

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND FLEXIBLE PAY STRUCTURES: THE CURRENT ITALIAN OUTLOOK

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Abstract *The author explores an issue of acute contemporary relevance which is fueling a heated doctrinal debate in Italy and regards “flexible” remuneration or the linking of pay to productivity, performance or quality. It is the author’s belief that, as a result of the economic downturn and changing organisational models within companies, at this moment in time there is a growing need for workers to be made more directly involved in their companies’ overall productivity. This aim can be achieved by tying pay to performance, with remuneration based not on the amount of time spent at work, as has traditionally been the case in Italy, but with a pattern of remuneration based on the efficiency of workers’ performance, a practice which has until now been infrequently applied.*

Keywords: *Economic Crisis, Labour Market, Organisational Models, Remuneration, Flexible Remuneration, Rewarding of Productivity*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the labour market has undergone a profound change from the legislative, structural and also social point of view. It has slightly changed, in particular, the economic and productive environment: on one hand, the technological revolution has led to profound changes in the organisation of businesses, making the workforce easier to substitute than machines; on the other hand, the diffusion of the new economy and the free movement of financial capitals - the latter are also migrating to non-European countries where labour is cheaper, because often they lack legal protections and unions (Bertrad & Capron, 2014)- have generated phenomena of competitive import of goods and consequently, of social dumping so damaging the employment of workers. In this framework, a further consideration may also be done that affects, quite directly on the performance of the labour market: the phenomenon of immigration¹. It has created,

in fact, a class of individuals who, stressed by their state of need; they are ready to accept any working conditions, often under paid, other times or in conjunction, with the phenomena of so-called “moonlighting” (or undeclared job) (Lambertucci, 2010).

In the face of such pervasive changes, the evolutionary dynamics of the welfare state - traditionally hinged on the Fordist model of social solidarity (based, as known, on mass production, on large factory and on full-time employment) - and the underlying logic of protectionism, functionally related to the defense of jobs and incomes of workers, have

(countries that joined the EU in 2004). Recent migration and social security data for Germany (and the UK) confirm these trends. However, overall the increase in the number of southern citizens working in Germany remains limited in respect of the unemployed population in those origin countries, confirming the rather limited role of adjustment through mobility among euro area countries: overall, flows have increased from the Baltic countries (+19%) and even more from southern countries (+39%). As a result southern movers made up 18% of the flows in 2009-13 compared to 11% in the previous years. This contrasts with substantial declines in the flows from Poland (-41%) and Romania (-33%). In 2009-2013 a substantial share (59%) of intra-EU movers originated in EU-13 countries (those which joined the EU since 2004), though it is down from 66% before. Data can be read in “Eu Employment and Social Situation, Quarterly Review” supplement June

¹ Focusing on labour mobility through EU-Labour Force Survey data indicates a rebound in mobility flows (+21%) in the more recent years (2012-13) compared to the previous period (2010-11), while the number of newcomers from third-countries went on falling (-16%). Trends in intra-EU mobility differ markedly across destination countries (increases in Nordic countries, Germany and Austria against decreases in France, Spain and Italy) as well across the origin countries, with the strongest rise recorded from southern Member States, and, to a lesser extent, from the EU-10 countries

progressively gone into crisis (Romeo, 2015; Persiani, 2013; Granaglia, 2011; Rullani, 1998).

The cause, though obvious, is to recognise certainly in the changed economic scenario; but another cause is also to attribute to the employment policies which, although traditionally set to the unconditional protection of the workplace, they tend to gradually downsize, in accordance with the indications coming from European Union that aim at a new frontier of employability, through a model that is commonly called flexicurity, apparently able to ensure the security of the employment together with flexibility needs of the employer/company (Pagano, 1991; Giubboni, 2015).²

On these premises is grafted the problem of great importance on staff costs that businesses, especially in Italy, are no longer claiming (on the problems in personnel costs in the Euro area, Gouveia & Correia, 2013). So, purpose of this paper is to analyse whether the changing organisational models, as a result of the economic crisis, still support the canonical forms of payment or whether they must be updated through greater worker participation in the reality and the business productivity.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE LABOUR MARKET

In the current period, the most developed capitalist societies are going through an economic recession whose full course is still in progress and whose dimensions are similar, if not in some ways superior, to those that characterised the Great Depression in 1929 (Pessi, 2014b; Vito, 2011; Pizzuti, 2009).

