new models of work organisation, which enhance employee involvement. As a consequence, the only way through which trade unions can survive is to take part in this process and attempt to make it more sustainable for workers, by giving them the right instruments to voice their suggestions and actively contribute to the improvement of their company. This perspective can reasonably be interpreted as a "(re)embeddedness effort": the union's attempt to integrate recent organisational developments within the framework of collective representation and industrial relations. Moreover, this reasoning is intertwined with Marshall's discourse on citizenship, conceived as a «basic equality» deriving from a sense of community membership, that is compatible and coinciding with the rise and maintenance of capitalism «which [though] is a system, not of equality, but of inequality»; particularly, Marshall introduces the concept of industrial citizenship, regarded as a form of collective civil citizenship, «parallel and supplementary to the system of political citizenship» in its potential to deliver social rights¹¹⁹. Secondly, there is a motive which is strictly connected with the unitarist perspective and the *business case* argument, better explained in the literature review of this project. Particularly, it is emphasised by the representatives of FIM-CISL of Brescia that increased direct employee participation is expected to lead to better results in terms of firms' productivity and competitiveness. In addition, as suggested by a union representative, there's the belief that external consultants chosen by

¹¹⁸ The interviews were conducted on January 23 and January 30, 2017.

¹¹⁹ Marshall, T. H., "Citizenship and Social Class", in Marshall, T. H., *Citizenship and Social Class and other essays*, Cambridge University Press, 1950, 1-85.

some companies are not prepared enough to carry out organisational innovation projects, since they barely know the company and its workers; hence, the union can play a role in bridging external consultants' gaps¹²⁰. Thirdly, there is an aspect which is related to a broader and social meaning of work, as it is argued by Luciani in his analysis of the conceptualisation of work within the Italian Constitution¹²¹, which profoundly relies on Arendt's third dimension of the human activity as *action* or *homo politicus*, which encompassing dialogue, social relationships, political activity, and so on, is strictly linked to the sphere of human freedom.¹²² More specifically, a representative of FIM-CISL of Brescia affirms that direct employee participation may play an instrumental role in giving value to the work of people and devising a new identity of workers within the society. This "job-enlargement"¹²³ perspective, which clearly draws on the thought of Giulio Pastore, former General Secretary of CISL¹²⁴, appears to be consistent not only with the neopluralist view within the industrial relations literature but also with the recent attempts made by lecturers to re-conceptualise labour regulation, by abandoning the mere function of redressing the imbalance of contractual power between employers and employees and drawing more heavily on the Sen's Capability Approach¹²⁵, thus attributing to labour regulation a role in enhancing individuals' capabilities and promoting their wellbeing¹²⁶.

By answering to a question referred to the origins of the experimentations on employee participation and work organisation, the representatives from FIM-CISL of Brescia highlight the influence exerted by three external issues: the popularity and success of some previous, though mainly management-led, experiences in employee participation at company level; the recent introduction of fiscal, and then contributory cuts, related to the promotion of employee involvement in work organisation; the acknowledgement of the scant performance of variable pay schemes and their low appeal to workers. As regards

¹²⁰ This argument was made by a union official interviewed on April 3, 2017.

¹²¹ Luciani, M., "Radici e conseguenze della scelta costituzionale di fondare la repubblica democratica sul lavoro", in *ADL*, 2010, 3, 628-652.

¹²² Arendt, H., *The human condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1958.

¹²³ The expression is used in Fenwick, R., Olson, J., "Support for worker participation: attitudes among union and non-union workers", in *American Sociological Review*, 1986, 51 (4): 505-522.

¹²⁴ As reported in Carera, A., "Giulio Pastore: per la crescita civile degli "uomini del lavoro", in *Storia economica*, 2013, 211-232, Pastore acknowledged the importance of worker participation, intended as an expression of human freedom, encompassing all the experiences of social and personal life, and likely to enable institutional and structural innovations, centred on the full dignity of the individual.

¹²⁵ Sen, A., *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

¹²⁶ Del Punta, R., "Labour Law and the Capability Approach", in *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 2016, 32 (4): 383-406.

the first issue, it is pointed out that Brescia hosts a plant of the Italian company Iveco (belonging to the multinational group, Fiat Chrysler) where the methods of World Class Manufacturing (combining lean manufacturing and Total Quality Management) have been implemented since 2006 following a corporate management's initiative. This system and the related effects on work and workers' conditions have been investigated by an empirical research focused on 5,000 employees in 30 establishments of the same multinational group, conducted by a team of lecturers and experts from the Polytechnic of Milan and Turin, and commissioned by the national structure of FIM-CISL¹²⁷. This research shed light on employee views on the change of their work, the decreased physical efforts and the increased conceptual pressures, thus catching the attention of some officials from FIM-CISL of Brescia, that started thinking about how to overcome the gap in knowledge and action on work organisation. Secondly, a member from FIM-CISL of Brescia mentions the significant contribution of the 2016 Budget Law (then confirmed for 2017), which introduced not only a tax reduction for those variable pay schemes, established via collective agreements at company or territorial level and linked to increases in productivity, profitability, quality, efficiency and innovativeness, but also an increase in the maximum amount of these bonuses subject to decreased taxation if accompanied by ways and instruments of employee involvement in work organisation (e.g. via work groups where managers and employees operate on the same footing for the improvement of performance levels and via bilateral permanent structures for the monitoring of the results achieved). The fiscal intervention on employee involvement has been recently replaced by contributory incentives for employers who establish and implement ways and instruments of employee involvement in work organisation, in agreement with trade unions. These incentives, in the form of reductions in social security contributions, are applied to variable bonuses up to 800 Euro. This legislative measure has contributed to enhancing the commitment of FIM-CISL of Brescia in this area. Finally, the General Secretary of the local trade union specifies that the increasing awareness of the potentials of employee participation in work organisation, following some previous management-initiated experiences in unionised companies, has gone hand in hand with the growing acknowledgement of the inadequacy of performance-related

¹²⁷ Various Authors, *Le persone e la fabbrica: Una ricerca sugli operai Fiat-Chrysler in Italia*, Guerini Next, 2015.

pay to satisfy workers' interests and needs as well as to increase their involvement and motivation. The General Secretary clearly admits that focusing on economic demands and redistributive practices, such as the negotiations over variable pay schemes and joint labour-management committees for their monitoring, and leaving organisational issues to management's discretion have been a serious mistake, since performance-related pay failed to boost both firms' competitiveness and workers' engagement. For this reason, and given the acknowledgement of the importance of people in producing change and innovation, representatives from FIM-CISL of Brescia have begun to sustain the idea that it is necessary to firstly promote direct employee participation in work organisation and at a later stage contributing to creating a pay structure, which is coherent with the organisational improvements. It is important to clarify that there is no a precise directive regarding employee participation and work organisation coming from the higher levels of FIM-CISL's organisational structure (i.e. regional or national level). Therefore, even though the theses elaborated by FIM-CISL for its XIX National Congress recognise the need to convert the traditional interest in employee participation into concrete actions that enhance employees' participation and professional competences to the benefit of the company's performance and sustainability, FIM-CISL of Brescia declares not to operate in this field to comply with precise directives expressed by the national representatives. However, it should be specified that from September 2015 to March 2016, a training course, financed by the bilateral interprofessional fund, FAPI, and focused on the issues of organisational innovation and company-level collective bargaining, was organised by CISL Lombardia and the local employers' association of SMEs, API Varese, and involved around 70 local trade union officials: some unionists from FIM-CISL of Brescia also took part in the initiative¹²⁸. Even though the training programme paved the way to the launch of organisational innovation projects in few companies, FIM-CISL of Brescia ended its involvement in this initiative with the participation in the training course. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the idea of boosting direct employee participation

¹²⁸ To deepen the reasons behind the beginning of this activity, see Moia, S., "Una migliore organizzazione del lavoro come proposta per una crescita della produttività", in *Outsider*, Formaper, July-August 2016, 5, 17-18. The article was written by a trade union official from CISL Lombardia, whose ideas seem to be very close to those of the metalworkers' representatives from Brescia, described in this section. More specifically, Moia underlines the relevance of organisational innovation to spur firms' performance; plus, he stresses the role of training to create those cultural preconditions for a paradigm shift in industrial relations, so that they can accompany and sustain innovation processes at company level.

in work organisation does not originate from the willingness of the union's constituency. As the interviewees specify, partly due to a long-lasting tradition of adversarial industrial relations in the territory and an organisation of work in some companies that hardly overcomes a Taylorist approach, workers are generally not accustomed to situations where they are asked to give a direct contribution in decision-making processes at the operational level. As a consequence, the officials from FIM-CISL of Brescia affirm that they have to explain workers the meaning of employee participation and why it is important to enhance it. The interviewees state that times are not ripe enough to make a reasonable evaluation on the overall workers' perception on the commitment of FIM-CISL of Brescia in this domain. However, from some experiences that have already being implemented at company level, it is possible to detect the willingness of most workers to take part in these reorganisation processes and give a concrete contribution for the improvement of performance levels. «They do not back down» and have a lot to say about work organisation¹²⁹. Importantly, a representative from FIM-CISL of Brescia emphasises the need to convert workers' enthusiasm for these initiatives in increased rates of membership¹³⁰.

With reference to strategies and actions carried out to pursue greater employee participation in work organisation, the interviewees agree that it is important to firstly invest in the trade union's human resources, by training the leading group, union officials and shop stewards and providing them with the necessary skills to operate in this domain. Notably, as affirmed by the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia¹³¹, it is essential to provide union leaders and officials with theoretical knowledge on employee participation at company level as well as to organise meetings for the exchange of practices and views in order to inspire a profound cultural change which is regarded as a pre-condition for the success of these experiences. Indeed, the role of the unionist is expected to switch from a mere mediator between the interests of the company and those of workers, to a partner of the company in finding win-win solutions to existing problems,

¹²⁹ The quote is of the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia during an interview held on January 30, 2017.

¹³⁰ After all, not all union revitalisation strategies are likely to increase membership rates, as Haipeter demonstrates by looking at the recent experiences of IG Metall. See, Haipeter, T., "Union Renewal and Business Strategies: Strategic Codetermination of Works Councils and the Campaign "Better Not Cheaper" of the German Metalworkers' Unions", in *International Business Research*, 2013, 6 (3): 40-57.

¹³¹ The interview was conducted on January 30, 2017.

thus acting as a facilitator for these processes, that are likely to reduce the union's mediating function via increased direct employee voice. Interestingly, this argument recalls Müller-Jentsch's distinction between union-based and employer-based forms of interest mediation at firm level, whereby the former includes single-employer bargaining over co-determination and joint consultation, while the latter entails employer-sponsored participation and employee involvement¹³². Like the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia, also the Author suggests unions to engage in plant-level cooperation and adopt a co-managing role, in a situation of structural changes and socio-technical reorganisation processes. To do so, union officials and shop stewards should be able to analyse companies' balance sheets and organisational processes. Furthermore, the General Secretary specifies that unionists need to develop greater capacity to listen to (and not only affect) workers and to approach companies in a partnership way. Finally, it is argued that pursuing greater employee participation in work organisation requires a radical change even in the ways through which the union operates. Indeed, changing the organisational structure within a company does not constitute an immediate operation, yet it implies an analysis of the company, the establishment of good relationships with both managers and workers, a detailed planning of the actions, a monitoring of those actions, etc. Overall, it requires the design of a complex project, entailing different phases to be carried out in different times. That is why, according to FIM-CISL of Brescia, union officials need to overcome their emergency way of working and embrace a forward-looking approach to workers' representation and industrial relations, by carefully planning and organising their actions to achieve a concrete goal. Beyond unionists' training and skills development, the interviewees point out that it is important to establish relations with technical experts in this topic so that they can support the union in drafting work reorganisation projects and assist both the union and the company in their implementation. Indeed, the union does not have technical skills in this domain and the relationships with external experts (e.g. from consultancy agencies or universities) may be relevant to provide these company-level experiences in work organisation with technical foundations. However, it is highlighted that before concrete results emerge from these projects, it is advisable not to inform and involve many external actors (e.g.

¹³² Müller-Jentsch, W., "Industrial Relations Theory and Trade Union Strategy", in *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 1988, 4 (3): 177-190.

employers' associations, consultants, etc.) but to select only trustworthy and reliable partners. Notably, it is stressed the value of the collaboration with an external expert, working for a private consultancy firm and for the Polytechnic of Turin, who comes from the union environment and currently covers the role of the FIM-CISL responsible for work organisation at the national level. His/her involvement is thus welcomed as likely to activate work reorganisation projects that focus on people and their role rather than on mere technical aspects of lean systems¹³³.

As far as possible negative implications of work reorganisation processes are concerned, the interviewees underline different aspects that partly recall Walton and McKersie's subprocesses of labour negotiations¹³⁴. Firstly, it emerges that some employers fear that the trade union wants to replace them in making decisions concerning work organisation. This issue is evidently linked to the so-called *attitudinal structuring* process, that according to Walton and McKersie implies the search for trust in labour-management relations, since trust proves to be a pre-condition for effective integrative solutions. Secondly, there is the difficulty to build workers' consensus over the intention of FIM-CISL of Brescia to promote direct employee participation. This situation clearly relates to what Walton and McKersie define as *intra-organisational* or *surface bargaining*, which is necessary to provide the trade union with the authority to make commitments with the employer at the bargaining table. In this case, the representatives from FIM-CISL of Brescia underline that intra-organisational bargaining is made even more complex by the heterogeneity of the workforce. Particularly, adult unionised workers may not understand the recent change in the union's behaviour and its new interest in work organisation, as work organisation has never been at the core of the trade union strategy. On the other hand, young non-unionised workers are likely to perceive the union as a useless body which interferes in the direct relationships between workers and the employer. Plus, also first-line supervisors are depicted as a very delicate category of

¹³³ I conducted an interview with the expert on September 7, 2017. In that occasion, he affirmed that promoting employee direct participation in workplaces is important to both give value to the work of people, thus contributing to "de-commodifying" labour, and boost competitiveness. He specified that companies are already engaging in work organisational projects, but often these initiatives are badly conducted. Therefore, it is necessary to support a union approach to these changes, which also allows to fairly distribute the gains from organisational innovation.

¹³⁴ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965.

workers, since they tend to fear that employee-participation projects are likely to eliminate their jobs¹³⁵. Therefore, the interviewees stress that it is important to consider all these heterogeneous instances while attempting to build consensus among workers. Furthermore, a member of the secretarial body of FIM-CISL of Brescia fears that direct employee participation makes indirect (union-led) employee participation irrelevant at the workplace and wonders whether the unitary workplace union structure can be compatible with a model of work organisation that relies on team works, joint consultative committees, etc. This fear is also extensively reported by literature¹³⁶. Finally, it is interesting to mention the suggestion made by one representative from FIM-CISL of Brescia. Notably, he/she affirms that pursuing employee participation in work organisation may imply a radical change in the CISL's logics of representation. Whereas CISL has always adopted an associational approach to workers' representation¹³⁷, thus valorising the role of its members and concentrating on their needs, the choice of enhancing employee participation may imply the adoption of a broader vision encompassing all workers in a company and the advancement of general interests.

Interestingly, one member of the secretarial body of FIM-CISL of Brescia argues that in the first years of the economic crisis the union adopted a very short-sighted approach, by simply supporting the deployment of social-shock absorbers to overcome difficulties. In other words, the union did not commit itself to the promotion of a concrete and profound analysis of the root causes of the economic problems within firms. Only in recent times, unionists have become aware of the need to act at the organisational level to solve many structural problems and prevent crises and closures. It is though contended that it may be too late for the recovery of many critical situations. Moreover, employers can no more rely on generous social-shock absorbers, as the resources allocated to this purpose have recently been reduced by government¹³⁸.

¹³⁵ This fear, referred by a unionist of FIM-CISL of Brescia on April 3, 2017, was also reported in Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., "The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining", in *Monthly Labor Review*, 1977, 100 (4): 52-55.

¹³⁶ See, for instance, Kochan, T. A., Katz, H. C., Mower, N. R., *Worker Participation and American Unions: Threat or Opportunity?*, M.I.: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1984.

¹³⁷ Lama, L., "The CISL Pillars. The original Concept as Trade Union", *Ausili didattici per la formazione sindacale*, Centro Studi Nazionale CISL, 2008, 7.

¹³⁸ This interview was held on January 23, 2017.

3.2.4. Action

This section is intended to shed light on the strategies and actions carried out by FIM-CISL of Brescia in an attempt to promote employee direct participation in work organisation. After explaining the slight changes in the role of the union as representative of workers' interests and in its own organisational structure given the new attention paid to workers' participation, I will describe the intervention of FIM-CISL of Brescia in 4 local companies. The examination of these case studies will provide the basis for the "Discussion" paragraph of this research project. Company case studies are developed through the method of participant observation, entailing direct participation in the daily activities of FIM-CISL of Brescia, such as internal meetings and discussions, collective negotiations and assemblies, analysis of primary documents (i.e. collective agreements, industrial plans, etc.) and semi-structured interviews with local union officials and shop stewards.

As explained in the literature review, it is possible to identify three major roles of trade unions: the regulatory role, the representation role and the services provider role¹³⁹. The action of FIM-CISL of Brescia in the field of non-union employee voice essentially encompasses and affects the union's regulatory role (via collective bargaining for the delivery of collective goods), which, in Schmitter and Streeck's typology, is mainly related to the logic of *influence*, and representation role (via mobilisation, lobbying, networking, etc. for the delivery of identity goods), which is instead linked to the logic of *membership*¹⁴⁰. On the one hand, as I will better describe in the following lines, the trade union is involved in changing work organisation in various companies, by contributing to the definition of specific projects and the production of new rules that mainly concern decision-making and organisational processes as well as workers' training, and may thus be ascribed to the general goal of workers' promotion rather than protection¹⁴¹. On the other hand, the recent attention to the issues of direct employee participation seems to bring about also significant changes in the union's representation strategies and organisational structure, in an attempt to boost participation also within the union

¹³⁹ See Figure 4 in Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁰ Schmitter, P. C., Streeck, W., "The Organization of Business Interests: Studying the Associative Action of Business in Advanced Industrial Societies", *WZB Discussion Paper IIM/LMP 81/13*, 1981.

¹⁴¹ See Figure 4 in Chapter 2.

organisation so as to enhance the role of union delegates and members, and promote their skills and dignity. The following paragraphs thus concentrate on the internal (mainly regarding changes in union organisation) and external (essentially concerning relationships with employers at company level) dimensions of union actions.

3.2.4.1. Internal dimension (logic of membership)

During an interview held on December 15, 2017, the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia affirms that it is not possible to promote direct employee participation in work organisation at company level without encouraging direct participation also within the trade union organisation¹⁴². FIM-CISL of Brescia needs to be trustworthy and reliable in the eyes of workers. For this reason, the union asks itself to abandon its hierarchical organisational structure and top-down representation initiatives so as to allow for more horizontal relationships between union members and officials, and for bottom-up activities. An effort that, as previously explained, has already been made since the late 2014 when FIM-CISL of Brescia started to organise its activities according to three different processes (the training process, the negotiating process and the organisational process), all managed by different unionists in relation to their own interests and abilities and irrespective of their position in the union's hierarchy. This organisational structure of FIM-CISL of Brescia was conceived as relevant to encourage autonomy, participation and responsibility among all union officials.

Moreover, the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia asserts that some of the most important moments and rituals within the organisation (i.e. assemblies with workers in companies, the General Council and the Congress) are already being affected by the recent union's interest in direct employee participation. Firstly, some union officials (particularly, those who are more sensitive to the issue) are starting to test new ways to hold assemblies with workers, by overcoming the traditional model consisting of a discourse made by the unionist and some questions made by workers, and searching for more direct involvement of workers and their active contribution during the entire assembly. Secondly, both the General Council (held monthly and open to union delegates

¹⁴² This argument is clearly raised also in Cohen-Rosenthal, E., "Sociotechnical Systems and Unions: Nicety or Necessity", in *Human Relations*, 1997, 50 (5): 585-604. Here, the Author suggests that applying a sociotechnical model also to union structure is required to make unions' demands for sociotechnical organisations in workplaces more credible.

and members for the discussion of relevant topics) and the Congress (held every four years for the election of the new trade union leadership) have recently experienced an important change. Indeed, on October 25, 2016, FIM-CISL of Brescia organised a General Council aimed at spurring union delegates and members' critical thinking and problem solving with reference to their companies' organisational structure. The participants were divided into seven groups and coordinated by an expert from the Polytechnic of Turin, currently representing the main partner of FIM-CISL of Brescia in work organisation-related issues. After analysing a company case-study, workers in each group were asked to provide suggestions and help their colleagues find solutions to organisational issues. Finally, they were invited to show the results of their work to the other groups' members. According to the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia, this represented an important occasion to stimulate workers' participation and collaboration with each other, against dominant individualistic values within society and for the promotion of a new idea of work that based on workers' participation and cooperation, promotes people and their dignity¹⁴³. Moreover, the II Congress of FIM-CISL of Brescia and Val Camonica, held in February 2017 and entitled "The individual at the centre" [*La persona al centro*], was conceived and organised in an original way according to the unionists. Notably, in the weeks before the Congress, union delegates and members were divided into different groups according to their areas of origin, which together make up the territory of Brescia. Each group was coordinated by a union official, who illustrated to workers the "Congressional theses", elaborated by FIM-CISL and focused on five main issues (i.e. *Industry 4.0*; the future of industrial relations; a new trade union policy; the social role of the union; a new organisational structure), and invited workers to select a topic and formulate ideas and suggestions to improve the action of FIM-CISL of Brescia in that field. Later, during the Congress, each group was asked to prepare a brief report and present it to all participants. This was apparently the first time that union delegates and members had the opportunity to be protagonist in the Congress and advance their own instances and points of view. The goal of the leadership of FIM-CISL of Brescia was to mark a change of pace towards a new emphasis on cooperation, dialogue, teamwork

¹⁴³ See: FIM-CISL of Brescia, "A scuola si impara la partecipazione", in *Nuovo Impegno Sindacale*, Brescia Cisl, December 2016, 2-3, <http://www.fimbrescia.it/data/UserFiles/File/Notiziario%20Impegno%20sindacale%20dicembre%202016.pdf> (accessed 2 July 2018).

and a sense of belonging: all considered as important elements to tackle the current challenges in the world of work¹⁴⁴.

As previously mentioned, relationships with external actors (i.e. Universities, research centres, etc.) are considered by unionists from FIM-CISL of Brescia as particularly important in order to achieve their goal of boosting direct employee participation at company level¹⁴⁵. Notably, they declare to need the collaboration with external experts to carry out work reorganisation projects and progressively improve their own competences in this field. However, the metalworkers' organisation based in Brescia seems to generally count on the collaboration with one single expert, considered as trustworthy, reliable and inspired by the same values and ideas as those of the union. Indeed, he/she comes from the union environment and currently works for FIM-CISL at the national level; plus, he/she also runs a consulting firm focused on work organisation and collaborates with the Polytechnic of Turin. Apparently, no other relevant relationships with external actors have been established so far by FIM-CISL of Brescia, with reference to work organisation and direct participation.

As regards the importance attributed to FIM-CISL of Brescia to skills developments, the General Secretary confirms that the next training project directed to union delegates should be composed of a package specifically dedicated to direct employee participation in work organisation, with the aim of not only providing them with the necessary technical skills to discuss direct participation with management and monitor work reorganisation projects but also inspiring a change in the ways union delegates represent workers and interact with management. However, a certain caution is expressed by the General Secretary since, as he/she states, «we still need time to understand what's common among the experiences of direct participation already performed at company level; we still need time to find out some regularities»¹⁴⁶. Particularly, the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia explains that it is the role of the delegate in those companies already

¹⁴⁴ See, FIM-CISL of Brescia, "Partecipi, uniti e propositivi", in *Nuovo Impegno Sindacale*, Brescia Cisl, June 2017, 1-7, <http://www.fimbrescia.it/data/UserFiles/File/Impegno%20Sindacale%20Aprile%202017%20fto%20A4.pdf> (accessed 2 July 2018).

¹⁴⁵ The reference is to interviews conducted on January 23 and 30, 2017.

