

Diversity management e formazione.
Alcune questioni emblematiche

Diversity management and training.
Some emblematic issues.

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ABSTRACT

According to Istat's 2022 Annual Report, the labor market is rapidly changing and the processes are currently underway that, because of their complexity and interaction, increase existing critical situations, such as deep-rooted inequalities and unemployment, which are all matters of great vulnerability in our country. Within this framework, work-related pedagogical reflection takes on a critical prospect, playing a role due to its axiological nature and planning aspect. In the debate concerning training for diversity management, pedagogical reflection can make its contribution by combining people and skills, human resources development and work. Furthermore, it identifies inclusive and cohesive processes designed to promote in a new way design skills and effective innovation, high quality training processes and dignity at work. This essay addresses in an emblematic way some pressing issues, such as the real challenge of recognizing diversity as a powerful strength and competitive strategy, enhancing resilience in our country.

Secondo il Rapporto annuale Istat 2022 il cosiddetto "mercato" del lavoro è in rapida evoluzione e implica processi oggi in atto che, nella loro complessità e interazione, acutizzano le criticità esistenti, tra cui radicate disuguaglianze e crisi occupazionale, elementi di elevata vulnerabilità nel nostro Paese. In questo quadro, la riflessione pedagogica sul lavoro può avere un compito critico e prospettico, è interpellata per la sua stessa natura assiologica e progettuale. Nel quadro del dibattito sulla formazione al Diversity management, la riflessione pedagogica può offrire un contributo rivolto a coniugare persone e competenze, orientamento e lavoro, individuando percorsi di inclusione e coesione per valorizzare in modo inedito capacità progettuale ed efficaci innovazioni, qualità dei percorsi formativi e dignità lavorativa. Il saggio indaga in modo emblematico alcune questioni di particolare attualità, tra cui la sfida di sostenere la diversità come "ricchezza" e strategia competitiva per la resilienza del nostro Paese.

Keywords: pedagogy; training; inequalities; work; diversity management

Parole chiave: pedagogia; formazione; disuguaglianze; lavoro; diversity management

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1. The labor market between inequalities and exclusions

In recent years, the workforce in Italy has gone from a homogeneous reality to a situation of growing differentiation. Like the world, even the labor market is rapidly evolving and requires ongoing strategies of adaptation to the numerous processes currently underway that, because of their complexity and interaction, increase the existing critical situations, especially persistent inequalities and unemployment. All this is determined by the variation of contractual forms, as well as by additional radical socio-demographic transformations. Some data relating to social trends and structural changes in our society, such as the feminization of work, the significant incidence of foreigners on the workforce, and the permanence in the labor market of a larger number of people over 55 years old (Boldizzoni, Quaratino, 2014), lead us to believe that diversity management must be addressed.

There are numerous barriers that can affect people's access to the labor market in Italy. For instance, migrants mostly have legal issues, while others face informal and cultural barriers (Crepaldi, Nanni, 2021). An undeniable phenomenon of discrimination specifically affects women. According to Eurostat data (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>), in 2019 the female employment gap had already reached 19.6% (a slight decrease compared to 2009, when it was only 24.0%). Part-time work affected 29.2% of women (against 8.4% of men), and this was not by choice in at least 60.4% of cases. The overall income earned by working women was on average 25% lower than men's. Furthermore, the pandemic crisis has complicated this scenario.

The condition of the new generations is also worrisome for two reasons: firstly, the levels of unemployment, which according to Eurostat data in March 2021 was 33% (young people aged between 15 and 24), and this represents an increase of over 5 points compared to March 2020 (27.6%) and is one of the highest increases in Europe; secondly, the state of inactivity, in fact already in the pre-pandemic period there were 2 million NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) young people (Crepaldi, Nanni, 2021).

Therefore, it can be argued that the complexity and uncertainty marking the current situation in Italy have increased because of the pandemic crisis, affecting an already fragile country from an economic, social, and environmental perspective.

With the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza - PNRR), Italy has set some transversal objectives attempting to recover from historical delays undermining the country (Governo italiano, 2021), so that all citizens can have equal opportunities and fully express their potential. Regardless of their origin, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation, the presence of gender inequalities and the absence of equal opportunities have to be considered not only an individual problem, but actually a significant obstacle to economic growth (Governo italiano, 2021). For this reason the PNRR, in addition to paying special attention to the issues concerning the South and people with disabilities, identifies specific interventions and concrete strategies aimed at combating discrimination against women and reclaiming youth potential.