In the same way as during this period of history, the actually economic crisis is acting as a pathogen that lurks and strengthens the structural weaknesses of the economic systems (Sacconi, 2009). Sacconi explains that the crisis has become global because of the interconnection between national economies. Globalisation has increased the wealth of economies and societies, expanding the possibilities of global trade, increasing export markets, multiplying the opportunities for financial investment, but at the same time, has demonstrated an extreme vulnerability to the occurrence of adverse shocks. The negative effects of this “perverse” system have also been reported in Europe which is called today to react to cope with the consequences of the global crisis; Kirman, 2011) and for this reason, the governments of the world are called upon to perform both on the domestic and on the international level, difficult choices and no longer to be postponed with respect to these weaknesses (Fitoussi,

Ginefra, Masera, Paci, Roma, & Spaventa, 2010; Teubner 1987).

What is now called the “Great Depression of 2008”, has in fact manifested initially in the stock exchanges and in the banking system at the international level; this has helped to give the impression that, at first, its nature was essentially of financial kind; but at a later time, perhaps by reflex, it has also affected the economic, social and political issues and it is in this area that should be identified its structural causes, its most worrisome effects, and its possible solution (Pizzuti, 2009; Galimberti, 2009; Rinaldi, 2011; Pessi, 2014).

This statement is not meant to say that the economic crisis that has hit Europe is the only cause of unemployment in the continent (Lindbeck & Snower, 1988).

It is known that the scarcity of jobs available in the market with respect to the demand of employment is a matter of fact in the post-industrial society, especially if one conceives the work in its most traditional sense of stable employment, full-time, with a model of rewarding based on “the time” spent at work, according to the underlying assumption of the contract of employment as full-time and permanent contract, which is the model that predominates (Proia, 2013; Travaglini, 2014; Liso, 2002; Di Stasi, 2011; Erickson & Mitchell, 1995).

It may well be said, however, that the crisis has exacerbated the problem, until the point to involve all European countries (for further details of the situation up to 2012, including detection methods, see Barbera, 2012).

THE NEW ORGANISATIONAL MODELS OF THE ENTERPRISE

In this context, the traditional conception of the medium and large sized enterprise, based on rigid management dynamics and difficult to modify, on consolidated hierarchical structures and repetitive patterns of behaviour, in which the position of the individual is recognised in the stability and immutability of the role, is now in crisis and is no longer suitable to accommodate the dynamic nature of the market and production (see reconnaissance operated by Proia, 2007; Rossetti & Tanda, 2007; Del Punta, 2001; Collins, 1997; Cataudella & Dell’Olio, 1974).

The structure of modern economic organisations is seeking, in fact, new moments of connection and it does not hold anymore on the definition of specific and detailed operating procedures, to be repeated in a systematic way for the production of scale (see, Gabrielli, 2015). For a study of flexible organisational models based high performance, see Nacamulli, 2014). So, the activity of the enterprise tends nowadays to specific targets, to be achieved quickly, with a wide operational discretion in which personal and human characteristics of all the actors involved are enhanced (Autor,

² In fact, the economic literature does not always believed that, in the current historical period marked by a technological revolution, there is an equation for which the reduction of the productive efficiency of a standard to match the market.

2015; Boltaski & Chiapello, 2005; Nogler, 2014; Magnani, 2004; Carabelli, 2004; Marazza, 2002; Ichino, 1991).

There is thus an urgent need to adapt to the changing and varied instances related to the phenomenon just now described. These needs may be grouped under a common denominator which is represented by a deliberately intrinsic element of disorganisation, in which there is no more much space for pre-established production strategies to be implemented in the long run. Therefore, the models for which the company relates to the market and, consequently, to the production strategies have changed. In practical terms, this means that the structures of modern businesses now rely on communication and on the determination of the results to be achieved, so that manufacturing activity may be directed towards a specific and predetermined project (Carinci, 2010; Borzaga, 2012; Pantano, 2012; Morone, 2012; Zachert, 1997; for analyse on demand for labour in the manufacturing industries, see Rajaram Iyer, 2013).

The Recent Models Related to Production Industry 4.0

On this basis, it is from 2011 that the talk is of a new production model identified by the term Industry 4.0³, corresponding to the fourth industrial revolution, in which the production, using the IoT⁴ network (for further details,

3 The term has been used for the first time by the National Academy of Science and Engineering (acatech). This identifies an initiative of the German government that aims to define and implement a digitisation of the national manufacturing strategy, to be implemented through projects of innovation and hence technology transfer, on a 10-15 years. This would allow the German manufacturing leadership in the following decades. Industry 4.0 is intended for the application of IoT in manufacturing. This will be possible by creating Cyber-physical System interaction with a continuous connection between them, doing so that production can self-control themselves. This is possible through many sensors installed on the machine. Fundamental characteristics of this model are: the presence of CBS that connect the factory machinery; The high presence of robots that replace human manual labour; the use of big-data to monitor trends in production; The production flexibility and product customisation; optimizing production through automatic re-calibration during the process; the intelligent use of energy resources and development of self-sufficient and ecological factories.