¹⁴⁶ This interview was conducted on April 12, 2018. It is worth mentioning that on March 27, 2018, the former General Secretary was replaced by another person, which was previously a member of the secretarial board.

experiencing a work reorganisation project, that is considerably changing: union delegates are no more the unique vehicles for workers to communicate with management. As a result, the General Secretary believes that union delegates cannot represent workers as they did in the past. It is suggested that adversarial practices towards management are not a valuable option any more, and that union delegates should become partners of managers in the development of work reorganisation projects, by also coaching their colleagues to deal with the organisational change¹⁴⁷. The relevance attributed by the union to the role of the delegate can be also seen in the new format of the union's magazine *Nuovo Impegno Sindacale*, which according to the General Secretary should be the "voice" of union delegates and members, more and more often asked to write articles for the magazine. An example can be found in the No. 6 (December 2017) of the magazine, entirely dedicated to the figure of the delegate and interviews conducted with delegates from different companies.

Finally, an important change in the union's organisation concerns the role of one union official. He/she shew an interest in direct employee participation and work organisation in workplaces since the beginning, and attempted to initiate work reorganisation processes also within some companies located in his/her reference geographical area. As a result, the union official started to work with the above-mentioned external expert and the secretarial body of FIM-CISL of Brescia decided to make him/her responsible for work organisation in the union. In this capacity, he/she is supposed to coordinate work reorganisation projects carried out in Brescia's companies, by helping his/her colleagues outline the projects and monitor their whole functioning. The union official has a privileged relationship with the external expert, as he/she is expected to provide the unionist with the necessary skills to play the role of an expert in work reorganisation projects and progressively replace him/her, thus making the union self-sufficient in this field. Overall, it is important to say that beyond the secretarial body, FIM-CISL of Brescia is being organised in as many functional groups as are the issues to be addressed (e.g. work organisation, welfare policies, etc.). As before mentioned, each group is coordinated

¹⁴⁷ The role of the union delegate was stressed by the General Secretary in the interview conducted on January 30, 2017.

by a single unionist, chosen for his/her own interests and skills and not following hierarchical criteria.

3.2.4.2. External dimension (logic of influence)

The following are 4 case studies on 4 different workplaces, where FIM-CISL of Brescia started to develop work reorganisation projects enhancing direct employee participation between 2016 and 2017.

Company A

Company A represents the parent company of a multinational group, including two subsidiaries located in Portugal and Poland. Company A was founded in 1899 as a producer of caps for sabres. In 1957, it entered the sector of hydro-thermal systems by producing brass syphons. Today (in 2018) it produces pipes and accessories, made of plastic and aluminium, for hot and cold water conveyance under pressure, compressed air, air-conditioning, industrial applications, and naval installations. It sells to wholesalers and suppliers in Italy (representing 35% of the sales volume) and abroad (representing 65% of the sales volume). Particularly, Company A trades in Maghreb, Arab states of the Persian Gulf (i.e. Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and Eastern Europe. The 2016-2018 industrial plan describes the sector as highly competitive with entry barriers limited to the know-how and the availability of capital. The bargaining power of both suppliers and clients is depicted as equally strong, since suppliers are large national or multinational producers and clients impose tight deadline, failing which the commission is lost. The presence of substitute products is quite low and dependent upon the deployment of different materials and/or new technologies. Company A consists of two establishments and three warehouses, located in the same town in the area of Brescia. It employs 94 workers (71 blue-collar workers and 23 white-collar workers). The majority of workers are men and the average age is 50 years old. Workers are generally employed on a permanent basis, with either a part-time or full-time employment contract. There are no temporary agency workers. The shop steward affiliated to FIM-CISL emphasises the presence of around 20 poorly qualified workers.

Company A has never been highly unionised. Today, unionised workers in the company are less than the half of the overall workforce (34 out of 94 workers). The shop steward

affiliated to FIM-CISL attributes the low degree of unionisation to some traditional features of the company¹⁴⁸. It was a family business, which was able to directly communicate with its workers with no need of union intermediation. The former Director General was responsible for the growth of Company A in the post-war II and workers were animated by feelings of loyalty and trust towards him/her and his/her work. As stated by the shop steward from FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL was the only union operating in the company until ten years ago and collective bargaining was characterised by fixed wage increases exchanged for no interference in traditional managerial prerogatives. FIM-CISL started to unionise the company about ten years ago, but the most representative union remains FIOM-CGIL. At the beginning of the reorganisation project (April 2016), two members of the unitary workplace union structure (RSU) were affiliated to FIOM-CGIL, whereas one member was affiliated to FIM-CISL. The industrial relations at the company were described as quite cooperative. Indeed, as confirmed by the shop steward affiliated to FIM-CISL, although Company A still owed two monthly salaries to all workers, no strike had been convened over the previous years.

As described by the shop steward and confirmed in the latest industrial plans, Company A seriously suffered from the economic crisis that hit Western countries from 2008. Notably, from 2010 both the sales volume and the operating revenue of the company started to decrease, along with the crisis that harshly hit the building sector in Italy. Due to these difficulties, the company-level collective agreement has not been renovated since 2008. In the following years, workers' representatives and management just negotiated the adoption of social shock absorbers. Over the last seven years, Company A's personnel has experienced a remarkable shrinking from 135 to 94 employees. Some workers have retired, other workers have found a different occupation. No worker has been fired.

Within the framework of an industrial plan presented by the new Director General (who has also the role of business manager as regards the abroad sales network) in 2016 and consisting of a range of new measures aimed at driving Company A out of the crisis (i.e. including the enhancement of the area Research and Development, the expansion of the sales network in foreign and emerging economies, the introduction of a project of Business Process Reengineering), on April 15, 2016, Company A management, the

¹⁴⁸ The interview with the shop steward was held on December 20, 2016.

unitary workplace union structure (composed of one member affiliated to FIM-CISL and two members affiliated to FIOM-CGIL) and two trade unionists respectively from FIM-CISL and FIOM-CGIL signed an agreement encompassing the launch of a new phase of social shock absorbers and the introduction of a so-called “Teamwork” project, conceived as a part of the overall Business Process Reengineering.

More specifically, as described by the shop steward affiliated to FIM-CISL, Company A difficulties induced local union officials from FIM-CISL to figure out a solution that could help management overcome existing problems. Union officials from FIM-CISL and the shop steward affiliated to the same union were the first to think of devising a teamwork project and only at a later stage, they advanced this proposal to Company A management. The new Director General reacted positively to the proposal, which was thus inserted in the April 2016 collective agreement.

The agreement established the introduction of a teamwork in each Company A department. The teamwork was expected to be composed of some workers from the department (not line managers or department’s heads) and the Director General. The parties agreed that each teamwork should organise two meetings every three months in order to discuss issues related to quality, productivity, work organisation and innovation. The unitary workplace union structure was endowed with a proactive role in the definition, implementation and assessment of the project. It was allowed to take part in each meeting organised by each teamwork and to periodically meet Company A management to discuss the implementation of the project and the evaluation of those problems that might arise. The agreement enshrined the company’s commitment to investing a specific amount of money in workers’ skills development.

However, it is worth mentioning that the actual implementation of the project revealed to be quite different from that planned in the collective agreement of April 15, 2016. What was actually being performed in Company A was pretty a unique joint committee composed of nine workers and the Director General. The members of this committee on the side of labour came from different Company A departments (i.e. moulding department, extruding machines, mechanical processing, packaging, assembly, warehouse, offices) and were elected by the whole workforce. From April to December 2016, two meetings of this committee were held. In the first meeting, members coming

from different departments were asked to speak about a concrete problem or critical issue affecting their area. A discussion was launched with the aim of finding solutions to the existing problems. In the second meeting, the Director General provided a feedback of the solutions emerged and evaluated them by taking account of their economic viability. Each meeting lasted about two hours.

In labour-management meetings held after the start of this project, both workers' representatives and management appeared enthusiastic about the results of the first committee's meetings. Notably, the Director General put emphasis on workers' availability to really contribute to solving those problems that they highlighted. Conversely, the shop steward affiliated to FIM-CISL stressed the importance of the climate of mutual trust engendered by this project. However, they both specified that it was too early to evaluate the project's results in terms of Company A's productivity and competitiveness.

In late November 2017, after over one year from the signature of the agreement, an official from FIM-CISL revealed that the "Teamwork Project" was going to founder, due to a radical change in the composition of the unitary workplace union structure¹⁴⁹. Indeed, after an overwhelming victory of FIM-CISL at the elections of the RSU in May 2017, FIOM-CGIL contested the validity of the vote and convened new elections. The new RSU was thus established and composed only of members affiliated to FIOM-CGIL. This change in the composition of the unitary workplace union structure produced a stalemate in the continuous improvement process promoted by FIM-CISL. FIOM-CGIL, the most representative union in the workplace, did not seem to be interested in the continuation of the project and instead, held a conflictual behaviour towards management, by also asking workers not to work overtime to fulfil orders until management pays the monthly salaries still owed to workers.

Figure 14. Scheme of Company A case-study.

COMPANY A	
Part of a group (YES or NO)	Yes

¹⁴⁹ The interview was conducted on November 22, 2017.

National or multinational scope	Multinational scope
Role in the group	Parent company
Role in the supply chain	Company A produces pipes and accessories and sells them to national and foreign wholesalers
Type of commercial transactions	B2B
Degree of market competition	High, with entry barriers limited to the know-how and the availability of capital
Dimension of the company	Less than 100 employees
Business	Hydro-thermal and medical sector (Company A produces pipes and accessories, made of plastic and aluminium, for hot and cold-water conveyance under pressure, compressed air, air-conditioning, industrial applications, and naval installations)
Economic conditions of the company	Since 2010, the company has been affected by the economic crisis, which has produced a decrease in operating revenues and sales volume
Industrial relations	Cooperative
Trade union density	36% of the employees
Most representative union in the company	FIOM-CGIL (most of the members of the unitary workplace union structure are affiliated to FIOM-CGIL)
Reasons behind the introduction of the project	Economic and financial difficulties that are partly linked to problems related to the work organisation
Start of the project	April 15, 2016
How did the project start?	Via a collective agreement which also enshrined the adoption of social shock absorbers and company investments in workers' training
Essential features of the project	A joint worker-management committee that convenes regularly to discuss about quality, productivity, work organisation, innovation. The committee is conceived as useful to the implementation of the Business Process Reengineering.
Role of the union (FIM-CISL) in the project	FIM-CISL devised the project and then communicated it to management.
Role of the unitary workplace union structure (RSU) in the project	The unitary workplace union structure was allowed to take part in each meeting of the committee and to regularly discuss with management the implementation and potential improvement of the project
Role of the company in the project	The Director General was a member of the joint committee. Plus, he/she cooperated with the unitary workplace union structure in the implementation of the project.

Role of the workers in the project	All workers elected nine out of them, coming from different departments, to be members of the committee. The nine members were asked to identify problems and propose solutions during meetings.
Role of external experts in the project	None
Preliminary response to the project	Satisfaction from workers' representatives and the Director General. Positive feedback in terms of trust between workers and management in the company. Too early to assess the impact in terms of productivity of the company.
End of the project	In late 2017, the project foundered due to a change in the composition of the RSU.

Company B

Company B represents the subsidiary of a multinational group headquartered in Japan, which manufactures press forming systems and, as stated in the 2016 Annual Report, helps customers maintain efficiency and quality in their manufacturing operations and contributes to their efforts to save resources and energy. The multinational group was founded in 1917 and now boasts of an international network consisting of five development and production facilities located around the globe in Japan, China, Malaysia, Italy and the United States, as well as of sales and service branches located in 34 cities in 17 countries (i.e. Brazil, Canada, China, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam). The focus of the group is clearly on the customer and its needs, as it emerges from the 2016 Annual Report, which states that the corporation «provides after-sales service through specialist service engineers stationed in locations throughout the world to enable customers, wherever they may be, to use our products with confidence. By not only providing various types of maintenance and spare parts but also performing preventive maintenance and recommending improvements and upgrades, we build long-term customer relationships on a foundation of trust». Automobile-related industries account for over 80% of net sales in the group's press machine business, while after-sales services comprise another important business division. The European division stands for 18.7% of the group's overall net sales, while the Japanese, American and Asian divisions account respectively for 34.7%, 23.9% and 22.6% of the total net sales. The future

perspective of the group is to further develop and pursue environmentally friendly and energy-saving products.

Company B was an Italian press manufacturer until 2004, when it was acquired by the multinational group, which turned it into the reference manufacturing location in Europe. Company B is specialised in the manufacturing of tandem lines and transfer presses for the automotive industry. Further, thanks to the contribution of the other European establishments, Company B provides: planned and preventive maintenance at the customer's convenience; equipment upgrades for enhancing productivity; complete plant re-location all over the world; in house knowledge and evaluation for safety and regulatory standards; refurbishment of press models.

Company B consists of 320 employees (the proportion of blue-collar and white-collar workers is quite similar). Most of workers are men, while women account for only 10 per cent of the total workforce. The average age is around 40 years old. However, a shop steward from FIM-CISL reports that over the last months Company B has experienced an increase in young workers. The vast majority of workers (97%) are employed on a permanent basis. The remaining 3% of workers are either employed on a temporary basis (either directly or via an employment agency) or with an apprenticeship contract.

Labour-management relations at Company B are described by shop stewards from FIM-CISL as cooperative even before the acquisition by the multinational group¹⁵⁰. Unionised workers in the company account for about 35% of the entire workforce. In the company, there are two representative unions: FIM-CISL and FIOM-CGIL, which, according to a FIM-CISL official, «are still looking for their mutual recognition»¹⁵¹. FIOM-CGIL holds the majority of union constituents. Workers affiliated to FIM-CISL are about 50. However, FIM-CISL holds the majority of members in the unitary workplace union structure (RSU), where 4 members are affiliated to FIM-CISL and one member is affiliated to FIOM-CGIL.

According to shop stewards from FIM-CISL, the need for Company B's work reorganisation emerged from the bad performances of a variable pay scheme, negotiated

¹⁵⁰ The interview with shop stewards was held on February 13, 2017.

¹⁵¹ This interview was conducted on August 2, 2017.

in 2012¹⁵² and linked to four objectives: turnover portion, operative income, cost of not quality and efficiency. As explained by FIM-CISL's delegates, satisfying levels of these parameters were never achieved and the labour-management joint committee, established in 2012 to monitor the performance of the indicators and carry out actions to solve potential problems, was never able to fulfil its functions. «They (management) gave you numbers that were unverifiable and unmanageable», a shop steward, who was also a member of this committee, affirmed¹⁵³. This condition was compounded by the perception of workers at the shop floor that poor performances of the variable pay scheme could be ascribed to issues related to the organisation of work. For instance, they complained about the difficulties to trace at the shop floor the material needed for the production and they noticed considerable communication gaps between the design office and the production and assembly departments. These deficiencies usually led to serious mistakes committed by the designers, which in turn provoked delays in the production phase.

Within this scenario, on March 2016, the President of Company B released a newsletter targeted to all employees emphasising the worrying operating loss of the fiscal year. More precisely, the President revealed some details of a previous meeting held in Japan with the parent company and some external auditors. In that occasion, the parent company, though specifying that negative Company B's results were balanced by profits achieved in Japan, warned the President that in absence of positive levels of profit in the following fiscal year, Company B would have faced the «inevitable consequences». Moreover, the President emphasised in the newsletter the relevance of some technological investments, which would have had to lead to improved efficiency levels in the departments “Carpentry” and “Welding” in the following months. However, he/she also stressed the inability of other important units of Company B to achieve the objectives. The President took part of responsibility for these negative results, though asking all workers to respond together «as a team» to this situation and commit themselves to work hard for an improvement. In the final lines of the newsletter, the President announced some imminent changes in the organisational structure of the company and underlined his/her confidence

¹⁵² The performance-related pay scheme was negotiated in 2012 by management, the unitary workplace union structure and FIM-CISL. FIOM-CGIL did not sign the agreement.

¹⁵³ The interview was conducted on February 13, 2017.

that all employees would have committed efforts to show the parent company successful results. Lately, the President reminded that the multinational group is a stock company and has a responsibility to shareholders.

In the following months, the parent company made important changes within the organisation of Company B, by dismissing the President, the General Director and the Human Resources Director. Contemporarily, FIM-CISL of Brescia started to be involved in some meetings with Company B's management, the unitary workplace union structure and FIOM-CGIL of Brescia, aimed at discussing the renewal of the 2012 company-level collective agreement which was about to expire. During these meetings, the management restated the economic difficulties and the impossibility of bargaining over wage increases. FIOM-CGIL responded to this affirmation by expressing its opposition to the idea of signing an agreement which would have not included any wage increases. «We have a mandate from workers, who clearly want to discuss over wages», the official from FIOM-CGIL contended. He/she was available to postpone the negotiation over wages up to the following year. However, Company B's management specified that, in all likelihood, the circumstances would have not improved in the following year. This situation led to a stalemate in the negotiations over the renewal of the company-level collective agreement.

In the meantime, FIM-CISL of Brescia started thinking about the possibility of involving some external experts, and notably a project manager, who is responsible at FIM-CISL (national level) for work organisation, and a professor from the Polytechnic University of Milan, to solve Company B organisational problems. Indeed, as affirmed by a FIM-CISL official, the experience of the joint committee, which was supposed to monitor the variable pay scheme, had revealed Company B's incapacity of internally tackling serious issues. Therefore, FIM-CISL of Brescia asked the external experts to contribute to a joint effort to improve Company B's conditions. In April 2016 (some weeks after the release of the above-mentioned newsletter), the experts drafted a project entitled "Worker and union participation for the improvement of productivity". The premise to the document reported the difficult financial conditions faced by Company B and the FIM-CISL's commitment to the promotion of a joint initiative (foreseeing the contribution of management, external experts and workers) intended to pursue better levels of productivity via increased worker participation. In order to achieve this objective, the document proposed a methodology consisting of several steps: the analysis of critical

aspects in the production process thanks to the know how expressed by workers; the quantification of losses and waste in terms of costs; the planning of actions to improve the process by containing costs; the assessment of the results by looking at company performance and learning. Then the project outlined a detailed roadmap consisting of three phases: the identification of intervention areas (mainly via focus groups with workers and interviews with managers) to be performed in two months; the analysis-diagnosis and the action plan (mainly via analysing company costs and the productive organisation, and submitting a survey to workers) to be performed in three months; first implementation of improvement actions (mainly via outlining an intervention plan, assessing the effectiveness of the initiatives and suggesting hypotheses for a continuous improvement process) to be performed in three months. The organisation of the project envisaged a steering committee (composed of the plant manager, the HR manager, an official from FIM-CISL of Brescia, the unitary workplace union structure and external experts) with the task of coordinating and monitoring the several project's phases, and an improvement group (composed of 2/3 managers, the unitary workplace union structure, company technicians and external experts) with the task of implementing the project. Plus, it was specified the involvement of focus groups, managers and workers at various stages of the improvement process. This project was introduced to the Company B's management, which reserved itself some time to evaluate it and its possible development.

The management's evaluation took some months, and for this reason the start of the project was delayed. However, it is important to mention that while evaluating the project proposal, Company B's management started to unilaterally organise focus groups in the assembly and machine tools departments. These focus groups were led by departments' supervisors and attempted to involve all workers employed in these units. As reported by the shop stewards from FIM-CISL, in an interview conducted on February 13, 2017, they initially functioned quite well. However, in the following months they turned themselves into mere occasions where supervisors or managers communicated information to their subordinates.

Eventually, on December 12, 2016, Company B's management, the unitary workplace union structure, and two officials respectively from FIM-CISL and FIOM-CGIL of Brescia signed an agreement setting forth the launch of the project presented by the external experts involved by FIM-CISL. This agreement stated that Company B operates

in a highly competitive market where operating margins need to be enhanced, via improved quality in the production process and the reduction of inefficiencies. Workers' competences were highlighted as an important dimension to pursue a continuous improvement process. To this purpose, the agreement established the start of a project targeted to all workers. The project would have started on December 21, 2016 and aimed at identifying all potential intervention areas to ensure the continuous improvement of company's performance. The details of the project, as described by the external experts in the document of April 2016, were attached to the agreement. Plus, the agreement specified that the unitary workplace union structure would have been entitled to take part in all the meetings (included the focus groups) envisaged in the project, so as that it would have been aware of the project organisation and implementation. In other words, the unitary workplace union structure would have assumed a proactive role in the management of the whole project, through scheduled meetings with management.

Therefore, the project was illustrated by management to the whole workforce and started soon thereafter.

The first phase of the project was financed through the resources of two bilateral funds, Fondimpresa and Fondirigenti, founded respectively by Confindustria (the most representative employers' association) and the main Italian workers' confederations, CGIL, CISL and UIL, and by Confindustria and Federmanager (the trade union federation representing managers in industrial sectors), and specifically aimed at financing workers' continuous training. It started in December 2016 and ended in March 2017. As revealed by shop stewards from FIM-CISL on February 13, 2017, three focus groups were established in three different Company B's departments (i.e. engineering, production, construction). These departments were selected after a meeting between the external experts and the shop stewards from FIM-CISL, held in July 2016. In that occasion, the shop stewards described Company B's production process to the external experts and some critical issues came out from these departments. Each focus group was composed of six workers, three chosen by management and three chosen by the trade unions according to their skills and abilities. One shop steward from FIM-CISL and one shop steward from FIOM-CGIL took part in the focus groups, which were led by the two external experts. The purpose of the focus groups was the identification of critical areas and the devising of possible solutions through workers' direct participation. The focus

groups were convened on December 21, 2016 and on January 25, 2017. On December 21, 2016, workers discussed existing problems and potential solutions. The focus group in the engineering department led to the identification of some critical areas (i.e. difficulties in the relationship between engineering and sales departments; difficulties in scheduling activities; problems in efficiently designing piping and wiring; no direct relationship with suppliers and scant dialogue between technical and sales departments; scant quality control in the production and installation phases) and suggestions (i.e. more dialogue and communication across different departments, improving the design of piping and wiring, learning from the past, training young designers). The focus group in the production department allowed to identify other problems (i.e. difficulties in scheduling activities; lack of the necessary material at the shop floor; wastes of time in remanufacturing; scant design of hydraulic and inflatable systems; no design of electric systems; difficulties in managing non-compliances) and possible solutions (i.e. more involvement of production department in the phases of design and planning; improving relationship between production and technical departments to better manage mistakes and non-compliances; committing to better scheduling activities and just in sequence; reducing wastes of time; designing hydraulic and electric systems). The focus group in the construction sites led to the identification of further critical issues (i.e. short-timing planning; wastes of time while waiting for the arrival of materials and tools; no communication with technical department and scant interoperability in the management of warranties; no design of electric systems) and suggestions (i.e. more dialogue between construction sites and other departments; better scheduling and coordination with clients; better designing of projects). Moreover, the external experts conducted interviews with middle-managers from each department involved. However, shop stewards were not allowed to participate in these interviews. On January 25, 2017, two groups were organised. The first one included all the members of the previous three focus groups in order to favour the interoperability of the project. The second one involved all the middle-managers. The shop stewards were allowed to take part in the first group. Here, the purpose was to find solutions to the critical issues previously highlighted. In addition, the shop stewards were interviewed by the external experts and asked for their opinion on the project implementation. The activities of the second day led to the identification of three main critical areas (i.e. difficulties in guaranteeing the customisation of products mainly

due to scant interoperability between different departments; wastes of time and costs in projects' development mainly due to scant cooperation between different departments, no use of concurrent engineering-related techniques and innovative mechanisms of orders' management; weaknesses in project management mainly due to a lack of methods, instruments and culture of concurrent engineering and scant communication between different departments). Coherently, some improvement areas were highlighted (i.e. product standardisation and modularisation by also taking into account the need to produce customised products; concurrent engineering and increased interoperability; improved design of piping and wiring; adoption of innovative techniques of project management; better production and construction processes).

This first phase of the project was performed during working hours.