Within an equal opportunities framework, the Italian Government also considers women's contribution essential for Italy's recovery. However, a specific action to counter the multiple dimensions of discrimination against women is needed (Governo italiano, 2021). For this reason, the PNRR set up a detailed program to promote female participation in the labor market and to prevent asymmetries that undermine equal opportunities since school age (Governo italiano, 2021). Among the different interventions planned out, there is the introduction of a national gender equality certification system to help companies enhance women's professional growth and wage transparency in many critical areas (Governo italiano, 2021).

As far as young people, the different actions listed in the PNRR Missions plan to invest in the new generations' potential and promote an institutional and business environment where their skill development and direct involvement in society are encouraged (Governo italiano, 2021). In addition to interventions to improve students' skills, reduce school dropout rates, enhance university education, and ensure effective integration between active labor market policies and social ones (also thanks to heavy investments in education and training policies), even the investments and reforms connected to the ecological transition are considered quite important, contributing to the creation of youth employment opportunities in all of their working departments.

In this framework, pedagogy can play a demanding and prospective role, and is asked for its projec-

tive-planning nature to act “in the sense that the urgent matters marking today as a time of strategic, ethical, vital, political, and economic bifurcations, will be absolutely decisive and irreversible to realize the upcoming future, and above all to allow men and women to see themselves as part of it”¹. It becomes somehow the lens needed to evaluate the pandemic effects (Mannese, 2021, p. 25) and the related transformations of the social ecosystems that are underway.

2. The added value of differences: sustainability, inclusion, and training

In the present time, affected by significant environmental, economic and social challenges, it is essential to uphold the centrality of the person, acknowledging at the same time his/her multiple differences. Focusing on differences (primarily of gender, age, but also of ethnicity, religion, etc.) presents a great opportunity to develop people’s specificities, promoting and using peculiar inclinations and unique abilities each individual intrinsically has. Today remaining in the midst of changes, by growing appreciative of the many different human resources, is an essential component for an effective management in times of crisis, since the transformations underway are no longer an occasional, sporadic element, limited in time, but a structural element of the system (Iori, 2014). Drawing attention to the role of differences can be useful in a regenerating process, through better integration and mutual attention. For this reason, the involvement of different skills and talents must become a distinctive feature of strategies.

The culture of differences is becoming ever more relevant, but it must be removed from a standardized and conforming mentality that ignores the potential and enrichment deriving from the value of otherness. It is necessary to counteract the presence of stereotypes and other situations that foment rather than overcome the gap of diversity, mainly related to gender and age, manifesting themselves in various forms (Alessandrini, Mallen, 2020, p. 13). To unhinge prejudices that are sometimes difficult to bring out, focusing on the centrality of the person and on human training can become a key element to pursue a deep revision of the dominant development model and become an occasion for a new way of planning.

Sustainability is the cornerstone of what is called the ‘architecture for diversity,’ which finds in the 2030 UN Agenda (United Nations, 2015) and in the New Green Deal the main strategic references to act in the present time and also build a sustainable future (Alessandrini, Mallen, 2020, p. 17). Environmental and social issues seem to be intrinsically connected, and the guidelines to be followed require an integral approach. There is no area of knowledge or economy, politics or professions that can ignore the deep changes brought about by the ecological shift, whose central element is the dignity and promotion of the whole human being and of every human being.

In the path towards a right transition which governments and businesses are called to, attention to people and enhancement of differences cannot be ignored (UN Global Compact Network Italy, 2021). Moreover, no one is excluded or left behind along the necessary path leading the world on the way to sustainability (United Nations, 2015).

While talking about differences and inclusion today, we cannot but mention especially women in all of their dimensions, because “the enhancement of female talent is a pivotal issue concerning all of us, that must be considered a battle of civilization for the country and a growing opportunity for the economic context in which we operate”² (Maioli, 2014, p. 11). In the current context, drawing attention to the role of gender strategies is not only necessary in order to go through the changes and stay in the transformations in a planning process, but it is also essential to generate innovation through behavioral practices and planning tools suitable for different situations. Gender culture has the function of acknowledging skills and inclinations that history has attributed to male and female patterns, for the purpose of better integration and mutual appreciation.

Looking at the history of women’s movements, they have pursued emancipation (the need for gender equality and the right to increasingly access the resources of social citizenship) as well as they have focused on promoting differences and female peculiarity in its biological, experiential and planning dimension

1 Author’s translation.

2 Author’s translation.

within various contexts, like family, culture, and politics (Ulivieri, Biemmi, 2011). The World's Women 2015 (United Nations, 2015b) emphasizes how women are more careful than men in adopting virtuous behaviors and are more inclined than men to support environmental protection (Ergas, York, 2012). Women can be considered privileged interlocutors for drafting strategies aiming to face the challenges of today's society, especially in terms of environmental emergencies and ecological transition.