4 This is the acronym for the Internet of Things (IoT), introduced for the first time in 1999 by MIT researchers. This is a summary of a new mode of use of the Internet of physical space. This means that the parts of the physical world interact with each other through the computer network. Through the use of microprocessors inside objects we can draw a digital mapping of the physical world that goes to improve, reduc-

see Mukhopadhyay & Suryadevara, 2014; Rifkin, 2014), is totally automated and interconnected (Auschitzky, Hammer, & Rajagopaul, 2014).

It is a production model imported from Germany in order to revive and strengthen the domestic industrial market, also with the aim to return to his country companies that have their production sites abroad (Seghezzi, 2015). The revolution we are talking about took place, although with less standard, where it is developing an embryonic process of a production model connected to the Internet.

Speaking of the fourth industrial revolution, with many underlying similarities, the German model and the American⁵ model differs significantly in the technological progress, in the actors that driving the transformation and in the governance model.

Similar differences, without the relevance of German and American cases, may be possible to identify the initiatives promoted in recent years by the United Kingdom (Catapult), France (Industries du Futur), Denmark (MADE), Holland (Smart Industry), and Sweden (Produktion 2030), reflecting the centrality of which the issue of re-industrialisation is held across the continent, and at the same time, the need to reinterpret the fourth revolution in the light of the characteristics of its industrial fabric.

Now, we have to ask what are the features and the benefits of Industry 4.0.

The digital enterprise planned by Industry 4.0 will produce a wide range of changes in manufacturing processes and in business processes.

First of all, we will have a greater flexibility in the production, consider for example the speed of changing the small lots (even as small as single unique items) due to the ability to rapidly configure machines to adapt the customer supplied specification and additive manufacturing (Davies, 2015). This flexibility also encourages innovation, since prototypes or new products can be produced quickly without complicated re-tooling or the setup of new production lines.

The speed with which a product can be produced will also improve. Digital designs and the virtual modeling of manufacturing process can reduce the time between the design of a product and its delivery. Integration product

ing time and human actions, various aspects of daily life. The IoT devices today are just under 20 billion and in 2025 it's possible that it will be more than 45 billion.

5 See the Report presented by President Obama, Report to the President on Ensuring American Leadership in advanced manufacturing, produced by the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, which although does not use directly the term Industry 4.0, but refers to a model characterised by the use of the Internet.

development with digital and physical production has been associated with large improvements in product quality and significantly reduced error rates (Davies, 2015; Gabrielli, 2016).

Not least, the location of some manufacturing operations may also be close: if manufacturing is largely automated, it does not need to be “off-shored” or located countries with low labour (but high transport) cost. Industry 4.0 will also provoke changes in business models. Rather than exclusively competing on cost, European companies can compete on the basis of innovation (the ability to deliver a new product rapidly), on the ability to produce customer driven customised designs (through configurable factories), or on quality (the reduction of faults due to automation and control) (Davies, 2015; European Commission, 2015).

The Industry model 4.0 has also really changed the way we work; think about how the next few years will change, for example, assembly lines and how we will be far from the Taylorist model.

It is certain that the consequences that this new mode of production will have on the world of work are essentially two: the first practice, referring to the worker’s duties; the second, more difficult to implement, concerns the change of the general view of the work.

The Consequences on Employment Relationships

The new production model provided by Industry 4.0 will have strong impacts on the subject duties of the employment contract, especially with regard to certain categories of workers: the workman.

From the findings in the preceding paragraph, it appears that the enterprise will make superfluous certain categories of workers, such as simple workers, and at the same time, will make essential other categories, such as skilled workers, so-called white collar, having a high degree of responsibility on the proper functioning of the enterprise related to the new mode of production. To allow a better personalisation of the product, there are necessary workers who work, in each production cycle, using the complex machinery in order to obtain what is desired by the customer. At the same time, the worker must be able to resolve errors, bugs or other types of obstacle to production that result from computer systems that govern the production. Another change required to meet the challenges of Industry 4.0 deals with the abolition of the times and places of work (on irrelevance of the time and place see Bavaro, 2008; recently, Gabrielli, 2016). The latter will have much less relevance in the production system because it is run virtually and does not require a physical on-site presence of the human resource, being the worker

quietly, through his tablet, PC or smartphone organises the production process, solving remotely possible problems arising from the operation of machinery.