On the basis of the results from the first phase of the project, in March 2017 the external experts drafted a document describing all the activities performed, the critical areas and two proposals to further implement the project. The first plan could last six months and be centred on some of the critical issues arisen and their possible solutions, via the establishment of three improvement groups, the adoption of lean tools and the assessment of the results by the steering committee. The second plan could last one year and expand the project development to other Company B's departments, via the submission of a survey to all workers, the establishment of six improvement groups, the adoption of lean tools and the assessment of the results by the steering committee. This document was presented to Company B's management which asked for more details on the potential impact of the measures in terms of cost reduction. Moreover, the external experts further detailed the training activities envisaged within the context of the first shorter plan. Particularly, in May 2017, a document was written and presented to Company B's management. It contained the proposal to create three improvement groups, respectively in the areas of Project management, Production and Construction sites. The team would have been composed of representatives of each professional function in the area. The idea was to train teams' members to develop new and more efficient working methods as well as professional solutions, thus reducing wastes and lead times, improving the planning of activities and the quality of work, by working on a pilot project and measuring the results via KPI (key performance indicators).

It is important to mention that workers in Company B (with the exception of the shop stewards from FIM-CISL) were not aware of the fact that the original project was promoted by FIM-CISL, which chose to involve external experts. The reason behind this situation lied in the complex relationships between FIM-CISL and FIOM-CGIL. More precisely, FIM-CISL officials feared that FIOM-CGIL could oppose the project, if its officials and constituents had found out the active role of FIM-CISL in the promotion and management of this experience. Company B's workers thought that the original project was designed and activated by management. As regards workers' perceptions of this project, shop stewards from FIM-CISL affirmed, during the interview held on February 12, 2017, that despite initial skepticism or apathy, workers involved seemed progressively more enthusiastic about the experience. «For the first time, they feel their opinions are taken into consideration», shop stewards argued. However, they stressed the importance to overcome the situation of stalemate, which made workers very disappointed, and increase the number of workers involved in the project, by asking for the contribution of young people, apprentices, and low skilled workers since «they can all bring a different but interesting vision of the production process». Plus, shop stewards revealed their willingness to be involved in all the steps of the project and also during the interviews with middle-managers. The only risks perceived by shop stewards regarded the potential dismissal of some workers following the reorganisation process and the likelihood that the change in Company B's management impedes the continuation of the initiative.

However, in spring 2017, Company B experienced a phase of changes within the management, at the end of which the previous HR leader, responsible for the signature of the agreement of December 2016, was replaced by another person, who, though not totally opposed to the work reorganisation process, clearly shew the willingness to make it a company-led initiative. Therefore, the reorganisation process was discontinued until the resumption of the negotiating process, which led to a company-level collective agreement signed on April 10, 2018, by FIM-CISL, the members of the RSU adhering to FIM-CISL and FIOM-CGIL, the new HR leader, the managing director and the employers' association, AIB. FIOM-CGIL did not sign the agreement as it included only a very variable pay scheme, connected to performance results, and no fixed pay increases were provided for. The agreement was approved by the majority of workers and set forth the launch of a new continuous improvement project, which, though being inspired by

the same ideas and principles of the traditional project (namely, the relevance of direct employee participation for company competitiveness), did not represent the continuation of the latter project, that was thus completely abandoned. The new plan, drafted accordingly to the guidelines released by the Revenue Agency (Circular n. 5/E of March 29, 2018) and the prerequisites to allow Company B to have access to fiscal and contributory incentives, provides for a bilateral commission, composed of three representatives elected by workers and three representatives from Company B. The bilateral commission is in charge of analysing, also with the support of some other workers potentially specialised in organisational issues, the solutions devised by a bilateral focus team, which should be established by the head of each department every three months, after the collection and analysis of those suggestions and ideas of organisational improvement that each Company B's worker is entitled to submit by filling in a specific questionnaire. As revealed by the trade unionist of FIM-CISL operating in Company B, the new plan still relies on the contribution of the same external experts who designed the previous project¹⁵⁴.

Figure 15. Scheme of Company B case-study.

COMPANY B	
Part of a group (YES or NO)	Yes
National or multinational scope	Multinational scope
Role in the group	Subsidiary company
Role in the supply chain	Company B manufactures tandem lines and transfer presses and sells them to automotive firms. Plus, it provides after sales-services (i.e. maintenance, improvements, etc.)
Type of commercial transactions	B2B
Degree of market competition	High
Dimension of the company	More than 250 employees but less than 500 employees
Business	Automotive sector

¹⁵⁴ The interview with the union official was conducted on April 12, 2018.

Economic conditions of the company	The 2015 fiscal year was characterised by a serious operating loss. Company B was indicated by the parent company as the unique bad performing subsidiary firm in the multinational group. In 2016, the situation slightly improved, though thanks to non-structural factors.
Industrial relations	Cooperative labour-management relations, yet complex relations between FIM-CISL and FIOM-CGIL.
Trade union density	35% of workers
Most representative union in the company	FIOM-CGIL holds the majority of union constituents, yet FIM-CISL holds the majority of members in the unitary workplace union structure
Reasons behind the introduction of the project	Bad performance of a variable pay scheme and serious operating losses which could be ascribed to problems in work organisation. The parent company put pressures on Company B so as to encourage it to adopt actions to increase its profits.
Start of the project	December 2016
How did the project start?	Via a collective agreement specifically aimed at launching a training project encompassing the creation of focus groups and the conduction of interviews in a view of identifying critical areas and issues, thus devising actions that could lead to improved quality in the production process and the reduction of inefficiencies.
Essential features of the project	The project, specifically aimed at enhancing the participation of employees and their representatives to the benefit of work organisation, consisted of three main phases: the identification of intervention areas (via focus groups and interviews); the analysis-diagnosis and the action plan (via analyses of company costs); the first implementation of improvement actions (via an intervention plan and the assessment of the results). The project's implementation involved a steering committee (composed of the plant and HR managers, an official from FIM-CISL of Brescia, the unitary workplace union structure and external experts) and an improvement group (composed of 2/3 managers, the unitary workplace union structure, company technicians and external experts). The experts' idea was to continue the project through the establishment of continuous improvement groups in the areas "Construction", "Project management", and "Production".
Role of the union (FIM-CISL) in the project	During the negotiations over the renewal of the 2012 company-level collective agreement, FIM-CISL acknowledged that bad performances in the variable pay scheme could be attributed to problems in work organisation. Therefore, FIM-CISL asked for the involvement of external experts to devise a project plan that could help to solve Company B problem. FIM-CISL arranged the first meetings between management and external experts.

Role of the unitary workplace union structure (RSU) in the project	As stated in the agreement of December 2016, the unitary workplace union structure had a proactive role in the management of the project, by taking part in all the meetings foreseen. The unitary workplace union structure was a member of the steering committee of the project.
Role of the company in the project	The company evaluated the project plan, drafted by the experts, and agreed with its activities. Company B's managers took part in the steering committee of the project, which was responsible for the implementation and management of the project.
Role of the workers in the project	All workers were informed about the project activities. However, only eighteen workers took in the focus groups so far. They were selected by management and the unitary workplace union structure. During the focus groups, workers were asked to identify critical issues and potential solutions.
Role of external experts in the project	The external experts designed the project plan and led its implementation.
Preliminary response to the project	Too early to evaluate the project in terms of productivity. Workers involved were enthusiastic about the project. However, shop stewards from FIM-CISL asked for an increase in the number of workers directly involved in the project. Company B's management initially agreed with the actions proposed by the external experts to improve work organisation. However, in spring 2017 the changes in management, the replacement of the former HR leader and the need to contain costs were jeopardising the continuation of the project.
End of the project	On April 10, 2017, the original project was abandoned, and a new plan was launched via a company-level collective agreement.

Company C

Company C comes from a long family tradition. It consists of a unique establishment located in the area of Brescia and operating in the production of cylindrical and helical gears shaved and grinded up to 500 mm in diameter. Company C does not belong to any national or multinational corporation. Company C works as a subcontractor by performing operations and realising products on behalf of other companies. Company C operates in the automotive industry and provides manufacturers of tools, reducers, agricultural machines and earth-moving machines with some products they need. Company C's mission is that of offering products which meet customers' needs and ensure quality, price performance and delivery schedules. Company C is described by

shop stewards as growing and expanding, via the acquisition of a new warehouse and machines.

Company C consists of one establishment which employs about 75 workers (around 60 blue-collar workers and 15 white-collar workers). Most of workers (about 60) are employed on a permanent basis, whereas 15 workers are employed on a temporary basis through an employment agency. The majority of workers are men and the average age is 34 years old.

Company C has been only recently unionised. A FIM-CISL official from Brescia entered the company on April 2016 for the first time. 18 workers (standing for the 24% of the whole workforce) are currently members of FIM-CISL, which remains the sole union operating in the company. The unitary workplace union structure (RSU) is composed of three members, all affiliated to FIM-CISL of Brescia. Unlike Company A and B, Company C is an artisan company covered by the sectoral-level collective agreement signed by the employers' association called CONFAPI and the most representative workers' federations in the industry (FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL and UILM-UIL). Industrial relations in the company are described by the FIM-CISL official as cooperative¹⁵⁵. Particularly, a climate of trust between the union and management has been established since the beginning. However, in an interview held in May 24, 2017, the FIM-CISL official confessed that after the initial interest, workers seem more unresponsive to the union's attempts to involve them. For instance, union meetings are attended by few workers, even though, as reported by the union official, this condition may be partly explained by the fact that due to organisational issues, union meetings are held outside working hours. Another reason behind the scant participation of workers in union activities is represented, pursuant to the FIM-CISL official, by the lack of union culture among workers and the incapacity of the recently-elected shop stewards to act and behave as workers' representatives, thus assuming the responsibility for workers' needs and demands and advancing them towards management. Interestingly, management itself has sometimes complained about the impossibility of effectively relying on the unitary workplace union structure to communicate with the rest of the workers. Moreover, the shop stewards do not participate in the meetings of the General Council, convened

¹⁵⁵ The interview with the union official was held on April 3, 2017.

monthly by FIM-CISL of Brescia and conceived as chances for all FIM-CISL-affiliated members of the unitary workplace union structures and the secretarial body to discuss about relevant industrial relations' issues in the territory. Interestingly, two out of the three components of the unitary workplace union structure are also entrepreneurs of a different venture. Finally, in an interview held on August 25, 2017, they reported that although the employer trusts them and asks for a greater commitment to represent all workers, he/she does not have any relationship with the other employees.

Unlike Company A and B, in Company C it was not a crisis situation that brought about a work reorganisation process focused on employee direct participation. Conversely, as previously mentioned, Company C is growing. The idea of initiating a work reorganisation process emerged following the attempt to conclude the first company-level collective agreement. More specifically, in May 2016 the FIM-CISL official started a negotiation with management over the opportunity to define a performance-related pay for all workers. However, a stalemate was immediately generated due to the difficulty expressed by management to decide the performance indicators to which linking the variable pay. «There was too much at stake», the FIM-CISL official reports. Notably, both management and workers during union meetings highlighted various problems related to products' quality, workers' safety, relationships with supervisors, organisation of production process, and so on. Interestingly, it emerged that the quite good and stable economic performance was not dependent on a well-functioning organisation of work. Conversely, it relied on the persistence of the demand of the company's products. In an interview conducted on August 25, 2017, shop stewards stated that the company continues to take orders and is charging a lot but still working as an artisan enterprise. Indeed, some attempts to reorganise the work were made by the employer few years ago through the involvement of some external consultants. However, after few training sessions with workers, the employer decided not to continue with the reorganisation process. Moreover, during the meetings between FIM-CISL and the management in May 2016, it came out that management needed to move some production units to other barns located very close to the original establishment and that this transfer would have required a reorganisation of production within the new buildings. The FIM-CISL official reported this peculiar situation to a member of the FIM-CISL of Brescia secretarial body, who suggested that before bargaining over a variable pay scheme, it could be appropriate to

discuss a work reorganisation process, which could allow a better design and management of a variable pay scheme at a later stage. This suggestion met the approval also of the newly elected unitary workplace union structure, composed of three shop stewards more willing to improve work organisation thus reducing overtime, rather than to discuss distributive issues. Therefore, as occurred in the Company B, FIM-CISL of Brescia involved an external expert, the project manager responsible at FIM-CISL (national level) for work organisation and also working for a private consultancy agency, and asked him/her to draft a project focused on work reorganisation via greater employee participation. Through the support of the FIM-CISL official providing information on the characteristics of the enterprise, a project entitled “Workers’ participation for the improvement of processes and products in Company C” was created on December 31, 2016 and presented to management. Management chose to start the initiative, which was entirely financed through the company’s own resources. Contemporarily, union and management cooperated for the draft of staff rules aimed at contrasting some previous irresponsible workers’ conducts. It is worth mentioning that management and the local union simply agreed on the project proposal and no formal documents were signed.

With regard to the contents of the project, the document drafted in late December 2016 reports that the project was intended to promote continuous improvement of production as well as of relationships between all the stakeholders (i.e. workers, supervisors, the employer, the unitary workplace union structure and the local trade union). Moreover, the development of workers’ skills and the promotion of their wellbeing appeared as further goals of the project, founded on a labour-management partnership and the active and direct contribution of all the actors involved. More specifically, the objectives of the projects were the following: i) providing instruments for the continuous improvement; ii) measuring performance indicators and improvement criteria; iii) devising a variable pay scheme linked to the improvement of the above-mentioned indicators; iv) increasing workers’ and management’s competences related to industrial relations, notably by favouring an integrative and win-win approach to collective bargaining and providing the unitary workplace union structure with the necessary skills to manage this process and promote a participative culture among workers. An important actor within this project was the steering committee, composed of the employer, line managers, the unitary workplace union structure and the external consultants. The steering committee was in

charge of monitoring the implementation of the project and if necessary, re-defining the objectives in the light of potential changes. The project was supposed to last one year and follow a road map consisting of three major phases. The first phase envisaged the involvement of the steering committee in the definition of those indicators aimed at assessing the achievement of the objectives. Moreover, a 4-hour training session directed to all workers and focused on the typical tools of lean systems and problem solving was scheduled. Workers were then invited to use these tools in their daily activities. Later, an initial assessment of the project's implementation was performed by the steering committee. The second phase entailed the establishment of three continuous improvement groups, composed of workers from various departments and supposed to meet twice a week in order to develop small projects aimed at solving the critical issues previously detected. Improvement initiatives were communicated to all workers through detailed information and announcements released in the bulletin board and during union meetings in the company. The steering committee was in charge of monitoring the implementation of this project's phase and if necessary, modifying the previously identified indicators. The third phase implied the organisation of some focus groups (i.e. 1.5-hour meetings between 6/7 workers from the same unit), intended to perform a root cause analysis of the problems and identify potential solutions. A further focus group was organised and included workers from various units in an effort to deepen the critical issues concerning the relationships between the different areas of the company. A suggestion scheme, and a rigorous assessment mechanism, were then introduced with the aim of promoting workers' engagement in the improvement of performance indicators. The local trade union and management were thus expected to define a variable pay scheme, which should have been coherent with the logics of this project.

In the course of the project's implementation, all workers were aware of the fact that the project derived from a union initiative and that it was financed by the employer. The training session was held in March 2017 on Saturday morning during working hours and involved the entire workforce, including temporary agency workers. The training session concentrated on two main topics: health and safety at the workplace; and continuous improvement process. As regards the first topic, workers were provided with knowledge on the existing legislation on health and safety at the workplace as well as on technical tools such as Ishikawa diagram and 5 whys. Workers were then invited to use the acquired

knowledge to identify conditions and actions at risk in the workplace and to develop a root cause analysis aimed at detecting the related causes and proposing solutions. With reference to continuous improvement, this topic was introduced via a review of the profound changes that have occurred in the industrial production over the last decades and a presentation of key concepts linked to lean systems such as teamworking, workers' responsibility and kaizen. Workers were then solicited to detect critical areas in their activities, the related motives and potential solutions. Overall, the external consultant drafted a document summarising the main results from this first phase and highlighting that whereas the quality of people, their capacity of analysing their work and proactively interacting between each other were positive elements, there were some critical organisational issues regarding, for instance, the inability of the company to valorise the professionalism and various experiences of different workers and the influence of ethnical backgrounds and familiar relationships in the organisation of work. Subsequently, the consultant suggested to focus on the development of workers' soft skills, that could benefit the whole company, and the promotion of workers' direct contribution to the improvement of performance results. More specifically, it was proposed to implement the second phase of the project, by identifying key priorities to be assessed in some departments where introducing the basic tools of lean systems and defining criteria for the measurement of the results. The second phase was thus carried out. However, while the project draft proposed the establishment of three continuous improvement groups, only two groups were created, due to relevant troubles arising from two specific units (i.e. gear cutters' department and lathes' department). The continuous improvement group from the gear cutters' department included all the employees in the production area (since they are just six) and rapidly started to propose and implement improvement solutions (e.g. new cataloguing system for the equipment). Conversely, the establishment of group from the lathes' department was delayed because this department was expected to be transferred to the new barn in the following weeks. Although the external consultant suggested to ask the workers participating in this group to propose ideas concerning the work organisation within the new structure, his/her suggestion was not accepted by the employer. In November 2017, a document was drafted by the external expert and delivered to Company C's management. The file summarised the outputs of the second phase of the project and contained some hypotheses of future activities. More specifically,

it stated that although the time available for the project was quite limited due to productive needs, some organisational innovations were implemented thanks to the expertise of the production manager, the commitment of shop stewards and the suggestions made by all workers, that positively impacted on the overall productive system. Interestingly, the expert highlighted some positive and negative aspects that emerged during this second phase of the project. In the gear cutters' department, workers appeared to be very committed to achieving improvements and were able to improve their working methods and ensure more order and cleanliness; however, they barely worked in team and needed a lot of time to implement good practices. By contrast, in lathes' department, there were very few meetings with workers and the expert had the chance only to speak with the manager of the area, who though appeared to be willing to continue the reorganisation project. For these reasons, the expert emphasised the risk that without a continuous and effective involvement of all workers, the project could not lead to positive economic results. In the final part of the document, it was specified that the company operates in a very unstable situation, characterised by many demands coming from clients facing continuous emergencies. For this reason, the expert suggested to concentrate on few actions, though oriented to achieve concrete results: communication between workers needed to be improved, thus overcoming also some language barriers; KPI (key performance indicators) were regarded as fundamental to evaluate the results of the actions and accordingly to remunerate workers.

At that stage of the project, according to the FIM-CISL official¹⁵⁶, some improvements were already evident thanks to the draft of staff rules and the initial work of the continuous improvement group in the corrections' departments. However, the shop stewards, in an interview conducted on August 25, 2017, revealed that it was very difficult to change traditional workers' conducts (e.g. smoking in the departments, not wearing the health and safety equipment, etc.), especially since the hierarchical structure was not adequately clarified and the heads of departments did not take the responsibility for ensuring the respect of the rules. Overall, they stressed the importance to improve the relationships between workers and the heads of departments and to improve the organisational skills of the leading professional figures. The times were not ripe to quantify the increase in

¹⁵⁶ The interview was held on May 24, 2017.

performance levels deriving from the project, even though in Company C, unlike in the previous company case studies, the identification of specific parameters through which measuring the improvements achieved, was provided for. These parameters should have been used also for the design of a performance-related pay. Importantly, some problems emerged during these first months of the project's implementation. Firstly, in an interview conducted on May 24, 2017, the FIM-CISL official revealed the lack of an efficient communication of the project's phases and results to the whole workforce. This problem was directly linked to a second major issue: the scant preparation of the recently elected unitary workplace union structure, which did not manage to act as a concrete representative of workers' interests. Pursuant to the FIM-CISL official, this issue was raised also by management that complained about the impossibility of relying on shop stewards to communicate and inform the rest of the workforce. This issue was combined with the lack of union culture among all workers. As a result, the FIM-CISL official was forced to act in many occasions as a substitute for the unitary workplace union structure, by attending all the meetings and initiatives organised within the framework of this project. Secondly, as far as workers' perceptions are concerned, it is important to state that after the initial enthusiasm, workers' morale and trust seemed quite low, since they expected concrete results from this process. Moreover, they complained about the fact that the only department where a continuous improvement group was established was that where two shop stewards worked. They tended to perceive this as a favouritism from the employer. These feelings might partly explain, together with some organisational problems previously mentioned, the low participation of workers in union meetings until late 2017. Moreover, as the company revealed that it hoped the project could require less time, the shop stewards feared that this initiative could end very soon. Meanwhile, the FIM-CISL official realised that in order to contain and limit workers' discontent, it might have been useful to start to bargain with management over economic issues.

The situation rapidly deteriorated in January 2018 when Company C's management, after complaining about the lack of evident economic results from the project, started to voice its willingness to cease the collaboration with the external expert suggested by FIM-CISL and to "internalise" the continuous improvement process. For this reason, the original project ended and currently (April 2018) FIM-CISL and Company C are starting the

negotiations over a collective agreement which should regulate some issues like a new direct employee participation project and a variable pay scheme¹⁵⁷.

Figure 16. Scheme of Company C case-study.

COMPANY C	
Part of a group (YES or NO)	No
National or multinational scope	Multinational scope
Role in the group	/
Role in the supply chain	Company C works as a subcontractor by performing operations and realising products on behalf of other companies.
Type of commercial transactions	B2B
Degree of market competition	High
Dimension of the company	Less than 100 employees – artisan company coming from a long family tradition
Business	Company C operates in the automotive industry and provides manufacturers of tools, reducers, agricultural machines and earth-moving machines with some products they need.
Economic conditions of the company	The economic conditions of the company are quite good and stable, though official documents have not been released by management to the local trade union.
Industrial relations	Cooperative, though very recently established; lack of union culture among workers.
Trade union density	24% of the employees
Most representative union in the company	FIM-CISL, which is the only trade union operating in the company
Reasons behind the introduction of the project	Difficulties in defining the indicators of a performance-related pay during the negotiations over the first company-level collective agreement
Start of the project	March 2017
How did the project start?	No agreement was signed by management and the union. Management simply agreed on a project proposal drafted by an external consultant in December 2016

¹⁵⁷ The final interview with the union official was held on April 12, 2018.

Essential features of the project	The project, specifically aimed at enhancing direct employee participation for the improvement of processes and products, consisted of three phases: a training session directed to all workers, followed by the deployment of the knowledge acquired to identify critical issues; the establishment of three continuous improvement groups in three departments intended to implement improvement initiatives; the organisation of focus groups to further analyse critical issues, followed by the introduction of a suggestion scheme and the identification of specific criteria for the measurement of the improvements and the definition of a performance-related pay.
Role of the union (FIM-CISL) in the project	During the negotiations over the first company-level collective agreements, several difficulties emerged concerning the incapacity of defining the indicators of a performance-related pay. Therefore, FIM-CISL suggested to implement a work reorganisation process via the involvement of an external consultant. FIM-CISL supported the expert in the design of the project plan and was involved in the project implementation as a component of the Steering Committee.
Role of the unitary workplace union structure (RSU) in the project	The unitary workplace union structure took part in the Steering Committee of the project, supposed to monitor its entire implementation.
Role of the company in the project	The company agreed on the project proposal drafted by the external expert and financed it. The employer was also a member of the Steering Committee of the project.
Role of the workers in the project	All workers (including temporary agency workers) were involved in a training session focused on safety at work and continuous improvement. Moreover, six workers participated in a continuous improvement group in the gear cutters' departments and a similar number of workers should have been involved in another group in the lathes' department.
Role of external experts in the project	The external expert designed the project plan and led its implementation.
Preliminary response to the project	Initial enthusiasm from both management and workers. However, problems arose from the lack of preparation of the unitary workplace union structure and union culture among workers as well as from the long time that the work reorganisation project required before delivering concrete and measurable results, even though in Company C, unlike in the other case study companies, the identification of precise criteria was foreseen also in the light of defining a performance-related pay. Workers started to show discontent due to the fact

	that most of them were not involved in the process and the FIM-CISL official was leaning towards collective bargaining to satisfy workers' needs.
End of the project	The project ended in early 2018 as Company C's management decided to cease the collaboration with the external expert suggested by FIM-CISL and to "internalise" the continuous improvement project.