In addition, young people between the ages of 15 and 30 are a generation quite concerned with the issues of sustainability and inclusion. According to a 2019 Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2019), they consider the fight against climate change, poverty and social inequalities one of their top priorities, asking for more education and training in these areas. The specific sensitivity of young people regarding these issues is also confirmed by a 2021 Ipsos survey (Ipsos, 2021), pointing out that more than 50% of young Italians are very concerned about climate change, 70% of them believe that governments failing to act on it damage the economy, and more than 80% think that the current economic model helps those who are already in a favorable position and think that the economic recovery should address pollution and climate change as key issues. Society and economy greatly need the contribution of younger generations to plan the future (Nicoli, 2018, p. 218) and their specific trait, i.e. the typical enthusiasm of their age, since today's society marked by aging population and demographic decline tends to focus more on the present and has an anxious view regarding the future. "Youth means positive openness towards the time to come, generosity in the work of putting down roots and making the world livable, pursuing great goals that make their life worthwhile"³ (Nicoli, 2018, p. 218).

Faced with the presence of many elderly people and a few young ones, the issue of the relationship between generations and the chance to hand down desire and meaning from one generation to the other (Alessandrini, Mallen, 2020, p. 276) become emblematic. Generational differences in workplaces are playing a major role, especially after the pension system reform. The crux of the matter is to understand how to get baby boomers, generation X, millennials and generation Z⁴ to work together, since they all have a different relationship with technology and authority, and a different perception of organizational identity and motivational leverage (Boldizzoni, Quaratino, 2014). Regarding age, in their manifesto to overcome inequalities, Alessandrini and Mallen point out how important it is to support and enhance intergenerational dialogue, in order to develop a culture of responsibility and increase young people's trust, especially those entrusted with responsibility. At the same time, it is necessary to avoid any type of vilification of more mature people by excluding them from roles or responsibilities determined by their age factor and not their skills, and by implementing cultural processes and inclusive policies on behalf of those who may find themselves behind on the frontier of change (Alessandrini, Mallen, 2020, p. 278). Skills and inclinations of each generation must be cherished as they can offer a specific contribution to the organization. "In the current competitive environment, they are all necessary to be successful; actually, it is precisely their intertwining and reciprocal interaction that generate added value in terms of creativity and innovation"⁵ (Boldizzoni, Quaratino, 2014, p. 305).

In order to counter gender and age stereotypes by fostering human development and an open and democratic society, training becomes a fundamental tool of mediation, promoting new convictions and the ability to reflect on ideas and attitudes considered conducive and shared when dealing with the idea of diversity in future societies (Alessandrini, Mallen, 2020, p. 278).

Training must increase the awareness of their resources needed for work and create opportunities for women to make responsible choices, learning how to take responsibility for themselves, meaning not to delegate their thoughts, words, choices, but to respect and use their own intelligence and feelings, so that the enormous wealth of female knowledge is not lost. Thus, not only women are changed while accessing male professional worlds, but those very worlds and society itself are transformed because of the mutual recognition of skills and collaboration between sexes (Iori, 2010, p. 145).

Moreover, training in a multidisciplinary dialogue is calling to determine which positive relationships and practices are needed to educate young people to be part of society as highly qualified and aware citizens

3 Author's translation.

4 Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X, born between 1965 and 1979; Millennials, born between 1980 and 1994; Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010.

5 Author's translation.

(Vischi, 2018), “responsible, free to bear witness to their own creative energy, their socio-affective availability, their moral option, their aesthetic sensibility, their axiological utopia”⁶ (Frabboni, 2010, p. 21).

3. Quality of work and creativity of organizations: between personalizing work and diversity management

In a fast-changing workplace, it is necessary to foster resilience and adaptability of the labor market to achieve good economic and employment outcomes, to promote policies and constructive social dialogue aiming at protecting workers, enhancing inclusiveness and enabling workers and businesses to make the most of ongoing challenges and opportunities (OECD, 2018). In terms of diversity, it is essential to shift the paradigm, helping contemporary organizational environments to overcome stereotypes and prejudices related to diversity, by educating and training people to understand and handle complex situations. Henceforth, there is a need to personalize work and businesses (Rossi, 2008) by pursuing a new employment strategy that goes beyond the concept of work quantity, choosing instead a better quality and its ability to adapt to new challenges, a “culture of the organizational quality of life” that stems from the awareness that “well-being is not a problem of quantity of resources but of quality and satisfaction of one’s desires and needs in optimal terms, [...] that learning to feel good is a structural task within the daily professional commitment [...] and that, ultimately, the possibility of using the creative potential of each person depends on its realization”⁷ (Rossi, 2008, p. 159).