This will be made possible by means of webcams installed in the fundamental points of the assembly line and to the knitter of sensors present. This is commonly called smartworking, that is a form of execution of the job performance that ranks among the classical performance held within the company, and teleworking.

The first reaction that we have in front of such descriptions is that the worker is replaced with robots and for this reason should not take on human resources, or that it no longer has the value it had at one time, or that the worker it is no longer the center of the production system (for further details, see Pratt, 2015)

This is absolutely wrong, because it’s should be viewed with different points.

The sense of Industry 4.0 and the connected smart working is only to increase the profit, maximise production and to facilitate the reconciliation of life and work of human resources.

According to Frey and Osborne (2016), the role of the worker, in contemporary factory, will be more and more to set the machinery, control them, design their products and solve problems that may occur during the production cycle.

This demonstrates the superiority and the essentiality of human labour to the machine, as the equipment located within companies may not work (or communicate with each other) if not set and controlled directly by the human.

In particular, the machines are used to fill the gaps of the physicality of the person, as for example, the loss of energy, the impossibility of great efforts for prolonged periods or the need for breaks, illness, or even the momentary loss of concentration.

The model that has been analysed, in Italy, has become a reality in the engineering industry at General Motors Power train in Turin headquarters.

In fact, the social partners, recently signed a union agreement where it’s possible avail oneself of computer protocol of the company so that employees can manage themselves for ten days a year.

Thanks to the Internet they will be able to check the progress of production in real time, manage it independently from their computer, smartphone or tablet at any time of the day (for more, see Seghezzi, 2015).

Another example is that of the company Barilla. In this company for three years he is successfully tested the smartworking for four days a month from 1200 employees. The future project will be to expand even more hours worked

through smartworking and make it possible for 40% of the hours of human resources involved, up to 100% in 2020.

The feature of this implementation is that not only used for the workers, but, also, for example, for the human resources office or office of the business controller, which in theory have a greater need of physical presence in the workplace.

We can say that in Barilla, more than ever, we have witnessed in the past three years to a change in the trend characterised by the passage of the necessary physical presence within the company to an ever stronger culture of performance of human resources.

In this way, as will be described in the following of this writing, the most appropriate forms of wages in this type of business are increasingly related to variability (on variability wage, see Vitaletti, 2010), productivity (on productivity wage, see Putaturo Donati, 2009), performance (on performance wage, see Treu, 2010; Marazza, 2004; Gragnoli, 1995), all united by their incentive nature based on the paradigm “the more productive I am for the company, the more I earn in economic terms”.

In other words, there is a transition from a company where the product was subject to demand and wages to the amount of hours-worked to a company that produces according to the rules of the just in time where you feel the strong need for a remuneration linked to the productivity (Marazzi, 1999; for the Portuguese case, see Martins, 2015), that is a salary that values also external factors which are unrelated to hours worked, or otherwise does not depend only on them (see Clar, Dreger, & Ramos, 2007).

FROM THE ORGANISATIONAL FLEXIBILITY TO THE WAGE FLEXIBILITY

The above mentioned organisational logic has resulted in structural changes in the labour market and has produced, for example, in Italy, various tools that have established the “incoming” (see, for example, the liberalisation of the use of the temporary contract occurred with the Law 16th May 2014, n. 78) and “outgoing” (see, for example, the Law 28th June 2012, n. 92) flexibility, laying the basis for a debate on possible wage flexibility (whilst they must comply, in Italy, the constitutional rules of proportionality, quality and quantity of the work performed and sufficiency, so that the worker and his family have a decent life. About, see the outdated study of Franke & Flaschel, 1996; recently see, Calform & Johansson, 2006), with the enhancement of certain types of reward until now little used in the Italian real economy (for wage system as means to enhance wage flexibility at the firm level are also considered, see, Bellmann & Emmerich, 1992; Vavassori, 2006). So, it has begun what we could describe as an “historic transition” of the traditional

forms of remuneration, in particular those commensurate exclusively on the basis of time worked (See about the doctrine, Mitchell, 1985; Zolliopi, 1994; Ciucciovino, 1996; Persiani, 2004). The use of incentive forms of remuneration, originally considered “petty business practice,” (this was the definition given by Barassi, 1957, see also Alaimo, 1991) in the current period, is increasingly abandoning the previous skepticism of the doctrine, especially of the social partners (for further information refer to Carinci, 2013. On new perspectives and critical wage incentive, see Campanella, 2014 and Zilio Grandi, 2013. On the birth of such forms due to the crisis of the Fordist-like corporate organisation and the emergence of a system of advanced capitalism, see Caruso & Ricci, 1994).⁶