Company D

Company D is the parent company of a multinational group in the HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) industry, which trades in more than 60 countries and asserts its presence in 5 continents with 13 business branches: Australia, Belgium, China, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, United Kingdom, USA. The multinational group is clearly oriented to digital innovation, customised production, lean management and environmental sustainability. Indeed, from the website, it emerges that the group is determined to develop new, high energy efficiency products based on customer requirements; all systems are designed to ensure energy saving and manufactured in a zero environmental impact facility; constant upgrading of products and improvement of production processes are aimed at obtaining new patents and certifications; mass-produced products and single pieces, as well as customised systems and complex product combinations are provided. The group has recently developed a 4.0 project with the aim of making production processes more intelligent, more flexible and quicker so as to improve the competitiveness of products by implementing cutting-edge digital technology. To this purpose, in 2016 the group invested in research and development (947,680 Euro), production machinery and technologies (900,000 Euro), expansion of the production unit (2,600,000 Euro). Moreover, control along the whole supply chain (from brass forging to shipping) is exercised by the group.

Company D, located at the area of Brescia, is the unique production site of the multinational group, where various plumbing and heating solutions (e.g. radiator and fan-coil valves, pipes and fittings, manifolds, radiant systems, sanitary systems, hydraulic balancing, thermal power station, solar systems, etc.) are produced. Company D consists of 210 employees, standing for more than 50% of the total employees of the multinational group. Interestingly, the proportion of women (47%) is nearly the same as the proportion

of men (53%). Conversely, the percentage of blue-collar workers is higher than that of white-collar workers (about 26%). The vast majority of workers are employed on a permanent basis; only 7/8 workers are employed on a temporary basis via an employment agency, according to an official of FIM-CISL of Brescia. As written in the Annual Profile, in 2016 Company D invested 110,630 Euro in training and professional development of workers and 89,805 Euro in health and safety at work. Importantly, Company D is particularly devoted to social responsibility. Indeed, among the various initiatives, it financed the creation of a heating and plumbing technological laboratory and the expansion of the computer laboratory in two different schools in the area; it contributed to the upgrading of public lighting system in the town where it is located; it made donations to the pediatric intensive care ward of the City Hospital in Brescia; and it sponsors the main basketball team of Brescia.

Labour-management relations at Company D are not described as adversarial. However, a FIM-CISL official reveals that the company does not consider the trade union as a partner¹⁵⁸. As a consequence, it does not involve the trade union in the design and implementation of the several initiatives carried out. FIM-CISL operates as the only union in the company and its members account for about 24% of the entire workforce. The unitary workplace union structure (RSU) is composed of three workers, all affiliated to FIM-CISL. Among them, one worker is the responsible for the original unionisation of the company. For this reason, he/she is particularly respected by the HR manager, who frequently relies on him/her to get information. However, the RSU is not able to increase trade union affiliation in Company D and union meetings are generally attended by a minority of workers, which does not include white-collars. Importantly, industrial relations in Company D are characterised by a high degree of informality. In other words, there is a mismatch between formal agreements signed by management and workers' representatives on the one hand, and their actual implementation on the other. This issue is partly related to the fact that the Company D's representative at the bargaining table seems not to be the real decision-maker. Therefore, the commitments made by him/her are not always respected in the long run by Company D. Finally, though affiliated to AIB, the employers' association for the industry sectors based in Brescia, and participating in

¹⁵⁸ This information emerged from an internal union meeting held on August 31, 2016.

many of its initiatives¹⁵⁹, Company D counts only apparently on AIB for the management of industrial relations at workplace. Indeed, as reported by a FIM-CISL official, AIB frequently assists Company D at the bargaining table but is not able to exert an actual influence on management. Finally, as shop stewards reveal, the climate among Company D's workers is not relaxed especially due to the attitude of some floor managers to overlook workers' complaints and hide problems to make a good impression on bosses, and due to the rivalries between the same floor managers¹⁶⁰.

This consideration partly explains the choice of FIM-CISL of Brescia to insist, from 2016 onwards, on the need for direct employee participation at Company D. According to officials from FIM-CISL, direct employee participation could indeed contribute to solving some relevant issues in work organisation: e.g. scant communication between different departments; no collaboration between programming and production lines; late arrival of necessary materials to production lines; etc. Moreover, employees' participation and involvement in decision-making processes at the operational and organisational level were supposed to improve also the management of a performance-related pay scheme, introduced on an experimental basis via a collective agreement signed by Company D and AIB on the one hand, and the unitary workplace union structure and FIM-CISL of Brescia on the other hand, in December 2015. This variable remuneration scheme was related to two main indicators: i) the operating income measured by EBIT (Earnings Before Interests and Taxes), accounting for 33% of the overall bonus and ii) the company's efficiency measured by OEE (Overall Equipment Effectiveness) accounting for 66% of the entire bonus. The amount of the bonus was then individually proportionated to the number of days of absence from work. However, this scheme appeared to be very complex to workers, that did not understand its functioning. As a result, in late 2016, only 80 out of 190 workers (at that time employed at Company D) answered to a questionnaire submitted by management for an assessment of the performance-related scheme, and more than the half of the respondents affirmed that the functioning of the index OEE was unclear. Overall, the case of the variable pay scheme just mirrored a broader mismatch between management's strategies and innovation

¹⁵⁹ For instance, Company D adheres to the project "Workplace Health Promotion", promoted by AIB and gathering all Brescia's companies committed to the promotion of health and safety in workplace.

¹⁶⁰ This information emerged from a meeting with shop stewards held on September 7, 2016.

projects on the one hand, and workers' understanding of those changes on the other hand. In other words, whereas Company D performed very well and was oriented to grow even faster and compete in international markets, by investing in new IT infrastructures, advanced robotics and lean management to improve ergonomics and quality of its products, workers were not enabled to know the reasons behind the introduction of new machineries and other relevant changes in production lines as well as to be involved in them. For instance, although a suggestion box was provided in order to encourage suggestions from the shop floor, some workers confessed that management generally did not provide feedback on these suggestions. Moreover, whereas Company D was keen to change work organisation towards lean management and continuous improvement practices, a training course on these issues, unilaterally organised by management in September 2016 through the support of an external consultant, was addressed only to specialised professional figures at workplace. The majority of workers were not involved.

In the light of these circumstances, on October 27, 2016, after a testing period on the performance-related pay lasted almost one year, Company D and AIB on the one hand, and the unitary workplace union structure and FIM-CISL of Brescia on the other hand, signed a collective agreement which confirmed the previously introduced variable pay scheme (whose maximum annual amount, in 2016, was delivered to all workers, thanks to the extraordinary performance of the index OEE) and established a bilateral commission composed of two members of the RSU and two Company D's managers with the task of monitoring the performance-related pay and suggesting how to improve Company D's competitiveness. For this reason, in support of the bilateral commission, the parties agreed to establish a continuous improvement group, composed of workers with the necessary skills to promote employee participation practices as well as to gather, assess and report to the bilateral commission suggestions for the optimisation of production processes, which would have been eventually examined by management. Importantly, according to the Italian Budget Law 2016, the introduction, via collective agreement, of initiatives directed to boost employee participation allowed workers to benefit from a lower taxation on their variable bonus¹⁶¹.

¹⁶¹ In 2017, through the Decree Law No. 50, the Italian government provided also for a cut in social security contributions on workers' variable pay in those companies that, via collective agreement, introduce employee participation practices.

In order to comply with the contents of the agreement, in February 2017 FIM-CISL of Brescia proposed to Company D to develop a continuous improvement project led by the same external expert, who is in charge of the union-promoted projects carried out at Company B and C. As reported in the document presented to Company D, the project was intended to be a continuation and an attempt to improve, via stimulating bottom-up workers participation and commitment, the existing practices of lean management performed by the company. More precisely, the project was aimed at giving value to workers' skills and encouraging their attitude to problem solving, enhancing employees' voice in work organisation, promoting more cooperative industrial relations, improving communication between workers and managers and between workers themselves, increasing productivity and quality of work. The project consisted of three major phases. In the first step, a steering committee (composed of Company D's management, RSU and external experts) would have been established with the aim of monitoring the project during its whole duration and setting the economic indicators to be periodically assessed; a training course on innovative methods of continuous improvement, kaizen, problem solving, etc. would have been organised and targeted to blue-collars; a further training course on communication skills would have been developed and directed to floor managers and the RSU; the RSU would have been increasingly involved and its members' skills would have been further developed. The second step would have been characterised by the establishment of some focus groups (one per each department), each one composed of 7/8 workers, whose task would have been analysing critical issues and outlining possible solutions; contemporarily, floor and line managers would have been involved in other focus groups (segregated by types of activity); finally, inter-functional focus groups (some involving blue-collars, and other involving floor and line managers) would have been organised to conduct a more integrated analysis. In the third phase, the steering committee would have analysed the results of the focus groups, defined an intervention plan, initiated its implementation, assessed its results in terms of productivity and workers' participation and commitment, analysed new strategies and methods for a continuous improvement of the company.

Despite an apparent interest by management, Company D took some weeks to analyse the project presented by the union and eventually, it decided to reject the project and not to rely on the expert chosen by the union for the implementation of employee participation

practices. As a consequence, FIM-CISL of Brescia relied on its own resources to define and agree with Company D on a path for the concrete implementation of the collective agreement's provisions related to employee participation. The urgency to start a continuous improvement project was due to both the need to implement the agreement signed in October and the rapid deterioration of the performance of the index OEE, after the first year of excellent results. After some meetings with Company D, another project was drafted by the trade union in April 2017. In accordance to the contents of the collective agreement, the project provided for the establishment of a continuous improvement group, composed of around 1/2 workers from each productive unit¹⁶², and with the task of gathering critical issues as well as potential solutions from the entire workforce, evaluating them and submitting a report to a steering commission, composed of Company D's management, floor managers, the RSU, FIM-CISL officials and potentially, some external experts. The steering commission would have monitored the activities of the continuous improvement group as well as identified priorities for action (potentially, among those areas that more concretely impact on the performance of the index OEE and subsequently, on the variable bonus), established a time schedule for each priority and communicated its decisions to all workers. Pursuant to the union-drafted project, workers could report problems and ideas to the continuous improvement group via either the suggestion box made available by the company or the digital totems located in the productive departments. The members of the continuous improvement group would have met monthly and when any significant issue would have required further analysis and discussion. The meetings would have lasted one hour and a half and would have been held during working hours. Every three months, the continuous improvement group would have been in charge of drafting a synthesis of the solutions implemented and those rejected (by justifying its decisions) and hanging it on the union bulletin board so as to inform all workers. A rigorous timetable was also included in the union project. Furthermore, the trade union stressed the need to be assisted by a union-selected external expert at least in the initial phase of the project.

¹⁶² According to the document presented to Company D in April 2017, the trade union hypothesises the involvement of white-collars in the second phase of the project via the establishment of a second improvement group.

Company D evaluated also this second draft of the project and approved it though with some changes. For instance, the continuous improvement group took the name of “permanent improvement group”, composed not only of blue-collars from productive units but also floor managers. According to the final version of the union-drafted project, the members of the permanent improvement group should have received an initial training phase led by an external consulting firm with the aim of providing them with necessary skills to implement continuous improvement in work organisation. Moreover, the technical bilateral commission should have been composed of either Company D’s delegates or floor managers, the RSU, one FIM-CISL official and if necessary, an external expert. At the end of the document, a time schedule was included, according to which in June 2017 all workers should have been informed of the project and in July 2017 they should have been enabled to report any problems in work organisation via the suggestion box or any other means agreed by the union and Company D, in October 2017 the first meeting of the permanent improvement group would have been held and in November 2017 the first meeting of the technical bilateral commission would have taken place.

The time schedule was initially respected. Indeed, after the selection of the members of the continuous improvement groups (7 workers selected by both the RSU and Company D’s management), in late August 2017, Company D organised a training course (8 hours), led by a consulting company chosen by management and addressed to the members of the continuous improvement groups as well as two members of the RSU. The training course concentrated on issues such as the origins and the instruments of lean thinking, the concepts of customer value and customer satisfaction, the identification and elimination of waste, the meaning of continuous improvement, and so on. In September 2017, the permanent improvement group collected the problems and suggestions that workers expressed either verbally to the RSU, or through the suggestion box made available by the company. In October 2017, the permanent improvement group drafted a report and presented it to the technical bilateral commission. A first meeting of the bilateral commission was held, and the members of the commission drafted a report to be presented to Company D’s management. The report included some suggestions such as the need to bring terminals closer to operators, improve the organisation of desks with the necessary equipment, and train line managers so that they can give more correct explanations to the other workers, etc. Company D’s management confessed that they were not able to

provide a feedback on those suggestions but that they could convene a meeting with the RSU to discuss the bad performance of the index OEE, connected to the variable pay scheme.

In the meantime, in a meeting held with the RSU and two FIM-CISL officials (notably, one FIM-CISL official is involved as formally responsible for work organisation project at the local level), some problems emerged: i) the training course was not effective, and the members of the permanent improvement group were still not provided with the necessary skills to independently analyse problems and come up with intelligent solutions; ii) due to the fact that Company D's management did not participate in the meetings of the technical bilateral commission, which by contrast was composed of those floor managers who used not to listen to workers' problems and suggestions, the perception by the RSU was that the process towards concrete improvements would have been very long. In the meantime, the index OEE continued to deliver bad results, but workers did not understand if Company D's management was really worried about this and willing to solve the problems through a process of continuous improvement via direct employee participation. Indeed, when the RSU asked for a meeting with the Managing Director, he/she was often too busy to participate. Plus, among the workforce, not all people were confident in the effectiveness of the permanent improvement project.

Eventually, a meeting between the RSU, a FIM-CISL official and management was held on January 12, 2018, and management alluded to the possibility of asking workers to give back part of the payment already made concerning the performance-related bonus, given the poor performance of the index OEE, ascribed to the non-efficiency of some assembly lines and the time needed to equip machines. In the light of these problems, the permanent improvement group met on February 12, 2018 and drafted a new report highlighting other suggestions, such as the need to re-analyse machines' cycle times, ask workers to provide further details on machines' downtimes, better control the quality of materials brought to the assembly lines, etc. However, before receiving a feedback from management, a new meeting was held between the company, the RSU, a FIM-CISL official and an AIB (the employers' association) official with the aim of finding a solution that did not involve the reimbursement of the performance-related pay by workers. Again, Company D's management seemed to be only partly worried about the performance of OEE and not adequately willing to detect and solve all related problems. For these reasons, in union

meetings held with workers in March 2018, workers voiced their discontent about a company, which was not able to pay bonuses to workers, though giving frequent interviews in local newspapers and being known in the local community as a good example of entrepreneurship. Workers' discontent materialised in an increase in FIM-CISL members at Company D. Plus, the members of the permanent improvement group declared that they did not intend to keep on meeting and figuring out solutions to company's problems unless management changed its attitude. The continuous improvement project is thus experiencing a stalemate (April 2018).

Figure 17. Scheme of Company D case-study.

COMPANY D	
Part of a group (YES or NO)	Yes
National or multinational scope	Multinational scope
Role in the group	Parent company
Role in the supply chain	Company D is a vertically-integrated production facility. The whole supply chain is integrated in Company D.
Type of commercial transactions	B2B
Degree of market competition	High
Dimension of the company	More than 200 employees
Business	Company D produces plumbing and heating solutions (e.g. radiator and fan-coil valves, pipes and fittings, manifolds, radiant systems, sanitary systems, hydraulic balancing, thermal power station, solar systems, etc.)
Economic conditions of the company	The economic conditions of the company are very good. Company D is developing and expanding its sales network. However, according to a member of the RSU, the shift from huge and standard lots to a higher demand for lower and more personalised goods is apparently worsening the performance of the index OEE (Overall Equipment Effectiveness).
Industrial relations	They cannot be described as adversarial. However, Company D does not consider the trade union as a partner.
Trade union density	About 24% of the employees

Most representative union in the company	FIM-CISL, which is the only trade union operating in the company
Reasons behind the introduction of the project	Some relevant issues in work organisation (e.g. scant communication between different departments; no collaboration between programming and production lines; late arrival of necessary materials to production lines; etc.) and the inadequacy of floor managers to solve them; a mismatch between management's strategies and innovation projects on the one hand, and workers' understanding of those changes on the other hand.
Start of the project	August/September 2017 (even though a collective agreement establishing a continuous improvement group and a bilateral commission was signed already in October 2017)
How did the project start?	In October 2017 a collective agreement was signed and established a continuous improvement group and a bilateral commission. The agreement was followed by two continuous improvement projects: one drafted by an external expert suggested by the union (which though was rejected by management) and the other drafted by the union and agreed with management in May 2017.
Essential features of the project	The project, specifically aimed at enhancing direct employee participation for the improvement of processes and products, provided for the establishment of a permanent improvement group (composed of 1/2 blue-collar workers and floor managers from each productive unit and aimed at gathering problems and suggestions from the shop floor and discussing them monthly) and a technical bilateral commission (composed of floor managers, the RSU, a FIM-CISL official and if necessary, an external expert, and aimed at identifying priorities for action and communicating them to Company D's management). Plus, the project started with a training course addressed to the members of the permanent improvement group.
Role of the union (FIM-CISL) in the project	FIM-CISL drafted the continuous improvement project, approved by management in May 2017 and was deeply involved in its implementation as part of the technical bilateral commission. Moreover, given the absence of the external expert who usually cooperates with the union, one FIM-CISL official assisted the RSU and her/his colleague in the implementation of the project as formally responsible for work organisation projects at the local level.
Role of the unitary workplace union structure (RSU) in the project	The unitary workplace union structure took part in the technical bilateral commission of the project.

Role of the company in the project	The company agreed on the project proposal drafted by the union in May 2017 and financed it. Company D's management was supposed to evaluate the priorities for action selected by the bilateral commission.
Role of the workers in the project	All workers were informed of the project and were invited to report problems and suggestions to the continuous improvement group. Moreover, seven workers were selected as members of the permanent improvement group.
Role of external experts in the project	No role for the external expert after the rejection by the company of his/her project
Preliminary response to the project	Several problems emerged from the initial phase of the project: i) the training course was perceived as ineffective; ii) the process towards continuous improvement was perceived as very long due to the fact the Company D's management did not participate in the meetings of the technical bilateral commission, which were instead attended by floor managers with often a hostile attitude; iii) it was difficult to understand how to improve the index OEE and hence, the variable pay via direct employee participation; iv) not all workers understood the value of direct employee participation and the continuous improvement project; v) Company D's management did not seem as sufficiently keen to find solutions at the poor performance of the index OEE via the agreed continuous improvement project.
End of the project	The project has not ended yet, though it is experiencing serious troubles.

Cross-case analysis

Figure 18. Comparison of company-case studies.

	COMPANY A	COMPANY B	COMPANY C	COMPANY D
Part of a group (YES or NO)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
National or multinational scope	Multinational scope	Multinational scope	Multinational scope	Multinational scope
Role in the group	Parent company	Subsidiary company	/	Parent company
Role in the supply chain	Company A produces pipes and accessories and sells them to national and foreign wholesalers	Company B manufactures tandem lines and transfer presses and sells them to automotive firms. Plus, it provides after sales-services (i.e. maintenance, improvements, etc.)	Company C works as a subcontractor by performing operations and realising products on behalf of other companies.	Company D is a vertically-integrated production facility. The whole supply chain is integrated in Company D.
Type of commercial transactions	B2B	B2B	B2B	B2B
Degree of market competition	High, with entry barriers limited to the know-how and the availability of capital	High	High	High
Dimension of the company	Less than 100 employees	More than 250 employees but less than 500 employees	Less than 100 employees – artisan company coming from a long family tradition	More than 200 employees

Business	Hydro-thermal and medical sector (Company A produces pipes and accessories, made of plastic and aluminium, for hot and cold-water conveyance under pressure, compressed air, air-conditioning, industrial applications, and naval installations)	Automotive sector	Company C operates in the automotive industry and provides manufacturers of tools, reducers, agricultural machines and earth-moving machines with some products they need.	Company D produces plumbing and heating solutions (e.g. radiator and fan-coil valves, pipes and fittings, manifolds, radiant systems, sanitary systems, hydraulic balancing, thermal power station, solar systems, etc.)
Economic conditions of the company	Since 2010, the company has been affected by the economic crisis, which has produced a decrease in operating revenues and sales volume	The 2015 fiscal year was characterised by a serious operating loss. Company B was indicated by the parent company as the unique bad performing subsidiary firm in the multinational group. In 2016, the situation slightly improved, though thanks to non-structural factors.	The economic conditions of the company are quite good and stable, though official documents have not been released by management to the local trade union.	The economic conditions of the company are very good. Company D is developing and expanding its sales network. However, according to a member of the RSU, the shift from huge and standard lots to a higher demand for lower and more personalised goods is apparently worsening the performance of the index OEE (Overall Equipment Effectiveness).
Industrial relations	Cooperative	Cooperative labour-management relations, yet complex relations between FIM-CISL and FIOM-CGIL.	Cooperative, though very recently established; lack of union culture among workers.	They cannot be described as adversarial. However, Company D does not consider the trade union as a partner.
Trade union density	36% of the employees	35% of workers	24% of the employees	About 24% of the employees

Most representative union in the company	FIOM-CGIL (most of the members of the unitary workplace union structure are affiliated to FIOM-CGIL)	FIOM-CGIL holds the majority of union constituents, yet FIM-CISL holds the majority of members in the unitary workplace union structure	FIM-CISL, which is the only trade union operating in the company	FIM-CISL, which is the only trade union operating in the company
Reasons behind the introduction of the project	Economic and financial difficulties that are partly linked to problems related to the work organisation	Bad performance of a variable pay scheme and serious operating losses which could be ascribed to problems in work organisation. The parent company put pressures on Company B so as to encourage it to adopt actions to increase its profits.	Difficulties in defining the indicators of a performance-related pay during the negotiations over the first company-level collective agreement	Some relevant issues in work organisation (e.g. scant communication between different departments; no collaboration between programming and production lines; late arrival of necessary materials to production lines; etc.) and the inadequacy of floor managers to solve them; a mismatch between management's strategies and innovation projects on the one hand, and workers' understanding of those changes on the other hand.
Start of the project	April 15, 2016	December 2016	March 2017	August/September 2017 (even though a collective agreement establishing a continuous improvement group and a bilateral commission was signed already in October 2017)
How did the project start?	Via a collective agreement which also enshrined the adoption of social shock	Via a collective agreement specifically aimed at launching a training project encompassing the	No agreement was signed by management and the union. Management simply agreed on a	In October 2017 a collective agreement was signed and established a continuous improvement group and a bilateral

	<p>absorbers and company investments in workers' training</p>	<p>creation of focus groups and the conduction of interviews in a view of identifying critical areas and issues, thus devising actions that could lead to improved quality in the production process and the reduction of inefficiencies.</p>	<p>project proposal drafted by an external consultant in December 2016</p>	<p>commission. The agreement was followed by two continuous improvement projects: one drafted by an external expert suggested by the union (which though was rejected by management) and the other drafted by the union and agreed with management in May 2017.</p>
<p>Essential features of the project</p>	<p>A joint worker-management committee that convenes regularly to discuss about quality, productivity, work organisation, innovation. The committee is conceived as useful to the implementation of the Business Process Reengineering.</p>	<p>The project, specifically aimed at enhancing the participation of employees and their representatives to the benefit of work organisation, consisted of three main phases: the identification of intervention areas (via focus groups and interviews); the analysis-diagnosis and the action plan (via analyses of company costs); the first implementation of improvement actions (via an intervention plan and the assessment of the results). The project's implementation involved a steering committee (composed of the plant and HR managers, an official from FIM-CISL of Brescia, the</p>	<p>The project, specifically aimed at enhancing direct employee participation for the improvement of processes and products, consisted of three phases: a training session directed to all workers, followed by the deployment of the knowledge acquired to identify critical issues; the establishment of three continuous improvement groups in three departments intended to implement improvement initiatives; the organisation of focus groups to further analyse critical issues, followed by the introduction of a suggestion scheme and the identification of specific</p>	<p>The project, specifically aimed at enhancing direct employee participation for the improvement of processes and products, provided for the establishment of a permanent improvement group (composed of 1/2 blue-collar workers and floor managers from each productive unit and aimed at gathering problems and suggestions from the shop floor and discussing them monthly) and a technical bilateral commission (composed of floor managers, the RSU, a FIM-CISL official and if necessary, an external expert, and aimed at identifying priorities for action and communicating them to Company D's</p>

		unitary workplace union structure and external experts) and an improvement group (composed of 2/3 managers, the unitary workplace union structure, company technicians and external experts). The experts' idea was to continue the project through the establishment of continuous improvement groups in the areas "Construction", "Project management", and "Production".	criteria for the measurement of the improvements and the definition of a performance-related pay.	management). Plus, the project started with a training course addressed to the members of the permanent improvement group.
Role of the union (FIM-CISL) in the project	FIM-CISL devised the project and then communicated it to management.	During the negotiations over the renewal of the 2012 company-level collective agreement, FIM-CISL acknowledged that bad performances in the variable pay scheme could be attributed to problems in work organisation. Therefore, FIM-CISL asked for the involvement of external experts to devise a project plan that could help to solve Company B problem. FIM-CISL arranged the first meetings between management and external experts.	During the negotiations over the first company-level collective agreements, several difficulties emerged concerning the incapacity of defining the indicators of a performance-related pay. Therefore, FIM-CISL suggested to implement a work reorganisation process via the involvement of an external consultant. FIM-CISL supported the expert in the design of the project plan and was involved in the project	FIM-CISL drafted the continuous improvement project, approved by management in May 2017 and was deeply involved in its implementation as part of the technical bilateral commission. Moreover, given the absence of the external expert who usually cooperates with the union, one FIM-CISL official assisted the <i>RSU</i> and her/his colleague in the implementation of the project as formally responsible for work organisation projects at the local level.