The organizational context can be seen as a container aiming at developing useful forms of relationship with work and people, where work is considered less at the center but more central. “Less in the center because personal life makes it part of a whole that largely surpasses it. More in the center because now it has to give everyone the power to do something with their life, to be the subject of their story”⁸ (Rossi, 2008, p. 91). Much depends on the ability of the organizational context to appreciate the person as a whole and to acknowledge diversity, in order to encourage the investment of intentionality and project (Rossi, 2008). Peculiarities and forms of difference are a resource to be used to increase the creativity of organizations and to better handle increasingly complex systems where different viewpoints are also considered a valuable resource (Cevoli, 1993, p. 75). Important elements are a lifelong learning process, a transforming resilience, and the promotion of differences as drivers for disseminating policies to contrast stereotypes and inequalities, fostering a human development that enhances an open and democratic society.

We could say that this day and age is trying to recover differences (Marone, 2000, p. 131), and the great attention to this topic is attested both in Europe and in Italy. Today the idea that diversity can be experienced in the organizational sphere is starting to emerge, no longer as a constraint but as a possible source of competitiveness.

A ‘paradigm shift’ is needed, not only through the education and training of new generations to understand and manage complexity, but also by guiding and inspiring managers and entrepreneurs, increasingly called to deal with diversity in contemporary organizational environments (Alessandrini, Mallen, 2020). There is a high demand of professionals who know how to help companies to recognize, understand and promote diversities as resources and to use them in a positive way, creating a fair and welcoming physical and social environment, according to a conscious inclusion able to obtain a real profit from diversity (UN Global Compact Network Italy, 2021).

Diversity Management cannot be based on a partial vision of the organization and cannot disregard the commitment of the top management, as well as the collaboration of all of the other corporate organizational functions. Diversity management is a philosophy of approach to building the ‘organizational we,’ rather than a process of managing complexity. It belongs to the organization’s vision and then becomes part of its mission. For this reason, it entails a double cultural and organizational change that impacts at

6 Author’s translation.

7 Author’s translation.

8 Author’s translation.

a strategic level in terms of vision and values, at a planning level in terms of policies and practices, and at an operational level in terms of their implementation (Ricco, 2016). The change hoped for will have to transform the way of thinking, behaviors, processes, and individual, group and organizational results (Friday, Friday, 2003).

“The underlying hypothesis of Diversity Management is that a management of the workforce centered on the promotion and enhancement of diversity [can] bring out a company and give it a competitive advantage in the market”⁹ (Buemi, Conte, Guazzo, 2016, p. 15). The specific advantages linked to the promotion and enhancement of differences in the workplace are by now asserted by various scholars and researches, but in order for these to be achieved it is necessary that at a strategic level there is mindfulness in the organizational leadership of the value of diversity as a means for future competitiveness, and this translates at an operational level into concrete actions that promote a culture of inclusion that is widespread throughout the organization (Braga, 2021). “Organizations as educational contexts and the work to ‘take care’ of each other, of individual experiences and talents, can be the framework needed to establish an unprecedented way of governance, of professional responsibility that takes into account the ontological value of the human person”¹⁰ (Vischi, 2012, pp. 162-163).

Like all the other organizational innovations, even the one introducing the Diversity Manager into the company must be carefully assessed to prevent it from becoming a redundant bureaucratic function and not affecting the integration of diversity into the organizational fabric. The disruptive ‘personalization’ of human resource management policies that the diversity approach suggests can become an organizational asset and help improving not only internal functions, but also the ability of the organization as a whole to decode the multiple diversities making up the external environment and social changes that characterize the context in which it operates. Organizations that will not be able to address the issue of diversity and value the different internal talents, will not be able to guarantee quality performance, and will therefore neither be effective for the community nor competitive.

To avoid that attention to differences does not become a simple homologation, or compliance with regulations to prevent any damage to the company’s reputation, but it reflects a real strategy for the creation of added value, every individual worker must be appreciated and the right conditions for his/her integral development, lifelong learning process and shared responsibility must be provided. This ongoing training and mutual enrichment can be achieved by transforming the company into a learning organization where organizations become places of learning, listening, adaptation and specialization, and the organizational learning factor becomes more important than the individual one (Vischi, 2012).

In conclusion, the current development model is no longer appropriate to handle the complexities of today’s society. More attention should be given to a new model centered on the value of the person (Vischi, 2012), and scientific management, now obsolete, is to be replaced by humanistic management whose focal point is the person and his/her ability to generate value for the company (Zamagni, 2009). In the present context, marked by environmental, economic and social tensions, even more aggravated by the pandemic crisis, the pedagogical reflection is invited “to offer a contribution aimed at combining people and skills, training and work, identifying paths of inclusion and cohesion to enhance in an unprecedented way imagination, planning ability and concreteness”¹¹ (Malavasi, 2022, p. 3).

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