The evolutionary process, in fact, that has characterised in recent years the organisation and management of human resources in the way of doing business, has encouraged more and more the use of participatory tools in corporate life and in its results. In this case, a fundamental role has been played by a more and more accentuated enhancement of human capital, in view of an increase in both the short and the long term, of the productivity of the company (see, Romeo, 2010). This trend certainly reconciles the changes in the traditional order of the organisation and the conduct of trade unions, but above all it generates an enhancement of the profile of the individual cooperation between the

⁶ Regarding the social partners it’s useful to point out that the turnaround can be attested in the recent trade union’s agreements, such as the “Framework Agreement on the structure reform” of 22nd January 2009. The 9th comma states the need to increase and facilitate all measures providing incentives, in terms of reduction of taxes and contributions, the collective bargaining of second level that links the economic incentives to the achievement of objectives of productivity, profitability, quality, efficiency and effectiveness related to the profitability of enterprise. Another more recently document about the same issue is the “Interconfederal Agreement on productivity” of 16th November 2012, containing the “*Program Guidelines for productivity growth and competitiveness in Italy.*” The evolution which is the basis of the actual change of direction can be clearly seen in the latter agreement, which defines as common purpose among the parties involved the «*development of an industrial relations system that creates the conditions for competitiveness and productivity such to strengthen the production system, employment and retribution*», and specifically, «*... to increase and make structural, reliable and easily accessible to all, those fiscal and social measures aimed at encouraging local agreements that link part of the remuneration to the achievement of productivity, quality, profitability, efficiency, innovation, enhancement of labour, organisational efficiency and other elements relevant to the improvement of the competitiveness of the productive sector*».

employer and the employee (see, Hirsch, 2015). But not only that, disbursements related to the evaluation of quality, productivity, profitability, or otherwise to the performance of the employee, are currently considered as the new frontiers of remuneration's issues and are in turn connected to an evolution of the typical pattern of subordinated employment and its rules (about this, see, Baylos Grau, 1993; Pini & Antinioli, 2014). We might as well say that these elements - born essentially on the entrepreneurial boost - have today an important role also in the society as a whole, to the point that they can be considered forms of remuneration which are receptive both of the social and entrepreneurial needs of the workers (for further details on collective bargaining linked to productivity, see Bellomo, 2002; Lassandari, 2013; Dell'Aringa, 2013; Bavaro, 2014), and of the propulsive and participatory trends existing in many European countries (see, Arpaia & Pichelmann, 2007).

This evolutionary trend on the adoption of these remuneration models related to the participation of workers in the productivity process, predicts necessarily a participatory system of industrial relations and not just confrontational (see, Biasi, 2014). It can be easily argued that the starting point to implement such flexible systems of wages, especially related to the productivity of the company, is properly a system of industrial relations that can overcome the mere ideologies and the inherent differences among the parties, for the sake of the common good. All the things above described can also find a confirmation if we consider that one of the characteristics of the remuneration model linked to the productivity, is the combination of the best features of socialism and capitalism; it could well stand as a viable alternative for the company and the employees (in general, on cooperation between employers and workers, see Balletti, 1990, see also Hirsch, 2015). In other words, this is the so called *share economy*, or the economy based on the participation of workers in the corporate productivity. The setting up of a link between wages and production results achieved by a worker, can have the effect of improving solidarity and cooperation between both employers and workers, and among the workers themselves.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Some short conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the above dissertation.

Firstly, it can be argued that nowadays in Italy (as well as in other European countries) it is required to realize that the organisational and management models of the company have changed; secondly, this acknowledgment should also lead to a structural change in the labour market, particularly relatively to the cost of the same labour market that a company has to face. One of the possible ways to actualize the existing system and make it compatible with the real market economy, is through the achievement of a more

effective employee participation compared to the production processes. This road until now is little used in Italy.

The way to make viable this transition is to overcome an adversary culture of exasperated opposition in the production relations, a new behaviour that leads gradually to a full and conscious consideration of the company as an element of social inclusion and essential (common) factor of development (for the maximisation of social value, see, Samuels, 1988; Ramstad, 1993; Schotter, 1981).

It is in this direction that the participation of workers to the good performance of the company can be read as a strategic alliance in terms of growth and development, in which the social partners are called upon to contribute significantly to the perspective of supporting the growth and the productivity.

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