			implementation as a component of the Steering Committee.	
Role of the unitary workplace union structure (RSU) in the project	The unitary workplace union structure was allowed to take part in each meeting of the committee and to regularly discuss with management the implementation and potential improvement of the project	As stated in the agreement of December 2016, the unitary workplace union structure had a proactive role in the management of the project, by taking part in all the meetings foreseen. The unitary workplace union structure was a member of the steering committee of the project.	The unitary workplace union structure took part in the steering committee of the project, supposed to monitor its entire implementation.	The unitary workplace union structure took part in the technical bilateral commission of the project.
Role of the company in the project	The Director General was a member of the joint committee. Plus, he/she cooperated with the unitary workplace union structure in the implementation of the project.	The company evaluated the project plan, drafted by the experts, and agreed with its activities. Company B's managers took part in the steering committee of the project, which was responsible for the implementation and management of the project.	The company agreed on the project proposal drafted by the external expert and financed it. The employer was also a member of the steering committee of the project.	The company agreed on the project proposal drafted by the union in May 2017 and financed it. Company D's management was supposed to evaluate the priorities for action selected by the bilateral commission.
Role of the workers in the project	All workers elected nine out of them, coming from different departments, to be members of the committee. The nine members were asked to identify	All workers were informed about the project activities. However, only eighteen workers took in the focus groups so far. They were selected by management and the unitary workplace union structure. During the	All workers (including temporary agency workers) were involved in a training session focused on safety at work and continuous improvement. Moreover, six workers participated in a continuous improvement group in	All workers were informed of the project and were invited to report problems and suggestions to the continuous improvement group. Moreover, seven workers were selected

	problems and propose solutions during meetings.	focus groups, workers were asked to identify critical issues and potential solutions.	the gear cutters' departments and a similar number of workers should have been involved in another group in the lathes' department.	as members of the permanent improvement group.
Role of external experts in the project	None	The external experts designed the project plan and led its implementation.	The external expert designed the project plan and led its implementation.	No role for the external expert after the rejection by the company of his/her project
Preliminary response to the project	Satisfaction from workers' representatives and the Director General. Positive feedback in terms of trust between workers and management in the company. Too early to assess the impact in terms of productivity of the company.	Too early to evaluate the project in terms of productivity. Workers involved were enthusiastic about the project. However, shop stewards from FIM-CISL asked for an increase in the number of workers directly involved in the project. Company B's management initially agreed with the actions proposed by the external experts to improve work organisation. However, in spring 2017 the changes in management, the replacement of the former HR leader and the need to contain costs were jeopardising the continuation of the project.	Initial enthusiasm from both management and workers. However, problems arose from the lack of preparation of the unitary workplace union structure and union culture among workers as well as from the long time that the work reorganisation project required before delivering concrete and measurable results, even though in Company C, unlike in the other case study companies, the identification of precise criteria was foreseen also in the light of defining a performance-related pay. Workers started to show discontent due to the fact that most of them were not involved in the process and the FIM-	Several problems emerged from the initial phase of the project: i) the training course was perceived as ineffective; ii) the process towards continuous improvement was perceived as very long due to the fact the Company D's management did not participate in the meetings of the technical bilateral commission, which were instead attended by floor managers with often a hostile attitude; iii) it was difficult to understand how to improve the index OEE and hence, the variable pay via direct employee participation; iv) not all workers understood the value of direct employee participation and the continuous improvement project; v)

			CISL official was leaning towards collective bargaining to satisfy workers' needs.	Company D's management did not seem as sufficiently keen to find solutions at the poor performance of the index OEE via the agreed continuous improvement project.
End of the project	In late 2017, the project foundered due to a change in the composition of the RSU.	On April 10, 2017, the original project was abandoned, and a new plan was launched via a company-level collective agreement.	The project ended in early 2018 as Company C's management decided to cease the collaboration with the external expert suggested by FIM-CISL and to "internalise" the continuous improvement project.	The project has not ended yet, though it is experiencing serious troubles.

Figure 18 compares the longitudinal case study analyses conducted on local companies. As regards companies' characteristics, it is worth underlining that three out of four selected companies belong to a multinational group. Of these, two are parent companies and one is a subsidiary enterprise. Despite the fact that one out of four analysed companies is not part of a multinational group, the scope of all companies' activities appears to be international. Indeed, Company C has established business relationships with both national and foreign enterprises. Whereas Companies A and B seem to operate at the latest stages of their respective supply chains, Company C works as a subcontractor by performing operations and realising products on behalf of other companies. A quite unique position in the supply chain is that occupied by Company D, which constitutes a vertically-integrated production facility aimed at internally encompassing the main stages of the entire supply chain. All companies mainly make commercial transactions with other companies (B2B) rather than with the final customers (B2C). The analysed companies differ with regard to the sectors in which they operate: although Companies B and C's activities can be related to the automotive sector, Companies A and D operate respectively in the hydro-thermal and medical sector, and in the sector of plumbing and heating solutions. Albeit these divergencies, all companies seem to operate in quite highly competitive international markets. They are generally medium-sized enterprises with the exception of Company B employing about 320 workers. Delicate economic conditions are reported in both Company A and Company B. Conversely, Companies C and D are both described as growing and developing.

With reference to industrial relations, cooperation between unions and management seems to prevail in the analysed companies. However, cooperation does not mean partnership, especially in Company D, where FIM-CISL is never asked by management to jointly implement projects. Cooperation is better identified as the absence or low frequency of conflict. Specific attention should be paid to relationships between different unions, which appear as more complex and openly adversarial than those between unions and management, especially in Companies A (where FIOM-CGIL is the most representative union in the workplace) and B (where FIOM-CGIL holds the majority of union constituents, even though only one out of five members of the RSU are affiliated to FIOM-CGIL). Finally, it is worth mentioning that industrial relations in Company C are quite recent as FIM-CISL started to unionise the company in late 2015. Overall, in all

analysed countries trade union density is quite low: around 35% in Companies A (only 10% of workers are affiliated to FIM-CISL) and B (only 15% of workers are affiliated to FIM-CISL), and around 25% in Companies C and D.

As far as direct employee participation practices are concerned, it is important to underline that economic and financial difficulties are regarded as the main motives behind the introduction of these practices in Company A and B. By contrast, in Company C and D, that are described as growing enterprises, problems in the organisation of work seem to explain the need to introduce and develop direct employee participation practices. Interestingly, in most cases collective bargaining (and notably, the management and monitoring of an already established performance-related pay scheme delivering bad results such as in Company B and D, or the negotiations for the introduction of a new variable pay bonus such as in Company C) has represented the initial playing field where unions and management started to discuss work organisation-related issues and then embarked into a project enhancing direct employee participation. In all the analysed companies, these practices were initiated between April 2016 and September 2017, given the very recent attention paid by FIM-CISL of Brescia to this issue. Collective agreements introduced direct employee participation practices in Companies A, B and D. However, in Company B the collective agreement reported the contents of a continuous improvement project, drafted by an external expert chosen by FIM-CISL and already agreed with management, and in Company D the collective agreement contained just general information about direct employee participation practices in the workplace, which were further detailed in a project drafted by FIM-CISL itself and agreed with management some months later. As a matter of fact, a previous document was drafted by the external expert, who FIM-CISL generally relies on. However, this document was rejected by the company which preferred to count on its own resources and experts, and another document was written by FIM-CISL and eventually approved by management. By contrast, in Company C no agreement was signed, and management simply agreed on a project proposal drafted by the FIM-CISL-selected expert. As a result, two out of four direct employee participation projects have been designed and are currently led by an external expert, working for a private consultancy firm and for the Polytechnic of Turin, coming from the union environment and currently representing the FIM-CISL responsible for work organisation at the national level. The involvement of this person is generally

sought by FIM-CISL of Brescia. In Company D, this involvement did not materialise due to the management's refusal and its preference to rely on a consultancy firm identified by the management itself. Conversely, in Company A this involvement was not envisaged in the collective agreement, probably because the relationships between this expert and FIM-CISL of Brescia were not consolidated at that time. As a result, collective bargaining does not appear as a satisfactory tool to reach an agreement with management on direct employee participation practices to be implemented in the workplace. Conversely, the draft of a detailed project seems to be necessary to better define the features and steps of the work reorganisation processes enhancing direct employee participation, so as to find common ground on this topic and engage in a joint implementation.

With reference to the features of the projects, it is worth mentioning that in most cases some elements of the project (the time schedule, the phases, etc.), as outlined in the documents agreed between the union and management, slightly changed during the implementation. For instance, although the collective agreement signed in Company A provided for the establishment of as many working groups as are the departments of the company, what was actually created was a unique joint labour-management committee composed of workers coming from different departments, and the General Director. Similarly, whereas the project drafted for Company B should have consisted of three different phases (i.e. the identification of intervention areas, the analysis-diagnosis and the action plan, the first implementation) to be performed within eight months, after over one year since the beginning of the project it seemed that just the first phase was carried out, and that the next phases still had to be agreed with management, probably due to both the fickleness of management in Company B (asking for immediate economic results from the project) and the replacement of the previous HR leader. Moreover, although the project agreed by the union and management provided for the establishment of three continuous improvement groups, in Company C only two continuous improvement groups were created, as, according to union delegates, relevant issues arose only from those two departments. Plus, among those, one group was not operating because the reference department was expected to be transferred to a new barn. As one could expect, the projects drafted and coordinated by the same external expert were quite similar to each other. Indeed, both in Company B and in Company C, the projects consisted of different phases: after the identification of the intervention areas (via focus groups and

interviews in the large Company B, via training sessions directed to all workers in the medium-sized Company C), the establishment of continuous improvement groups was expected in both companies. Conversely, the projects implemented in Company A and D shared some common features, as they were both drafted only by the union. Notably, joint labour-management committees were established in both companies. However, whereas in Company A, the committee was composed of workers and the General Director, in Company D the committee took the name of “permanent improvement group” and gathered blue-collars and floor managers. Overall, the project outlined in Company D was more complex than that designed in Company A, probably because of the influence exerted over the union by the external expert, who had already drafted work reorganisation projects in Company B and C at the time of the discussion over Company D. Indeed, the project outlined in Company D provided for a training session like that delivered in Company C, even though in Company D the training module was directed only to the members of the permanent improvement group. Plus, a steering committee was established in Company B, C and D and generally composed of management, members of the unitary workplace union structure, FIM-CISL officials and external experts if necessary. However, in Company D, the steering committee was also named technical bilateral commission and did not involve management.

As regards the involvement of the actors, it is worth mentioning that in all case studies, the union played a crucial, proactive role by convincing management to promote direct employee participation practices, either via union-designed work reorganisation initiatives (as in Company A and Company D) or via a project outlined by a union-selected external expert (as in Company B and Company C). The unitary workplace union structure was generally provided with a role of protagonist in the initiatives: in Company B, C and D, it was a member of the steering committee of the project; in Company A, it was allowed to take part in each meeting of the joint labour-management committee and to regularly discuss with management the implementation of the project. Apparently, the unitary workplace union structure was distinguished from the forms of direct employee voice (e.g. joint labour-management committees, continuous improvement groups, etc.) by its functions of supervisor and manager, in cooperation with company management and FIM-CISL officials, of the whole project. Though not initiating the projects in the first place, management played an important role in most analysed companies, by either

actively contributing to identifying problems and potential solutions (as in Company A) or taking part in the steering committee thus monitoring the projects (as in Company B and Company C). Conversely, in Company D management seemed to play a more marginal role, as it was supposed only to evaluate the proposals drafted by the steering committee. The role of workers varied in the different companies: in Company C all workers attended a training session on lean production and continuous improvement processes; in Company A all workers were asked to choose the members of the labour-management committee; in Company B and D, just the members of the focus groups and the permanent improvement group actively contributed to the project. The external expert played a fundamental role as the designer of the project and its main coordinator only in Company B and C. In Company A and D, direct employee participation initiatives were led by the union in cooperation with management.

Finally, as far as the preliminary results of the projects are concerned, it is important to state that no project lasted enough to bring measurable economic results and that all projects experienced serious difficulties, mainly due to: changes in the composition of the RSU and the fact that the new most representative union in the workplace seemed not to be interested in implementing the project (see Company A); changes in management (see Company B); management's eagerness to see immediate results of the project in economic terms (see Company B and C); workers' discontent due to the fact that most of them were not involved in the project and did not perceive its value and effects (see Company C and D); management's lack of commitment (see Company D). As a result, three (in Company A, B and C) out of four projects promoted by FIM-CISL between 2016 and 2017 have ended. However, it is worth mentioning that in Company B a collective agreement was signed in April 2018 and it provided for the launch of a new continuous improvement project, whose implementation should still be coordinated by the external expert traditionally working with FIM-CISL. By contrast, in Company C, management clearly expressed its willingness to internalise the continuous improvement process and to cease the collaboration with the external expert: thus, the collective agreement that should be signed in the following months, should include a new project, intended to be designed and implemented by the sole union and management. Finally, in Company D, the project is experiencing a stalemate since workers realised that management was not adequately committed to contribute to its implementation and the joint solution of

organisational problems, also responsible for the bad performance of the index OEE, connected to the variable pay scheme.

3.3. Discussion

The theoretical framework of *organised disintermediation*, depicted in Chapter 1, proves to be already a concrete option in the experience of FIM-CISL of Brescia, which has recently started to integrate direct employee participation within its public discourse and agenda, as well as to take the lead in the promotion, regulation and implementation of direct employee participation practices in workplaces. The testing of the research hypotheses outlined in the first Chapter, is important to answer to the fundamental questions of this research project: how and why do trade unions in traditional industries come to promote forms of work organisation enhancing direct employee participation at workplaces? How and why do institutional factors (i.e. formal and informal norms, organisational structures), environmental constraints (i.e. market conditions, innovation pressures and power relations) and cognitive frames (i.e. trade union identity) interplay to affect trade union orientation in this field and the outcomes of union-*organised disintermediation* in workplaces? How and why does *organised disintermediation* impact on union purposes, identity and organisation, and interact with collective bargaining in workplaces?

Internal factors influencing union attitude and behaviour towards non-union employee participation

Hypothesis 1 (H. 1): A partnership/cooperative/integrative approach to industrial relations positively affects union willingness to take part in the definition of employee involvement work practices.

This hypothesis proves to be confirmed by the case study as FIM-CISL emerges as an innovative and reformist union which is willing to achieve compromises rather than affirming dogmas and ideologies⁵⁸⁸. Plus, it engages in the promotion of workers' participation in decision making processes at company level, according to its Statute⁵⁸⁹.

⁵⁸⁸ Bentivogli, F., "Epopoea e declino dei consigli di fabbrica", in Andriani, G., Costa, G. (eds.), *Fimmini: La Fim Cisl dal '69 ad oggi tra democrazia e innovazione contrattuale*, BiblioLavoro, 2010, 33-54.

⁵⁸⁹ FIM-CISL Statute, available at http://www.fim-cisl.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Statuto_Definitivo2017.pdf (accessed 27 June 2018).

The innovative turn of FIM-CISL is described by a former General Secretary as deeply driven by Brescia's unionists and their leader in the 1960s, Franco Castrezzati⁵⁹⁰. Nowadays, FIM-CISL of Brescia is pitted against the local structure of FIOM-CGIL, as the former is keen to establish cooperative industrial relations and promote workers' participation, while the latter is known for a more militant and confrontational approach to negotiations⁵⁹¹. Given this trade union identity and the positive relationship (proved by literature) between a trade union's partnership approach and its willingness to contribute to the design of employee involvement practices, it is no surprise that FIM-CISL of Brescia engages itself in the promotion and regulation of direct employee participation practices in workplaces. Indeed, supporting these practices seems to be in line with the trade union's mission to promote workers' voice as a vehicle for increased firms' productivity, a fairer income distribution, and enhanced workers' skills and employability⁵⁹². The advent of a *knowledge economy* and the increasing managerial attention to direct employee participation come thus to be perceived by FIM-CISL of Brescia as an enabler not only of Italian firms' and territorial competitiveness but also of FIM-CISL's own desire for a human-centred society and people's self-fulfillment within the experience of work.

Hypothesis 2 (H.2): Union awareness of both positive and negative effects of employee involvement programmes increases the chances of union willingness to participate in the development of programmes in workplaces.

This hypothesis is confirmed in the analysis. Indeed, officials from FIM-CISL of Brescia, when interviewed, described positive outcomes of direct employee participation in terms of firms' competitiveness and workers' capabilities and wellbeing, as well as potential drawbacks on the side of workers (e.g. excessive pressures and intensification of work, low workers' commitment to innovation projects when they are backed unilaterally by the companies and their consultants) and unions themselves (e.g. the risk of incompatibility between representative and direct employee voice). Particularly, it is due to their awareness also of the negative effects of direct employee participation that

⁵⁹⁰ Bentivogli, F., "Epopèa e declino dei consigli di fabbrica", in Andriani, G., Costa, G. (eds.), *Fimmini: La Fim Cisl dal '69 ad oggi tra democrazia e innovazione contrattuale*, BiblioLavoro, 2010, 33-54.

⁵⁹¹ *La Fim di Brescia: per una storia dei metalmeccanici bresciani*, BiblioLavoro, 2008.

⁵⁹² Bentivogli, M., *Abbiamo rovinato l'Italia?*, Lit Edizioni, 2016.

Brescia's unionists want to participate in the design of these practices and ensure that they are sustainable for workers.

Hypothesis 3 (H.3): The greater the union power, the greater the likelihood unions engage in the promotion of models of work organisation enhancing direct employee participation.

Regarding this hypothesis, the results from the case study analysis appear to be controversial. Indeed, while in three out of four analysed companies where a work reorganisation project was promoted by FIM-CISL of Brescia, the union either holds the majority of members in the unitary workplace union structure, or is the only union operating in the establishment, in Company A, FIM-CISL of Brescia is the second most representative union and does not hold the majority of either unionised workers or members of the RSU. However, from the interviews conducted with the trade union's officials, it emerges that in all company case studies, FIM-CISL of Brescia perceived itself as reliable and accountable enough, in the eyes of managers, to convince them to engage in the joint development of a work reorganisation process. Therefore, it is the union's perception of power and influence, rather than the union's representativeness itself, that can better explain FIM-CISL's proactive attitude in the analysed companies. Sometimes, however, this perception, even when supported by the fact that FIM-CISL is the only union at company level, has proved to be wrong, as the cases of Company C and D would suggest. Indeed, if power is not simply measured in terms of unionised workers and depends upon the ability of unions to build consensus among the rank-and-file and to convince management to engage in a joint, long-term organisational change⁵⁹³, FIM-CISL of Brescia, at least in the first years of company-level experimentations, seems to have overestimated its capacity of making both all Company C's workers trust the reorganisation project, and Company D's management truly committed to performing

⁵⁹³ Gill, C., "Union impact on the effective adoption of High Performance Work Practices", in *Human Resource Management Review*, 2009, 19 (1): 39-50; Grenier, J. N., "Local unions and the restructuring of work within the multinational company: internal solidarity and local context", in *Labor Studies Journal*, 2006, 31 (3): 65-84; Lévesque, C., Murray, G., "Union involvement in workplace change: a comparative study of local unions in Canada and Mexico", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2005, 43 (3): 489-514.

joint actions in this field. Strong internal and external legitimacies⁵⁹⁴ are apparently missing, thus jeopardising FIM-CISL's chances to achieve its purposes.

External factors influencing union attitude and behaviour towards non-union employee participation

Hypothesis 4 (H.4): Market pressures are expected to increase the union's propensity to cooperate with management for the implementation of new models of work organisation even emphasising non-union employee voice.

Even though market pressures cannot be regarded as the sole motives explaining the initiatives of FIM-CISL of Brescia in each analysed company (in fact, neither Company C nor Company D were suffering from a crisis situation and were struggling against sharp competition), transformations in the world of work and production did influence the union's overall attitude in the field of work organisation and direct employee participation. The hypothesis 4 is confirmed in the analysis, as officials from FIM-CISL of Brescia declared that they started pursuing work reorganisation practices via greater direct employee participation after acknowledging that future's firm competitiveness would increasingly rely on workers' knowledge and skills, product quality and responsiveness to customer (see also Hypothesis 2), and that thus the only way for unions to survive would be to take part in the process and make it more sustainable for workers. It is reasonable to claim that the union's need to contribute to shaping the future of work is made even more pressing by the specific conditions of Brescia's economy. On the one hand, indeed, unionists deal with the contradictions of the area of Brescia whereby large leading manufacturing groups coexist with small and medium enterprises still making large use of social shock absorbers⁵⁹⁵, and would like to overcome this persisting dualism and its deep social consequences also by boosting employee-driven innovation⁵⁹⁶. On the

⁵⁹⁴ For considerations on internal and external legitimacy, see: Dufour, C., Hege, A., "The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal", in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16 (3): 351-361; Mundlak, G., "We create spots from which we shine to others: Organizing as bridging practice between distinct meanings of association", in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 2017, 38 (2): 291-317.

⁵⁹⁵ Marelli, E., Barucco, R., *Economia e mercato: Brescia alla prova del terzo millennio*, Provincia di Brescia, Comedit group, 2009, 34.

⁵⁹⁶ For deepening the concept of "employee-driven innovation", please see: Sør Rocha, R., "Shop stewards as coordinators of employee-driven innovation: implications for trade unions", in *ETUI Transfer*, 2010, 16 (2): 185-196; Totterdill, P., Exton, R., "Trade unions as knowledgeable participants in workplace innovation", in *Strategic Direction*, 2014, 30 (9): 31-34.

other hand, as the perspective of *Industry 4.0* is increasingly affecting the strategies of Brescia's companies and the agenda of employers' associations, FIM-CISL unionists seem more and more keen to have a say in this process and accompany its development.

Hypothesis 5 (H.5): Historical workplace labour-management relationships characterised by cooperation favour union support for employee involvement programmes.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the longitudinal case study on FIM-CISL of Brescia. Indeed, in all the analysed companies where the union promoted an employee participation project, labour-management relations are depicted as quite cooperative, and where problems are reported, they are mainly attributed to the relationships with the other trade union, FIOM-CGIL, operating in the company, rather than with management. However, historical cooperative industrial relations at workplaces find themselves insufficient when the union is not merely asked by management to accept a work reorganisation process but is willing to initiate itself a change in work organisation and search for management's cooperation. In other words, as Company D case study would demonstrate, a union-initiated project can succeed only if management considers the union not simply as a cooperative and non-adversarial actor in the workplace but also as a relevant partner for pursuing common goals⁵⁹⁷. This observation appears coherent with Signoretti's research on two companies characterised by advanced organisational structures and cooperative relationships with trade unions, located in the area of Alto Adige in Northern Italy: the Author concludes that in both cases, the scope of labour representation and that of direct employee participation were strongly separated though positively, mutually reinforcing; this was ascribed to the persistence of «monistic cultures in firms' management and a defensive approach towards trade unions», even in contexts

⁵⁹⁷ In this context, partnership is intended as relating to the third approach of Guest and Peccei, which is exemplified by the mutual gains model of Kochan and Osterman. Accordingly, employees and their representatives, work with management to provide shared benefits. For further information, see Chapter 2 of this research and: Guest, D., Peccei, R., "Partnership at work: Mutuality and the balance of advantage", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2001, 39 (2): 207-236; Kochan, T., Osterman, P., *The Mutual Gains Enterprise: Forging a Winning Partnership Among Labor, Management and Government*, Harvard Business School Press, 1994.

of management-labour collaboration over issues such as working time flexibility and work-life balance⁵⁹⁸.

Hypothesis 6 (H.6): Institutional support for collective voice at the workplace and firm level positively affects union propensity to operate for the development of employee involvement programmes.

This hypothesis is partly borne out by the analysis. Indeed, despite the substantial abstention of law and high degree of voluntarism in industrial relations in Italy, some unionists from FIM-CISL of Brescia revealed that their decision to promote direct employee participation at company level was deeply influenced by the recent introduction, via the 2016 Budget Law (then confirmed also in 2017), of fiscal and contributory incentives for employers who negotiate with representative trade unions both performance-related pay schemes and instruments enhancing employee involvement in work organisation. This legislative measure represents an important leverage for unions willing to engage in the design of direct employee participation practices in workplaces. More importantly, the criteria highlighted in the legislative measure, in the Inter-ministerial Decree of March 25, 2016, in the Circular n. 28/E (June 15, 2016) and the Circular n. 5/E (March 29, 2018) of the Revenue Agency, that need to be respected by companies to have access to fiscal and contributory incentives, are likely to deeply influence the ways through which direct employee participation practices are carried out at company level⁵⁹⁹ and their content⁶⁰⁰.

Ways through which unions promote non-union employee voice

Hypothesis 7 (H. 7): Direct employee participation can be advanced by unions either in public speeches and reports, often in association with concepts like good and sustainable

⁵⁹⁸ Signoretto, A., “Quale ruolo per il sindacato nell’innovazione organizzativa?”, in *Note di ricerca*, 2016, 4.

⁵⁹⁹ It is essential that these practices are established in a company-level collective agreement; the incentives apply to performance-related bonuses that need to be negotiated in the same collective agreement.

⁶⁰⁰ Notably, the Inter-ministerial Decree of March 25, 2016 mentioned the establishment of working groups composed of both managers and workers, and permanent commissions devoted to monitor the improvement process; plus, the Circular n. 5/E of March 29, 2018 demanded companies to write an Innovation Plan according to the guidelines set in the company-level collective agreement; the Plan should better specify the background, the expected results, the practices to be implemented, and the role of the RSU.

work, or in collective bargaining at company/workplace level, particularly to take part in the introduction of organisational changes and the possible drawbacks.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the analysis, which though offers further details as to how the union's interest in direct employee participation may affect its representative and regulatory role or, by borrowing Schmitter and Streeck's words, its logic of *membership* and logic of *influence*⁶⁰¹. More specifically, FIM-CISL of Brescia promotes direct employee participation by performing actions that impact on its way to represent workers (e.g. public discourses and articles in local newspapers, alliances with an external expert though coming from the union environment, new modes to hold assemblies, General Councils and Congresses, etc.) and to interact and negotiate with management (e.g. the promotion of direct employee participation practices in workplaces and their implementation and monitoring in partnership with management), and that are expected to make changes also at the ways the union is organised (e.g. the introduction of a specific union role focused on carrying out projects of work reorganisation at company level; training on direct employee participation and work reorganisation addressed to members of the RSU; new relevance given to union delegates). These results are consistent with Fairbrother's argument on union renewal as an ongoing, dialectic relation between union purpose, capacities and organisation⁶⁰². Importantly, the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia wrote in a local newspaper that current technological transformations require to overcome the traditional contrasts between capital and labour, by opening a new phase of partnership and cooperation in industrial relations, that emphasises the role of people, by promoting and enhancing their skills and involving them in the achievement of new organisational, productive and innovative goals⁶⁰³. These discourses clearly affect the way FIM-CISL of Brescia interacts with companies (e.g. by attempting to introduce direct employee participation practices in workplaces via projects defined and implemented in partnership with management), workers and delegates (e.g. by practicing direct participation also within the union's organisational structure, thus strengthening the role of union delegates, promoting their critical thinking and problem solving-related skills,

⁶⁰¹ Schmitter, P. C., Streeck, W., "The Organization of Business Interests: Studying the Associative Action of Business in Advanced Industrial Societies", *WZB Discussion Paper IIM/LMP 81/13*, 1981.

⁶⁰² Fairbrother, P., "Rethinking trade unionism: union renewal as transition", in *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 2015, 26 (4): 561-576.

⁶⁰³ Damiani, A., "Damiani (Fim Cisl): cambiare le relazioni sindacali, chiudere con i fantasmi del passato", in *Giornale di Brescia*, October 4, 2017.

and encouraging bottom-up initiatives). Even though FIM-CISL unionists acknowledge the relevance of union training and skills development, from an interview conducted on April 12, 2018 with the General Secretary, it emerges that training initiatives directed to union officials on direct employee participation and participatory industrial relations have not been organised yet. The General Secretary confessed that more time is needed to find connections among single experiences and deliver guidelines. Moreover, the learning process still appears as largely internal, benefitting from the experiences of each unionist and the exchange of knowledge among the unionists themselves. This process does not generally rely on the influence of external actors (such as Universities, research centres, consultants, public authorities, etc.), since FIM-CISL of Brescia prefers to collaborate with one single expert, considered as trustworthy, reliable and inspired by the same values and ideas as those of the union. Indeed, he/she comes from the union environment and currently works for FIM-CISL at the national level; plus, he/she also runs a consulting firm focused on work organisation and collaborates with the Polytechnic of Turin. After all, the relevance of a network of union-oriented consultants was emphasised also by Haipeter in his research on IG Metall's "Better not cheaper" campaign aimed at providing works councils with skills to participate in strategic decision-making at company level⁶⁰⁴. Overall, unilateralism seems to prevail in the actions of FIM-CISL of Brescia that are directed to the issue of employee participation in work organisation; it seems quite difficult (and taking some time) to establish relationships with external actors (e.g. universities, consulting firms, etc.), and notably employers' organisations. The reason behind this situation appears to be that the trade union doesn't usually cooperate with external players in a view of pursuing its own objectives⁶⁰⁵. Moreover, a confrontational approach has traditionally prevailed towards both the other most representative metalworkers' organisations in the area and employers and their associations. This sounds as a paradox at the times requiring more participatory forms of work organisation as drivers for increased performance and competitiveness.

Hypothesis 8 (H. 8): Bargaining over work reorganisation is expected to: encourage an integrative/problem-solving approach to negotiations, which in turn places a higher

⁶⁰⁴ Haipeter, T., "Union Renewal and Business Strategies: Strategic Codetermination of Works Councils and the Campaign "Better Not Cheaper" of the German Metalworkers' Unions", in *International Business Research*, 2013, 6 (3): 40-57.

⁶⁰⁵ See paragraph 3.2.1.3. in Chapter 3.

premium on structuring attitudes of mutual trust and respect; require unions to seek rank-and-file consensus for the agreements they might reach; demand unions to start bargaining since the beginning of the organisational change and to adopt conflict tactics to achieve a better distribution of the gains from the change.

As regards this hypothesis, the analysis conducted on local companies delivers controversial results. Indeed, the integrative approach to negotiations and climate of trust and respect between management and the union can be detected in Company A (until the election of new members of the unitary workplace union structure), Company B (until the arrival of the new HR leader) and Company C. Probably, in these circumstances, the fact that management and unionists were both aware of and concerned about the economic difficulties and serious organisational issues in workplaces facilitated an integrative approach to negotiations, with the aim of finding solutions to common problems. Conversely, in Company D, unionists and members of the RSU still wonder if management is really concerned about the economic and organisational issues and willing to solve them via direct employee participation in partnership with the union. As a consequence, a climate of mutual trust and respect between management and labour can be hardly detected in Company D. Plus, this climate appears to be very delicate also when it has been established in the first place, especially in circumstances of relatively recent industrial relations (see Company C), and changes in management (see Company B) or in the composition of the RSU (see Company A).

In most analysed companies, the consensus of the union's rank-and-file and the companies' workforce appears to be a very important element for the success of a work reorganisation process. However, it is very difficult to be sought. An explanation may lie in the fact that, as confirmed by FIM-CISL unionists, boosting direct employee participation in work organisation does not originate from the willingness of the union's constituency, and therefore the relevance of such organisational changes needs to be accurately explained to workers. Direct employee participation implies a significant cultural change in workplaces (hierarchical structures need to be abandoned and workers are asked to give constant and direct contribution to the improvement of organisational and productive processes rather than to simply execute tasks) which usually requires time and cannot deliver immediate results in economic terms. Communicating this change to workers is thus not an easy task for unionists and union delegates, especially in contexts

of low union density (see Company A, Company B, Company C, Company D), union pluralism and ideological differences between unions (see Company A), lack of union culture and union delegates' competences (see Company C). Indeed, in newly unionised workplaces such as Company C, the involvement of the trade union in these processes may lead to increased ambiguities in the role of FIM-CISL and union delegates, in danger of being perceived by workers as mere consultants of the company, rather than representatives of their interests, while promoting work reorganisation projects. The trade union reliability thus threatens to depend exclusively on the results of the reorganisation process, whose full implementation and assessment are though likely to require a lot of time (at least one year). Plus, work reorganisation processes need to be transparent and workers want to be involved and constantly informed (see Company C, Company D). Related to this consideration, is the perception by some FIM-CISL officials that training addressed to all workers on lean production principles and new organisational models is a preliminary step for the successful development of direct employee participation in the form of continuous improvement groups and bilateral commissions at company level. Otherwise, the risk is the lack of employees' trust in both union and management-initiated reorganisation processes, hence their unwillingness to actively take part in them (see Company D).

Finally, as FIM-CISL of Brescia promoted all the work reorganisation projects activated in the companies, it is possible to affirm that the union wanted to be involved since the beginning of the work reorganisation and more importantly, it wanted to coordinate and manage the entire processes in partnership with management. As regards conflict tactics to achieve a better distribution of the gains from the change, the times are not ripe for an evaluation in the analysed companies as the organisational changes have been just initiated and most of them have already foundered. However, the union's idea is that direct employee participation in work organisation may deliver better results also in economic terms, and that therefore, after the organisational change is fully implemented, it is important to create a variable pay structure which is coherent with the project, thus being related to a rigorous, transparent mechanism for the assessment of the direct contribution given by workers and the improvements achieved. Apparently, far from thinking about conflict tactics to achieve a better distribution of the gains, FIM-CISL of Brescia expects that by participating in the organisational change, it will be enabled to

participate also in the definition, management and monitoring of a variable pay structure, which is coherent with such change and delivers better results to workers.

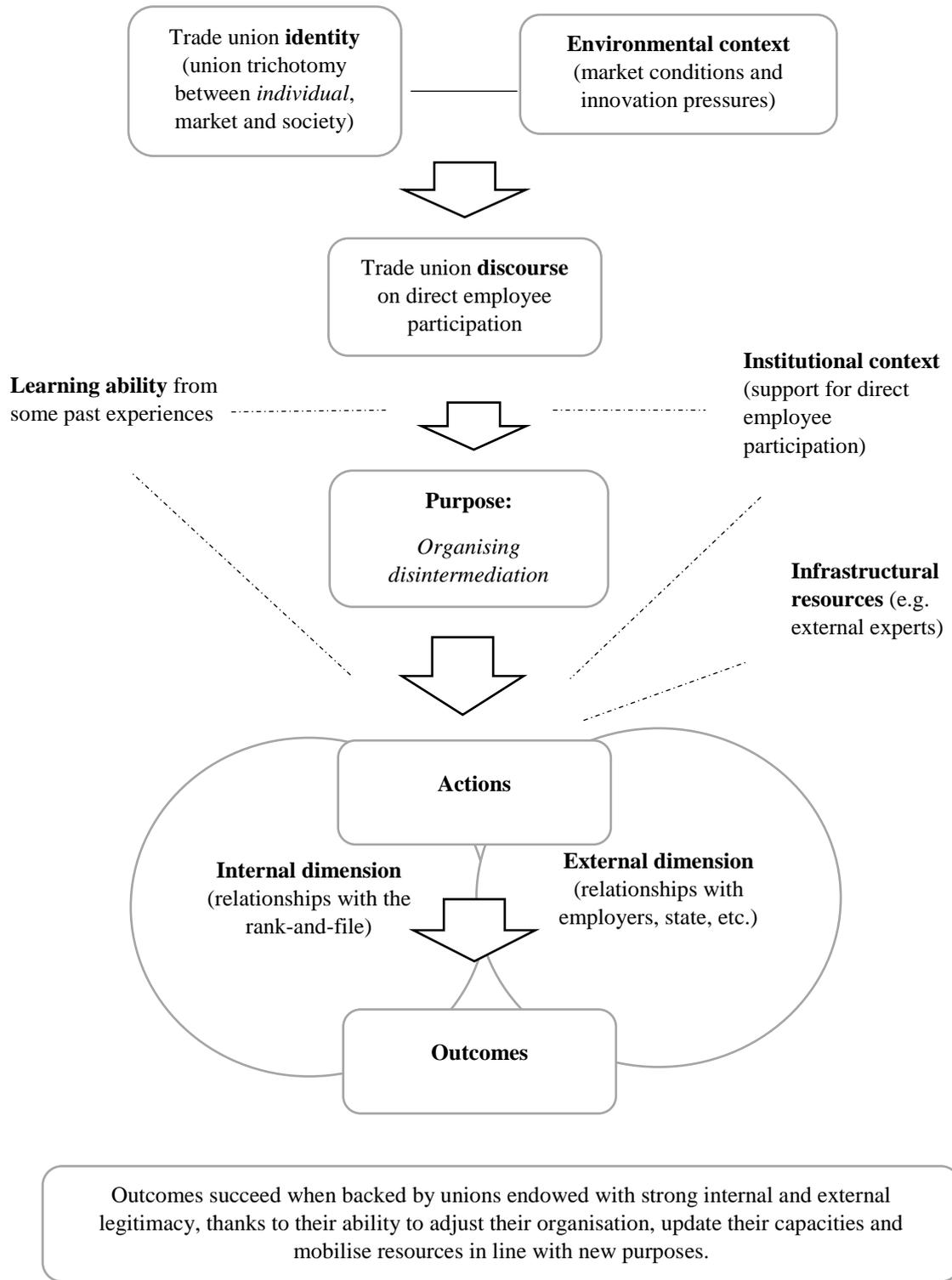
Hypothesis 9 (H. 9): Work reorganisation may imply the establishment of a negotiation channel which is parallel and complementary to that devoted to traditional “bread-and-butter” issues.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the analysis. Indeed, as underlined by the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia in an interview held on January 30, 2017, not only direct employee participation and collective bargaining represent separate domains but more importantly, if direct participation does not require collective bargaining, collective bargaining necessarily requires direct employee participation in order to be effective in delivering traditional “bread-and-butter” issues (and notably, to decide over wages and working conditions): in this sense, direct employee participation appears to be complementary and functional to collective bargaining; collective bargaining does not lose its relevance, yet it is improved by direct participation. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that in most analysed companies, collective bargaining does not appear as a satisfactory tool to reach an agreement with management on direct employee participation practices to be implemented in the workplace. Conversely, the draft of a detailed project seems to be necessary to better define the features and steps of the work reorganisation processes enhancing direct employee participation, so as to find common ground on this topic and engage in a joint implementation (see Company B, Company C and Company D). Plus, as work reorganisation is expected to be a long process, likely to be revised and updated during its implementation, a collective agreement does not seem the right tool for the management of such a long, unexpectable process. However, it is reasonable to claim that the prerequisite of “collective bargaining” established by Law to consent companies to have access to fiscal and contributory incentives for the introduction of direct employee participation practices, is affecting the ways through which improvement projects are carried out in Brescia’s companies: if a collective agreement is necessary to get the incentives, a collective agreement is likely to be signed in most companies to initiate a continuous improvement project. Interestingly, in most cases, collective bargaining (more precisely, the management and monitoring of an already established performance-related pay scheme delivering bad results such as in Company B and D, or the negotiations for the introduction of a new variable pay bonus such as in Company B

and Company C) represented the initial playing field where unions and management started to discuss work organisation-related issues and then embarked into a project enhancing direct employee participation. Moreover, in both Company B and Company C, the discussion concerning work organisation and the promotion of direct employee voice moved in parallel with the negotiation over wages and the other conditions of employment. Plus, when collective bargaining over “bread-and-butter” issues reached a stalemate, the discussion over work reorganisation via direct employee participation continued in both companies and led to a project agreed between the union and management. By contrast, when the project ended, collective negotiations over “bread-and-butter” issues started again in both companies.

Since, as mentioned in Chapter 1, these research hypotheses have been outlined from the review of existing literature, which though generally overlooks the role of unions as proactive players in work organisational change, it seems now necessary to move beyond the domain of these hypotheses, which though have been helpful to initiate the discussion, to provide the more honest and accurate analysis as one can, to give credit to the whole experience of FIM-CISL of Brescia. Figure 19 shows the dynamics inherent to that experience, thus attempting to draw a framework of *union-organised disintermediation*.

Figure 19. The framework of union-organised disintermediation.



By and large, in the experience of FIM-CISL of Brescia, the approach of *organised disintermediation* would have developed essentially thanks to an inherent inclination of

the union identity. As before mentioned, FIM-CISL traditionally exhibits an “industrialist” character, which materialises itself in the union’s inclination for collective bargaining, workers’ representation and participation at company level in a view of impacting on both social and economic matters. More recently, thanks to the contribution given by the new General Secretary, Marco Bentivogli, FIM-CISL has significantly stressed its reformist and innovative nature (even though this was already proved in the 1960s when FIM-CISL emerged as one of the first Italian trade unions to understand the scope of social and economic transformations, such as the rise of industrial sectors, thus calling for a stronger vertical organisation of CISL). Particularly, since 2015, the union has been attempting to contrast fears of digital innovation and technological unemployment, accentuated by the perspective of *Industry 4.0*, by adopting a more positive and proactive approach to the challenge, focused on the need to anticipate and orient change, thus making it sustainable for all⁶⁰⁶. FIM-CISL has, therefore, tried to counter a vision, quite popular in Italy, of trade unions as bureaucratic and immutable institutions, by underlining the need that unions change in the direction of a more human-centred collective action, which should be focused on organising and representing workers as people and citizens via the promotion of solidarity and cooperation among individuals and the enhancement of the numerous links between work/production and society/environment⁶⁰⁷. In so doing, FIM-CISL has made its identity quite clear: on the one hand, it sounds coherent with the recent neo-pluralist frame of industrial relations (that expands the scope of analysis by including also those relations and dimensions that generate outside the employment system, notably within society)⁶⁰⁸; on the other hand, it seems to embody all the three dimensions of unionism highlighted by Hyman⁶⁰⁹, even though the *class* part appears to be replaced by a deeper focus on the *individual*, in a way that it is in line also with the Capability Approach originally traced by Sen, entailing the promotion of capacities as abilities of individuals to access «the processes of socialisation, education and training which enable them to exploit their resource

⁶⁰⁶ Armaroli, I., Spattini, S., *National Report: Italy, Case Study on FIM-CISL*, SUNI (Smart Unions for New Industry) project, 2018, available at <http://suniproject.adapt.it/case-study-on-fim-cisl/> (accessed 4 July 2018).

⁶⁰⁷ Bentivogli, M., *Abbiamo rovinato l'Italia?*, Lit Edizioni, 2016.

⁶⁰⁸ See paragraph 2.1.

⁶⁰⁹ Hyman, R., *Understanding European trade unionism between market, class and society*, SAGE Publications, 2001.

endowments»⁶¹⁰. FIM-CISL and FIM-CISL of Brescia, indeed, intend to overcome the concept of *class*, which tended to neglect differences to the benefit of a homogenous collectiveness, by emphasising individuals' own peculiarities and the benefits of bringing together diverse individuals and their specific features: this is consistent with a *logic of association* in workers' representation, embodied in CISL tradition.

As emerged from the longitudinal case study analysis, the identity of FIM-CISL of Brescia would have interacted with the advent or acceleration of some external challenges (i.e. the perspective of *Industry 4.0*, its potential to subvert traditional hierarchical structures and put higher emphasis on workers' autonomy, participation and knowledge, as well as the persistent dualism in Brescia's economic system between large, well-performing manufacturing groups and small-medium, stagnating enterprises), thus shaping a very specific trade union discourse and approach on direct employee participation. As explained in the paragraph 3.2.3.2., FIM-CISL of Brescia has acknowledged that due to the progressive transition towards a *knowledge economy*, companies might have been increasingly interested in developing new models of work organisation enhancing direct employee participation and that consequently, the only way for unions to survive might have been to take part in that process and attempt to make it sustainable for workers. Here are thus expressed both functional (the maximisation of workers' welfare) and institutional (survival) goals of trade unions whose relation, pursuant to an institutionalist interpretation, would constitute one of the main cleavages characterising the non-unitary and multi-dimensional nature of unions, regarded as responsible for union "lagged behaviour" in response to external challenges⁶¹¹. However, in the specific case of FIM-CISL of Brescia dealing with direct employee participation, the presumed cleavage between functional and institutional goals is apparently bridged thanks to the fact that, as before mentioned, by taking the lead in the promotion and management of work reorganisation processes, the union is expecting to achieve both purposes: its own survival and a maximisation of workers' interests. Moreover, the

⁶¹⁰ Davidov, G., "The Goals of Regulating Work: Between Universalism and Selectivity", in *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 2014, 64 (1), 25-26.

⁶¹¹ Craft, J. A., *Unions, Bureaucracy, and Change: Old Dogs Learn New Tricks Very Slowly*, in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1991, XII (4). 393-405. See also Streeck, W., Schmitter, P. C., "Community, Market, State-and Associations? The Prospective Contribution of Interest Governance to Social Order", in Streeck, W., Schmitter, P. C. (eds.), *Private Interest Government: Beyond Market and State*, London: Sage, 1985, 1-29.

relationship - depicted by institutionalists as similarly complex - between environmental (economic pressures) and subjective (union attitudes and values) features appears to be equally harmonised in this case study, since macro-economic factors (i.e. the transition to a *knowledge economy*, companies' increasing attention to employees' skills and involvement, the perspective of *Industry 4.0*) are interpreted by FIM-CISL of Brescia as fundamental enablers not only for greater firms' competitiveness and local development, but more interestingly for the realisation of union subjective features and goals. Indeed, as explained by Brescia's unionists, direct employee participation may play an instrumental role in giving value to the work of people and devising a new identity of workers within society. Besides sharing some connections with a neo-pluralist frame of labour representation, this view is evidently related to Arendt's third conceptualisation of human activity, defined as *action* or *homo politicus* and entailing social relationships, dialogue, thus contributing to human freedom. This view allows the union to engage in a more human-centred collective action, as suggested by the General Secretary of FIM-CISL in his book⁶¹².

Given the above-mentioned motives and the positive influence exerted by an internal learning capability (notably, in relation to the results of a research commissioned by FIM-CISL on the impact of the methods of World Class Manufacturing on Fiat Chrysler's workers; and in relation to the acknowledgement of the inadequacy of economic participation, in the form of performance-related bonuses, to satisfy workers' interests and increase their involvement) and the institutional support for trade unions and collective bargaining in the promotion of direct employee participation (mainly via fiscal and contributory incentives since the 2016 Budget Law), *organising disintermediation* would have become a goal of FIM-CISL of Brescia, hence contributing to realise what Ibsen and Tapia have foreseen: a new social countermovement for the (re)embeddedness of economy within society⁶¹³. As before explained, an unexpected leverage to do so has been provided by the characteristics of the new economy itself (i.e. its focus on workers' knowledge and voice), which have ended up being interpreted by the union not merely as a form of marketisation but also as an instrument for its own goals. In addition, it is

⁶¹² Bentivogli, M., *Abbiamo rovinato l'Italia?*, Lit Edizioni, 2016.

⁶¹³ Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., "Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 59 (2): 1-22.

important to specify that although all local union structures are evidently influenced by FIM-CISL identity and the values stressed by the General Secretary, thus all being likely to engage with a similar approach to direct employee participation and organisational innovation, at the time of this research, FIM-CISL of Brescia constituted a quite unique case in the Italian landscape for the time and efforts dedicated to these issues. Although some hypotheses can already be made (entailing, for instance, the role of individuals, so-called institutional entrepreneurs⁶¹⁴, whose capabilities and practices come to be very relevant for organisational change to happen, as well as the influence exerted by the regional structure of CISL engaged in a training programme on organisational innovation and company-level collective bargaining between 2015 and 2016), assessing the specific reasons behind local disparities is not the goal of this research project.

If union renewal can be conceived as an ongoing, incomplete process of transformation entailing a complex interaction between union purposes, capacities and organisation⁶¹⁵, we might expect that pursuing the goal of *organising disintermediation* could impact on the overall multi-dimensional essence of the union, affecting all those cleavages (between internal and external legitimacy, between partnership and organising, between environmental and subjective features, etc.) that literature has frequently emphasised⁶¹⁶. Indeed, the longitudinal case study analysis sheds light on the union's efforts to orient its overall structure (both leadership and the rank-and-file) to the goal, by performing some actions that exhibit an "internal fulcrum" (deriving from a logic of *membership*), in the sense that they are directed to ensure internal legitimacy and increase union capacities to address the issue (also thanks to the collaboration of few external, though very trustworthy and inspired by FIM-CISL values, experts), and some other actions that exhibit an "external fulcrum" (deriving from a logic of *influence*), in the sense that they

⁶¹⁴ DiMaggio, P.J., "Interest and agency in institutional theory", in Zucker, L. (eds.), *Institutional patterns and organizations*, Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1988, 3-22.

⁶¹⁵ Fairbrother, P., "Rethinking trade unionism: union renewal as transition", in *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 2015, 26 (4): 561-576.

⁶¹⁶ See among others: Craft, J. A., *Unions, Bureaucracy, and Change: Old Dogs Learn New Tricks Very Slowly*, in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1991, XII (4): 393-405; Crouch, C., "Membership density and trade union power", in *ETUI Transfer*, 2017, 1-5; Dufour, C., Hege, A., "The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal", in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16 (3): 351-361; Mundlak, G., "We create spots from which we shine to others: Organizing as bridging practice between distinct meanings of association", in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 2017, 38 (2): 291-317; Streeck, W., Schmitter, P. C., "Community, Market, State-and Associations? The Prospective Contribution of Interest Governance to Social Order", in Streeck, W., Schmitter, P. C. (eds.), *Private Interest Government: Beyond Market and State*, London: Sage, 1985, 1-29.

are aimed at pursuing a logic of partnership with management, thus convincing it to jointly initiate and coordinate work reorganisation projects in workplaces. As argued by Mundlak, bridging the gap between internal and external legitimacy is relevant to overcome the contradictions inherent to the two logics of labour's association⁶¹⁷, and – I would say – to switch from a “behaviour lagged” by a plurality of irreconcilable cleavages (as stressed by an institutionalist frame) to a more concrete, though presumably still incremental⁶¹⁸, union change and renewal: a union-led countermovement, in Polanyian words, that would not lie in the neglect of one dimension in favour of the other, yet in the ability to connect and reconcile all dimensions inherent to union nature. It seems that FIM-CISL of Brescia has quite vigorously attempted to do so. Though acknowledging that the internal and external dimensions are not separate domains, yet they are likely to interfere with one another (especially, at company level where the union's effort is to strike a balance between a logic of *influence* (or *partnership*) towards the employer and a logic of *membership* (or *organising*) towards union members and workers), the following lines are dedicated to explaining how FIM-CISL of Brescia has acted in response to each logic.

Particularly, as far as internal legitimacy is concerned, FIM-CISL of Brescia has committed itself to abandon a hierarchical organisational structure and top-down representation initiatives so as to allow for more horizontal relationships between union leaders, union officials, union delegates and union members, and for bottom-up activities. After all, a re-design of union roles and structures in the direction of bottom-up and less hierarchical organisations was already suggested in the 1990s to those unions willing to participate in socio-technical work systems: «unions have to respond to the pressures for democratization in the same ways companies must»⁶¹⁹. Accordingly, the internal organisation of FIM-CISL of Brescia is structured along purposive processes, each one coordinated by union officials, chosen for their interests and skills and not for their

⁶¹⁷ Mundlak, G., “We create spots from which we shine to others: Organizing as bridging practice between distinct meanings of association”, in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 2017, 38 (2): 291-317.

⁶¹⁸ Streeck, W., Thelen, K., *Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, in Streeck, W., Thelen, K. (eds.), *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, 1-39; Mahoney, J., Thelen, K., *A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change*, in Mahoney, J., Thelen, K. (eds.), *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 1-10.

⁶¹⁹ Kelty, B., *Discovering Best Practice: The Union Experience*, 1993, in Cohen-Rosenthal, E., “Sociotechnical Systems and Unions: Nicety or Necessity”, in *Human Relations*, 1997, 50 (5), 598.

position in the union's hierarchy. Particularly, one process deals with organisational innovation at workplaces and is coordinated by a union official, who is responsible for helping his/her colleagues design work reorganisation projects and monitor their functioning. In addition, relevant bodies and rituals within the organisation (e.g. union assemblies in workplaces, the General Council, the Congress, etc.) have been changing: from the traditional model consisting of discourses made by union leaders and some questions made by other unionists and members, to concrete experiences of workers' direct participation, teamworking and cooperation, in a view of coming up with ideas and suggestions for FIM-CISL organisational improvement. In these occasions, FIM-CISL of Brescia tries to exhibit its discursive capacity, which is «the ability to provide overarching narratives as a frame of reference for union action»⁶²⁰, regarded as a pivotal source of union power, as it consents an effective representation and discussion of collective interests, thus potentially spurring the involvement and commitment of the rank-and-file. Partly instrumental in ensuring internal legitimacy towards *organised disintermediation* is the mobilisation of resources to coordinate this process. Particularly, both network embeddedness (or external solidarity, referring to the degree to which unions have horizontal and vertical links with other unions and with community groups and social movements) and infrastructural resources (covering the material and human resources, also coming from outside of the union, and their allocation through processes, policies and programmes)⁶²¹ sound relevant to FIM-CISL of Brescia, as it is engaged in a completely new scope of action in relation to which it seems to lack adequate internal skills and resources. However, besides establishing stable relationships with an external expert (considered as trustworthy, reliable and inspired by the same values and ideas as those of the union) and involving him/her in company-level experimentations, FIM-CISL of Brescia has not performed any other significant action in this field. Plus, despite the acknowledgement that the development of unionists' skills in organisational issues is crucial to the success of company-level projects, no training package targeted to union officials and delegates has been organised so far: the General Secretary argued that «this is not the right time as the experimentations have just started and regularities among

⁶²⁰ Lévesque, C., Murray, G., "Trade union cross-border alliances within MNCs: disentangling union dynamics at the local, national and international levels", in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 2010, 4 (4), 330.

⁶²¹ Lévesque, C., Murray, G., "Understanding union power: resources and capabilities for renewing union capacity", in *ETUI Transfer*, 2010, 16 (3): 333-350.

projects have not been detected yet»⁶²². However, it is worth mentioning that the union official who is coordinating the process of organisational innovation within FIM-CISL of Brescia, is encouraged to follow the external expert in his/her activities and cooperate with him/her, in a view of acquiring all relevant skills that in the long run, would permit FIM-CISL of Brescia to completely “internalise” the management of organisational innovation at company level. It is thus quite evident that the union prefers to unilaterally plan and manage its own processes and programmes. As shown in the paragraph 3.2.1.3., this appears as a legacy of the past: the result of the confrontational character of relationships between different unions and between FIM-CISL of Brescia and the main local employers’ association in the industrial sectors (AIB), the scant degree of collaboration with other stakeholders such as educational institutions, and overall the very low level of the union’s embeddedness at the local level. It though could be interesting to wonder if unilateralism may remain the right option for FIM-CISL of Brescia, even at the times of the demise of traditional internal paths for organisational development and growth and the relevance of new paradigms such as that of Open Innovation⁶²³: an approach to workplace innovation that, by emphasising network embeddedness and infrastructural resources, could reasonably be applied also to union change and renewal.

With reference to the external dimension (referring to the relation between the union and companies), important test benches were provided by the projects of organisational innovation promoted by FIM-CISL of Brescia and initiated in four companies: all operating in the metalworking sector in the area of Brescia, though integrated in international value chains; all characterised by cooperative industrial relations, albeit a quite low degree of unionisation (which does not exceed 25% of the workforce). In all companies, it was FIM-CISL of Brescia that firstly advanced the idea to initiate a work reorganisation process via either the simple establishment of a joint labour-management committee (see Company A) or the development of a more structured innovation plan (see Company B, C and D); via either the (at least attempted) involvement of external experts (see Company B, C and D) or the sole contribution of local union officials (see Company A). In all cases, and notably in Company B, C and D, where work

⁶²² The interview was conducted on April 12, 2018.

⁶²³ Chesbrough, H., *Open Innovation: The new imperative for creating and profiting from technology*, Harvard Business School Publishing, 2003.

reorganisation processes were articulated in different phases and comprised several actors, it would seem to emerge that the role of collective bargaining as «the most effective means of giving workers the right to representation in decisions affecting their working lives»⁶²⁴ may be challenged, or at least may need to be supported, by collective project management when processes and purposes, rather than rules and interests, are concerned. These circumstances seem also to differ from the situations of *integrative bargaining*, as depicted by Walton and McKersie⁶²⁵. Indeed, whereas in the latter management and unions are forced to deal with a common problem, thus searching for win-win solutions, the former would represent the next step of *integrative bargaining* when, after agreeing on the launch of a work reorganisation project to solve relevant issues, parties need to jointly design and progressively implement it. This requires what Walton and McKersie later define as a logic of *mutual commitment*, entailing both employers' additional commitment to workers and employees and their representatives' additional commitment to the organisation and its goals. This approach is needed especially in times of structural changes and technological and organisational transformations, so that positive social effects are realised⁶²⁶. Furthermore, by entering the sphere of workplace innovation and change, industrial relations tend to discover a quite unexplored domain and need to involve external players, such as experts, consultants, researchers, etc., that can assist traditional actors (in the analysed cases, unions and companies) in dealing with new issues. By and large, from the aforementioned case studies, it would emerge that when addressing workplace innovation, industrial relations end up adopting new instruments (e.g. projects and plans in addition to agreements) and players (e.g. external experts in addition to unions and managers), that could allow them to switch from a focus on interests and rule-making to a focus on goals and process-management. However, collective bargaining is not totally eclipsed by this new approach: conversely, in an industrial relations system with no institutionally established participatory rights, it emerges as the first occasion for management and

⁶²⁴ Donovan, T., *Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations*, CMND, 1968, 3623, 185, 27.

⁶²⁵ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965.

⁶²⁶ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *Managing new technology and labor relations: an opportunity for mutual influence*, Paper presented at a conference sponsored by the Panel on Technology and Employment of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the U.S. Department of Labor, October 1988.

unionists to discuss work organisation-related topics; plus, as confessed by some unionists from FIM-CISL of Brescia, collective bargaining is expected to improve and deliver even better solutions following a greater employee participation in work organisation and a greater employees' and their representatives' knowledge of companies' problems.

The relevance of procedural over normative aspects was, moreover, intuited already in the 1980s by Bartezzaghi and Della Rocca after reviewing the then-existing literature on the relationship between industrial relations and information technologies⁶²⁷, and confirmed in the same period by a Della Rocca's empirical analysis on some first experiences of collective bargaining over work organisation in Italy⁶²⁸. Even though these experiences remained very limited and did not boost further consistent research on the interplay between union representation and direct employee voice, their analysis is important since it shed light on aspects that turn out to be relevant in the collective regulation of work organisation, recently promoted by FIM-CISL of Brescia. Besides the emphasis on procedures (e.g. the constitution of labour-management committees, the definition of processes of collection and validation of suggestions from workers, the design of workers' training programmes, etc.) over rules, the work of Della Rocca, indeed, stressed the importance of the permeability of company-level collective bargaining to external players (e.g. civil society, public institutions, etc.) to solve strategic issues such as employment protection and workers' skills development; plus, the Author concluded that following the decline of traditional, purely normative collective bargaining and the increase in procedural bargaining over shared project-management, the area of informality might have been bound to enlarge. His impression is confirmed also in this analysis, especially if we consider the case of Company A and the slight difference between the collective agreement signed on April 15, 2016 and the actual implementation of the work reorganisation project, as well as the several delays and complications that made the projects launched in Company B, C and D different from their initial formulations.

⁶²⁷ Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., "Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche", in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122.

⁶²⁸ Della Rocca, G., "L'innovazione tecnologica e le relazioni industriali in Italia", in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1985, 5, 1-186.

In all case studies, FIM-CISL of Brescia was capable to convince management to embrace a work reorganisation project promoted by the union. However, it must be noted that in the same period, FIM-CISL of Brescia attempted to initiate similar experimentations at least in other two companies, which though rejected the union's offer. Plus, it should not be overlooked the role played by Italian legislation, and notably by the Budget Laws from 2016 and the article 55 of the Decree Law n. 50/2017, in supporting both workers and companies negotiating practices of direct employee participation via fiscal and contributory cuts. Nevertheless, it is important to say that all projects launched by FIM-CISL of Brescia in 2016/2017 either ended (see Company A) - although in some cases resumed in forms quite different from the initial (see Company B and C) - or have been experiencing serious difficulties (see Company D). Despite the fact that different circumstances led to stalemates or the end of the projects, an important underlying cause could be identified in the lack of sufficient commitment by all players and sufficient trust among each other⁶²⁹. The occurrence of economic difficulties did favour labour-management commitment to direct employee participation practices in Company A and B. However, also in these cases the initiatives did not follow a regular and unaltered path, as with the change in the composition of the RSU in favour of FIOM-CGIL (which was not committed to the development of the project), the initiative in Company A foundered, and the replacement of the former HR leader in Company B led to a stalemate situation and then to the suspension of the original project and the launch of a new one via collective bargaining. It remains to be ascertained whether even in these cases, the union failed to grasp the companies' most pressing concerns and use them as a leverage for the design and implementation of common reorganisation projects. By and large, these experiences would seem to teach us that it is impossible to initiate innovation processes without the bottom-up involvement of all players, even of other trade unions potentially operating in the same company; that the actual involvement of management seems to largely depend upon the union's ability to grasp companies' most pressing concerns and use them as a leverage to initiate work reorganisation projects; that the establishment of a climate of mutual trust needs time in contexts not used to labour-management

⁶²⁹ As regards the relevance of a commitment orientation, see Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *Managing new technology and labor relations: an opportunity for mutual influence*, Paper presented at a conference sponsored by the Panel on Technology and Employment of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the U.S. Department of Labor, October 1988.

participation, even when industrial relations are depicted as quite cooperative; and finally, that even when trust seems to be established, it is a very delicate situation likely to be overthrown by a change in the original players.

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSIONS

While labour representation via trade unions, traditionally considered as a building block of *industrial democracy*, continue to lose ground across many Western countries, new direct forms of employee voice have emerged and increased in workplaces since the late 1970s, spurred by *business case* arguments such as the mantra of continuous improvement, quality of work and better responsiveness to customers. As described in Chapter 1, this marketisation wave of employee participation has been depicted as further challenging the role of trade unions as main vehicles for workers' voice in workplaces, thus contributing to disembedding workers' knowledge, skills and participation from collective representation and industrial relations. Despite some pessimistic scenarios foreseeing the full marketisation of those previously known as "fictitious commodities", the end of the stabilising "double movement" and as a result, the demise of capitalism¹, it is worth underlining that according to Polanyi and other scholars drawing on his contribution², no matter how threatening marketisation pressures can be, economy cannot be disembedded from society, since a social countermovement is doomed to arise whenever it is necessary to further protect labour, land and money from full commodification. Given the pressures that capitalism and labour, among the three "fictitious commodities", are facing nowadays (e.g. skill-biased technological change, increased competition, intensified demands for deregulation, etc.), some authors have opened up possibilities for a new countermovement, driven by experiences of union change and renewal³.

Stemming from this background, this research project has been intended to investigate an original perspective of union counter-mobilisation, specifically directed to traditionally management-led practices of employees' participation in workplaces. The reference is to the concept of union-*organised disintermediation*, introduced in a previous work⁴, and here more extensively researched, in an attempt to provide new empirical findings on the

¹ Streeck, W., "How will capitalism end?", in *New Left Review*, 2014, 87, 35-64.

² Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1944. See, moreover, Blyth, M., *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

³ See, for instance, Ibsen, C. L., Tapia, M., "Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?", in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 59 (2): 1-22.

⁴ Armaroli, I., "In the midst of union (incremental) change in workplaces. Towards *organised disintermediation*?", Forthcoming.

issue as a suggested union option, thus shedding light on its internal and external determinants as well as on its research and practical consequences. Notably, the research questions underpinning this project have been: how and why do trade unions in traditional industries come to promote forms of work organisation enhancing direct employee participation at workplaces? How and why do institutional factors (i.e. formal and informal norms, organisational structures), environmental constraints (i.e. market conditions, innovation pressures and power relations) and cognitive frames (i.e. trade union identity) interplay to affect trade union orientation in this field and the outcomes of union-organised *disintermediation* in workplaces? How and why does *organised disintermediation* impact on union purposes, identity and organisation, and interact with collective bargaining in workplaces? To answer to these questions, I have developed an inductive and qualitative analysis based on case study, which is regarded as the most suitable methodological approach to answer to “how” and “why” research questions⁵, and overall, to investigate «contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships»⁶. Particularly, the Italian metalworkers’ organisation, FIM-CISL of Brescia, has been selected as the case study of this research project, given the fact that during my first year of the Ph.D. programme, I had the opportunity to come into contact with this metalworkers’ organisation and cooperate with its officials in daily research activities concerning collective bargaining. This circumstance allowed me to know the main concerns and activities of this organisation. Notably, one of the issues most frequently raised by the officials of FIM-CISL in Brescia was related to non-union employee voice in work organisation. When I started to work in FIM-CISL of Brescia, in May 2016, the metalworkers’ organisation had just begun to carry out some initiatives in this field and employee involvement in work organisation had just become a priority in the trade union policy agenda. Therefore, this project has been grounded in lived experience, developed in partnership with FIM-CISL of Brescia; it has addressed issues of pressing concern to the Italian trade union, and implied working with (rather than simply studying) metalworkers’ representatives. The theoretical framework within which I have conducted the research and notably, I have attempted to answer to the “why” question, has drawn on

⁵ Yin, R. K., *Case study research: Design and methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009.

⁶ Zainal, Z., “Case study as a research method”, in *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*, 2007, 5 (1): 1-6.

the Dunlopian systems theory and new-sociological institutionalism, given the former's focus on the environmental context (comprised of technology, market or budgetary constraints, and power relations) to explain actions⁷, and the latter's interest in understanding organisational behaviour according to rules, conventions, customs and ideas⁸. Conversely, to answer to the "how" question, I have relied on the findings from the literature review particularly as regards the essence of trade unions, and I have assessed the trade union's action with emphasis on its internal (referring to internal democratic processes, union organisational structure and internal relationships with the rank-and-base) and external (referring to relationships with employers and the state) dimensions⁹. The research was conducted from May 2016 to April 2018, by using methods such as desk research, participant observation and semi-structured interviews with union officials and union delegates. Moreover, 4 local companies have been subject to a longitudinal case study analysis, conducted via participant observation, relying on the analysis of primary documents (i.e. collective agreements, business plans, etc.), on-site visits, attendance at the negotiating tables and internal meetings, and semi-structured interviews with local union officials, shop stewards and an external expert supporting the trade union in these projects, in a view of comparing approaches and practices adopted by FIM-CISL of Brescia in different local companies with regard to work organisation and non-union employee participation. The selection of these companies is explained by the fact that during my stay at the premises of FIM-CISL of Brescia, the trade union developed processes of work reorganisation in these firms.

As suggested in paragraph 3.3., this analysis has shown that, in contrast to a literature generally depicting direct employee participation practices as a management-led choice and putting unions in a reactive position in face of managerial strategies, trade unions might have already started *organising disintermediation*, by taking the lead in the promotion, regulation and management of direct employee participation. The experience

⁷ Dunlop, J. T., *Industrial Relations System*, New York: Holt and Company, 1958.

⁸ Scott, W. R., *Institutions and Organizations*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001.

⁹ See, among others, Dufour, C., Hege, A., "The legitimacy of collective actors and trade union renewal", in *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 2010, 16, 351-361; Hodder, A., Edwards, P., "The essence of trade unions: understanding identity, ideology and purpose", in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2015, 29 (5): 843-954; Mundlak, G., "We create spots from which we shine to others: Organizing as bridging practice between distinct meanings of association", in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 2017, 38 (2): 291-317.

of FIM-CISL of Brescia thus contributes to challenging the perception, apparently, authoritatively justified in both rational choice and new-sociological institutional theories¹⁰, of unions as defensive and conservative organisations, and supports Thelen and co-authors' historical institutional viewpoint which, by opening up the possibility that different and unpredictable outcomes may result from an incremental change that lies in institutional lifecycle¹¹, sets the stage for the argumentation of an ongoing, gradual change in union behaviour. *Organised disintermediation* has thus been depicted as a potential direction of this change, which distinguishes itself from other union responses to “workplace disintermediation” found in literature, by the proactive role uniquely attributed to unions¹². Described as such, *organised disintermediation* appears to be as the latest manifestation of a Polanyian labour-led countermovement, generated in response to recent economic transformations implying an increasing disembeddedness of workers' knowledge and participation (spurred by pure *business case* arguments) from the institutions of industrial relations. In the view of the Author, such a countermovement would be necessary for the stability of the new socio-economic system¹³. Moreover, in its idealistic configuration, better described in my previous work¹⁴, as well as in its practical implementation, as depicted in this research¹⁵, the union approach of *organised*

¹⁰ These approaches tend to describe union actions as constrained either by rational cost-benefit analyses, which end up favouring customary practices as already tried and proven to yield net benefits, or by complex organisational cleavages (e.g. between environmental and subjective factors, between leadership and membership, between functional and institutional goals, between centre and periphery, etc.), which are responsible for unions' “lagged behaviour” in the face of external changes. For deepening the rational choice perspective, see among others, Gardner, M., “Trade Union Strategy: A Gap in Union Theory”, in Ford, B., Plowman, D. (eds.), *Australian Unions: An Industrial Relations Perspective*, Macmillan, 1989, 49-72; Lange, P., Ross, G., Vannicelli, M., *Unions, Change and Crisis: French and Italian Union Strategy and the Political Economy, 1945-1980*, Allen and Unwin, 1982. For deepening the new-sociological institutional perspective, see among others, Craft, J. A., “Unions, Bureaucracy, and Change: Old Dogs Learn New Tricks Very Slowly”, in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1991, XII (4): 393-405; Hoxie, R. F., “Trade Unionism in the United States: The Essence of Unionism and the Interpretation of Union Types”, in *Journal of Political Economy*, 1914, 22 (5): 464-481.

¹¹ Mahoney, J., Thelen, K., “A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change”, in Mahoney, J., Thelen, K. (eds.), *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 1-10; Streeck, W., Thelen, K., “Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies”, in Streeck, W., Thelen, K. (eds.), *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, 1-39.

¹² Armaroli, I., “In the midst of union (incremental) change in workplaces. Towards *organised disintermediation?*”, *Forthcoming*.

¹³ Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1944.

¹⁴ Armaroli, I., “In the midst of union (incremental) change in workplaces. Towards *organised disintermediation?*”, *Forthcoming*.

¹⁵ See particularly the links between collective bargaining and the promotion of worker participation described in the paragraph 3.2.

disintermediation is not meant to be at odds with the traditional means of *industrial democracy* in the workplaces. By contrast, the complementarity between these instruments (i.e. conflict, bargaining and participation) is inherent to the framework of *organised disintermediation*, as it is demanded for any union approach aimed at benefitting from new opportunities for employee participation and shared decision-making, without giving up on the protection of workers' fundamental needs. Indeed, as suggested by Leonardi, «if strategic decision-making appears unreachable today, as never before», especially if we believe in the phenomenon of financialised, “disconnected capitalism”¹⁶, new opportunities can be opened «in the no less crucial area of the quality of work organization and conditions at shop-floor level»¹⁷, particularly for those unions that will be able «to combine conflict, bargaining and participation, without relying exclusively – and ideologically – on only one instrument or another»¹⁸. After all, this view has been supported also by union officials from FIM-CISL of Brescia, who contended that the promotion of worker participation does not eliminate the relevance of conflict and collective bargaining for the advancement of workers' conditions and an equal distribution of the gains from production; conversely, in the words of local trade unionists, a union engaged in the regulation and implementation of direct employee participation is expected to have a better knowledge of internal organisational and productive dynamics, hence being more able to advance and negotiate fair and just solutions for workers¹⁹.

Besides proving the reality of the option of *organised disintermediation*, this analysis has allowed to shed light on the reasons behind this union approach and the ways through which a union actually organises direct employee participation. Firstly, it has been argued that, in accordance with elements of the Dunlopian systems theory, new-sociological institutionalism and the framework provided by Hodder and Edwards on the essence of

¹⁶ Thompson, P., “Disconnected capitalism: or why employers can't keep their side of the bargain”, in *Work, employment and society*, 2003, 17 (2): 359-378.

¹⁷ Leonardi, S., “Employee participation and involvement: the Italian case and trade union issues”, in *ETUI Transfer*, 2016, 22 (1), 94

¹⁸ Leonardi, S., “Employee participation and involvement: the Italian case and trade union issues”, in *ETUI Transfer*, 2016, 22 (1), 85.

¹⁹ Interviews conducted with the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia and a union official respectively on December 15, 2017 and April 4, 2017.

trade unions²⁰, the interaction between union subjective features (i.e. union identity) and environmental constraints (i.e. economic challenges) particularly affected union discourse and action in the field of work organisation. A less relevant, though not neglectable, influence has been attributed to union internal learning ability from past experiences, the legislative support for collectively agreed initiatives of direct employee participation and the union's relationships with few external experts. Conversely, the dimension of power, and a reflection upon power relations at territorial and company level, appears to be downplayed in the union's reasoning on *organised disintermediation*, even though, as proved in Chapter 3, it does play role for the results of reorganisation projects in workplaces. More importantly, though, against a background depicting trade unions as defensive and conservative organisations due to complex cleavages insisting on their non-unitary nature²¹, the analysis has shown not only that these cleavages (i.e. those between functional and institutional goals, and between subjective and environmental features) do condition trade union discourse and action but also that the relation between these apparently irreconcilable dimensions can be harmonised and this harmonisation can reasonably be the key for a union (unexpected) change and mobilisation. The triggering factor of the proactivity of FIM-CISL of Brescia in the area of direct employee participation, indeed, would have lied in its interpretation of "workplace disintermediation" as both an asset for firms' competitiveness and an enabler for the realisation of the union's own mission, which primarily consists of counterbalancing the employer's power as well as of advancing the needs of individuals at work²². The latter goal has been particularly emphasised by Brescia's unionists, claiming that direct employee participation may play an instrumental role in giving value to the work of people and devising a new identity of workers within workplaces and society. Therefore, as I have previously contended²³, the increasing managerial attention to direct employee voice and the quality of work can represent an unforeseen chance for unions to be themselves, by adhering to their original duties and even better achieving their goals:

²⁰ Hodder, A., Edwards, P., "The essence of trade unions: understanding identity, ideology and purpose", in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2015, 29 (5): 843-954.

²¹ Craft, J. A., *Unions, Bureaucracy, and Change: Old Dogs Learn New Tricks Very Slowly*, in *Journal of Labor Research*, 1991, XII (4). 393-405.

²² Cataudella, A., Dell'Olio, M., "Il lavoro e la produzione", in Lipari, N. (eds.), *Tecniche giuridiche e sviluppo della persona*, Laterza, 1974, 225-ss.

²³ Armaroli, I., "In the midst of union (incremental) change in workplaces. Towards *organised disintermediation*?", *Forthcoming*.

fulfilling the functions inherent to their “collective voice/institutional response face”, which consents workers to express their concerns and organise collectively for the improvement of their conditions²⁴, hence actualising the concept of *industrial democracy*, focused on contrasting the asymmetric nature of the employment relationship²⁵; contributing to the regulation of the so-called “managerial relations”, related to mechanisms for promotion and career advancement, training opportunities, the determination of workloads and work organisation, and so on²⁶; improving workers’ personal and social existence²⁷ and promoting workers’ dignity as human beings²⁸, by empowering people to have a say and affect their work environment. In this sense, by encompassing all these functions, *organised disintermediation* happens to be a simple label for a truly comprehensive union strategy.

As shown in the analysis, FIM-CISL of Brescia acts in the sphere of *organised disintermediation*, by striking a balance between what have been described as the two main dimensions of labour’s association: the (internal) logic of *membership* and the (external) logic of *influence* as defined by Schmitter and Streeck²⁹, or the (internal) logic of *organising* and the (external) logic of *partnership* as depicted by Mundlak³⁰. No one of these dimensions has been neglected by the union, which on the one hand, embarked on a process of change in its organisational structure in favour of more horizontal relationships and a bottom-up approach to collective representation, and on the other hand, advanced the idea of and started to implement labour-management work reorganisation projects in local companies. Interestingly, far from concerning completely different action fields, the two logics of labour’s association interact with each other especially at company level, where the union’s most serious challenge would seem to balance the search for consensus, trust and commitment by workers with that for

²⁴ Freeman, R. B., Medoff, J. L., *What Do Unions Do?*, New York: Basic Books, 1984.

²⁵ Webb, S., Webb, B. P., *Industrial Democracy*, London: Longmans, 1897.

²⁶ Hyman, R., “The future of employee representation”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3): 309-336.

²⁷ Hyman, R., “The future of employee representation”, in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1997, 35 (3): 309-336; Hyman, R., *Understanding European trade unionism between market, class and society*, SAGE Publications, 2001.

²⁸ Flanders, A. D., *Industrial Relations: What is wrong with the system? An Essay on Its Theory and Future*, Faber & Faber, 1965.

²⁹ Schmitter, P. C., Streeck, W., “The Organization of Business Interests: Studying the Associative Action of Business in Advanced Industrial Societies”, *WZB Discussion Paper IIM/LMP 81/13*, 1981.

³⁰ Mundlak, G., “We create spots from which we shine to others: Organizing as bridging practice between distinct meanings of association”, in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 2017, 38 (2): 291-317.

consensus, trust and commitment by management. However, not only workers and management need to trust unions but all players, including the external experts potentially involved in the projects, need to trust each other and commit to the shared management of a complex process of organisational innovation. This is particularly true in circumstances when actors' focus switches from interests and rules to goals and processes, and collective bargaining gives way to the communal design and management of highly flexible, developmental projects. As a result, the effectiveness of labour-initiated direct employee participation projects comes to depend upon the ability of unions to successfully pursue both the (internal) logic of *membership* and the (external) logic of *influence*, as well as to act as the glue between them and their various targets (i.e. workers, managers and experts). Therefore, the theme of the reconciliation between apparent opposite domains proves to be relevant not only as a trigger of union proactive mobilisation but also as a determinant for the effectiveness of union actions. However, in order to avoid any misinterpretation, it must be specified that in this context, the reference to a logic of *organising* does not coincide with membership recruitment (data regarding the effects on membership of the strategy of Brescia's unionist have not been collected in this research), yet a focus on *organising* here relates to the union's attempt to secure the legitimacy with the workers they act and bargain for³¹.

As before mentioned, concepts of trust and *mutual commitment* comes to be of crucial importance for this reconciliation, and subsequently for the success of labour-management work reorganisation projects. This not only sounds coherent with those studies advocating a partnership model for the management of developmental issues, such as technological and organisational innovation, featuring built-in opportunities for consensus and requiring constant monitoring³², but also recalls Ostrom's arguments that by challenging the idea of the enterprise as the epitome of private property³³ and opening

³¹ For similar conclusions in relation to a German union campaign, see Haipeter, T., "Union Renewal and Business Strategies: Strategic Codetermination of Works Councils and the Campaign "Better Not Cheaper" of the German Metalworkers' Unions", in *International Business Research*, 2013, 6 (3): 40-57.

³² Farnhill, T., "Union renewal and Workplace Greening – Three Case Studies", in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2017, 00 (0): 1-28; Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *Managing new technology and labor relations: an opportunity for mutual influence*, Paper presented at a conference sponsored by the Panel on Technology and Employment of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the U.S. Department of Labor, October 1988.

³³ Ostrom, E., "Private and Common Property Rights", in Bouckaert, B., De Geest, G. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Law and Economics, Vol. II: Civil Law and Economics*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2000, 332-379.

up the possibility of communal resources (e.g. knowledge) within a firm, recommend strong *collective action*, *self-governing* mechanisms and a high degree of *social capital* (entailing trust and reciprocity) for the self-organisation of commons³⁴. Pursuant to the Author, indeed, commons are resources shared by a group of people; commons are not value laden – their outcomes can be good or bad, sustainable or not – which is why mutual understanding and clarity, skilled decision-making abilities and cooperative management strategies are needed to ensure durable and robust systems of self-organisation. A typical threat to knowledge understood as a commons is, however, commodification or enclosure, which is depicted as the ability of new technologies – or, in the case of this research, also managerial practices – to “capture” (cognitive) resources that were previously unowned, unmanaged and unprotected³⁵. A similar risk was acknowledged also by Bartezzaghi and Della Rocca in the 1980s, writing about a possible decrease in employees’ bargaining power based on their skills and knowledge, following the introduction of management-led participation practices³⁶. Coherently, by adopting a Marxist approach and stressing the relationship between knowledge and power, Lucarelli and Vercellone have observed that in the wake of the industrial revolution, the development of the capitalist division of labour consisted of trying to empty labour of its cognitive dimension, so as to retain the control over the intellectual power of production; conversely, in more recent times, the cognitive dimension of labour would have become the dominant principle of value creation, thus bringing about the transformation of knowledge into a further “fictitious commodity” and the affirmation of a so-called

³⁴ Hess, C., Ostrom, E. (eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice*, The MIT Press, 2007.

³⁵ According to Ostrom, commons is a term that refers to a resource shared by a group of people. An important distinction is that between commons as a resources or resource systems (named *common-pool resources*) and a commons as a property-rights regime (named *common property*). Even though high subtractability is a key characteristic of common-pool resources, such as fisheries, knowledge commons have traditionally been relatively nonsubtractive. In fact, «the more people who share useful knowledge, the greater the common good». By contrast, typical threats to knowledge commons are commodification or enclosure (based on the ability of new technologies to capture resources that were previously unowned, unmanaged and unprotected), pollution and degradation, and nonsustainability. Importantly, «a commons is not value laden – its outcome can be good or bad, sustainable or not – which is why we need understanding and clarity, skilled decision-making abilities, and cooperative management strategies in order to endure durable, robust systems». See Hess, C., Ostrom, E. (eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice*, The MIT Press, 2007, 3-14.

³⁶ Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., “Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122.

“cognitive capitalism”³⁷. These considerations are of paramount importance for this research due to the fact that, as asserted by Tronti, what all new work organisational models (e.g. lean production, *learning organisation*, high-performance work practices, etc.) have in common is the emphasis on knowledge and its production and deployment, via direct employee participation, for the continuous improvement of firms³⁸. Therefore, direct employee participation in work organisation has been reasonably defined also with the expression of *cognitive participation*, intended as «the willingness and ability to get, share and use knowledge (one own knowledge or that of the organisation) to improve workplaces, products and productive and organisational processes»³⁹. Similarly, Bartezzaghi and Della Rocca wrote about “functional participation” (term used to emphasise the goal of organisational and productive improvement underlying employee participation or broadly speaking, user participation in the design of new work arrangements) as cognitive development⁴⁰.

Plus, the threat of knowledge’s commodification, fostered by technological and organisational advancements, gives a further reason to interpret *organising disintermediation* via the Polanyian framework of “double movement”. Indeed, the consequence of borrowing Tronti’s concept and taking up Ostrom’s perspective of knowledge as a commons is assuming that there is another way to look at union-*organised disintermediation*. Notably, it might be intended as the union’s attempt to take workers’ knowledge away from commodification/enclosure threats, spurred by greater *managerial control* and, by acknowledging the dual functionality of knowledge as a human need and an economic good⁴¹, to start embedding *cognitive participation* within the framework of industrial relations, thus attempting to ensure *equity, efficiency and sustainability* (the

³⁷ Lucarelli, S., Vercellone, C., “Knowledge and the dynamics of the social relations”, in *Theoretical framework on future knowledge-based economy, Decentralised Citizens ENgagement Technologies Specific Targeted Research Project Collective Awareness Platforms*, March 2014, 10-11, available at https://dcentproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/D3.1-final_new.pdf.

³⁸ Tronti, L., “Economia della conoscenza, innovazione organizzativa e partecipazione cognitiva: un nuovo modo di lavorare”, in *Economia & lavoro*, 2015, 3, 7-20.

³⁹ Tronti, L., “Economia della conoscenza, innovazione organizzativa e partecipazione cognitiva: un nuovo modo di lavorare”, in *Economia & lavoro*, 2015, 3, 16.

⁴⁰ Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., “Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122.

⁴¹ Something close to this dual functionality has been highlighted by the General Secretary of FIM-CISL of Brescia and a member of the secretarial body in interviews held on January 23 and 30, 2017. Notably, as explained in paragraph 3.2.3.2., they justify their willingness to pursue greater employee participation in work organisation by stressing both its relevance for company competitiveness and its importance in giving value to the work of people and devising a new identity of workers within society.

three essential questions for any commons) in the production, management, and use of this resource, while contributing to restoring that human, social and emancipatory value of employee participation which goes beyond its economic rationale⁴². After all, this effort to counter a static notion of managerial prerogatives to the generalised benefit of workers has always been a union goal and responsibility⁴³. Moreover, this institutionalisation of direct employee participation was recommended also in some work organisational studies already in the 1980s, where authors contended that cognitive development in companies couldn't be detached from the protection of the interests of those who participate in this development and that, subsequently, actual participation needed to be embedded in some forms of organisation other than the enterprise; otherwise, the risk would have been the reproduction, or even the worsening, of power imbalances in only apparently participatory contexts; in other words, direct employee participation should have been collectively organised⁴⁴.

According to Ostrom, a shared organisation of commons would require *collective action* (arising when the efforts of two or more individuals are needed to achieve an outcome), *self-governance* (requiring collective action combined with knowledge and will as well as with consistent institutional arrangements) and *social capital* (referring to the aggregate value of social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks e.g. the norms of reciprocity)⁴⁵: concepts that are not stranger to the players and dynamics of industrial relations too, as the analysis of company case studies has demonstrated in this project. But far from being limited to this, the parallel with industrial relations encompasses also the essence of an effective governance of knowledge as commons. Indeed, if the three essential questions for any commons are *equity*, *efficiency* and *sustainability*, it should not be overlooked that the key role of industrial relations, in their pluralist interpretation, has been identified with striking a (*sustainable*) balance between

⁴² Leonardi, S., "Employee participation and involvement: the Italian case and trade union issues", in *ETUI Transfer*, 2016, 22 (1): 1-19.

⁴³ Romani, M. (eds.), *Appunti sull'evoluzione del sindacato*, Edizioni Lavoro, 1981.

⁴⁴ Bartezzaghi, E., Della Rocca, G., "Impresa, gruppi professionali e sindacato nella progettazione delle tecnologie informatiche", in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1983, 1, 1-122; Schneider, L., "La partecipazione al cambiamento tecnologico. Stati Uniti ed Europa a confronto", in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1986, 11, 1-84.

⁴⁵ Hess, C., Ostrom, E. (eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice*, The MIT Press, 2007.

*equity, efficiency and voice*⁴⁶, whereby the use of *voice* (in an *integrative* rather than a *distributive* way⁴⁷) has been more recently depicted as the main factor tipping the scale in favour of *sustainability* (whether it is economic, social or environmental)⁴⁸. Therefore, it can reasonably be contended that when *voice* takes the form of workers' and their representatives' actual participation in shaping the work environment (a goal which is evidently embodied in the union approach of *organised disintermediation*), industrial relations can considerably contribute to ensuring *equity, efficiency and sustainability* in the management of knowledge.

While not downplaying Ostrom's commitment to trace an alternative to the theory of the firm and the theory of the state for the governance of commons and acknowledging that, on the contrary, this project has been developed in truly business environments, the parallel with Ostrom's reasonings would thus be justified by the role that non-market institutions and interest associations play in affecting and coordinating the relationships between actors (i.e. profit-oriented firms, workers, etc.) in many developed economies⁴⁹; at the company level, this reflects in the undeniable contribution that industrial relations make to corporate decision-making and private governance, by introducing logics of collective action spurred by the pursuit of collective goods and interests (i.e. better wages and working conditions), that need to be balanced with the private interests of the entrepreneur via self-governing rules and processes (i.e. collective bargaining, participation). It is in the acknowledgement of the existence of different (collective and individual) interests that need to be reconciled (in a *distributive* way) as well as of possible common goals to be achieved (in a *integrative* variant)⁵⁰, that industrial relations (viewed from a pluralist perspective) find the premise to challenge managerial prerogatives in workplaces and enter the sphere of corporate decision-making, thus bringing elements of

⁴⁶ Budd, J. W., *Employment with a human face: balancing efficiency, equity and voice*, NY: ILR Press, 2004.

⁴⁷ For a distinction between integrative and distributive approaches, see paragraph 2.2.1.1. and Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965.

⁴⁸ Tomassetti, P., *Diritto del lavoro e ambiente*, *Forthcoming*.

⁴⁹ Hall, P. A., Soskice, D. (eds.), *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001; Streeck, W., Schmitter, P. C., "Community, Market, State-and Associations? The Prospective Contribution of Interest Governance to Social Order", in Streeck, W., Schmitter, P. C. (eds.), *Private Interest Government: Beyond Market and State*, London: Sage, 1985, 1-29.

⁵⁰ Walton, R. E., McKersie, R. B., *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations: An Analysis of a Social Interaction System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965.

collective action and establishing *self-regulating mechanisms* that require a quite high degree of *social capital* to be enforced. In this sense, industrial relations, though not aimed at overturning the private property of firms, happen to embody some elements of Ostrom's theory of self-organisation and shared governance. And not without reason, these elements (i.e. trust, reciprocity and *mutual commitment*) appear to be even more relevant to industrial relations, when they start dealing with a communal resource like knowledge.

To conclude, in the case of this research, the acknowledgement of an accelerating transition towards a *knowledge economy*, whereby management's interest in workers' knowledge entails greater employee involvement, autonomy and responsibility in work organisation, would have led an Italian, local metalworkers' organisation, already displaying an "industrialist" and reformist character and an inclination for a more human-centred collective action, to expand its involvement to the sphere of organisational innovation, by attempting to collectively institutionalise direct employee participation practices, albeit their traditional management-led nature and union disintermediating potential. In fact, the approach of FIM-CISL of Brescia would seem to prove the reality of incremental change in organisational behaviour⁵¹, despite its still scant evidence in current literature on the interplay between representative and direct employee voice, as well as the likelihood of union-driven counter-movements⁵² in response to transformations in production processes: from deskilling of work at the times of mass production⁵³, to the more recent emphasis on data, information and knowledge as bases of economic development. Interestingly, by understanding the dual functionality of knowledge and subsequently, *cognitive participation* (as both an economic good and a human need)⁵⁴, which has perfectly matched its "industrialist" character as well as its goal of advancing the needs of workers as people, FIM-CISL of Brescia has been able to close

⁵¹ Mahoney, J., Thelen, K., "A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change", in Mahoney, J., Thelen, K. (eds.), *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 1-10; Streeck, W., Thelen, K., "Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies", in Streeck, W., Thelen, K. (eds.), *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, 1-39.

⁵² Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1944.

⁵³ Schlesinger, L. A., Walton, R. E., "The process of work restructuring, and its impact on collective bargaining", in *Monthly Labor Review*, 1977, 100 (4): 52-55.

⁵⁴ Hess, C., Ostrom, E. (eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice*, The MIT Press, 2007.

the gap between some of the organisational cleavages, inherent to unions' structure (notably, between environmental pressures and subjective features, and between functional and institutional goals), thus engaging in proactive processes of *organising disintermediation* in workplaces. By concentrating on these experiences, this research has shown that industrial relations, provided with new infrastructural resources (i.e. new players and new instruments) to address the new domain of organisational innovation, could constitute an effective means for a communal management of knowledge even in profit-oriented enterprises, as they potentially embody the seeds of *collective action*, *self-governance* and *social capital*. However, the first results of the four company-level reorganisation projects, initiated by the union, have also demonstrated that times may not be ripe enough, in the metalworking sector in the area of Brescia, for this to happen. Trust, reciprocity and *mutual commitment*, fundamental enablers for successful shared strategies, are hard to be built and continuously maintained, especially in contexts not used to labour-management partnership. In this regard, it would be important to monitor the evolution of already launched organisational projects in the area of Brescia over the next years.

Though exhibiting some limitations (i.e. the focus on one single union in a very specific geographical area does not allow generalised considerations; the narration of some company-level reorganisation projects which are still ongoing does not permit an evaluation of their outcomes; a qualitative approach does not consent to identify clear cause-and-effect relationships between analysed variables and the trade union's action), this project has explored a quite original domain and now call for further empirical research to assess the validity of its results. Particularly, there's a need to address the characteristics and results of the collective management of workers' *cognitive participation* in workplaces, by focusing on unions' and managers' discourses and behaviours alike. Such a comprehensive scope of research has not been assumed by this project, which conversely has intended to take up a trade union perspective in order to investigate the determinants and features of a possible path of trade union change and renewal. Moreover, the framework of *union-organised disintermediation*, outlined in this work on the basis of a local structure of an Italian trade union, needs to be further assessed also with reference to other unions' experiences in the field of employee participation and organisational innovation. Plus, it could be important to verify whether the key concepts

and variables of this framework (e.g. the interplay between trade union identity and environmental pressures; the relevance of both the internal logic of *membership* and the external logic of *influence*; etc.) might be applied also to the understanding of other trade union proactive approaches to current challenges: among those, the suggested “Negotiating the Algorithm” attitude⁵⁵, entailing a trade union involvement in digital transformation “before the fact”⁵⁶, can be considered. Finally, theoreticians could be interested in engaging in further investigations on the links between industrial relations’ theories and the literature on the governance of commons, starting from the standpoint of the conceptualisation of the enterprise as a mixed system of communal and individual resources⁵⁷. In the meantime, trade unions involved in direct employee participation practices could benefit from this work and particularly, from the framework of *organised disintermediation* to get to the root of their actions, as well as to understand, assess, and partly foresee and control their results.

⁵⁵ De Stefano, V., “*Negotiating the algorithm*”: *Automation, artificial intelligence and labour protection*, ILO Employment Working Paper No. 246, 2018.

⁵⁶ Schneider, L., “La partecipazione al cambiamento tecnologico. Stati Uniti ed Europa a confronto”, in *Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, 1986, 11, 1-84. The Author refers to Norwegian trade unions which were able, in the late 1970s, to embrace a “before the fact” strategy towards technological innovation. This consented the unions to participate in the phases of planning and introduction of new devices, as well as in discussions about the new work organisation.

⁵⁷ Ostrom, E., “Private and Common Property Rights”, in Bouckaert, B., De Geest, G. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Law and Economics, Vol. II: Civil Law and Economics*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2000, 332-379.

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