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MANAGING A "SPECIFIC" DIVERSITY: INDICATIONS FROM A RESEARCH ON ORGANIZATIONS EMPLOYING DISABLED PERSONS

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1.   A short introduction[1]

An important role in current competition among enterprises is played by human resource management (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Hiltrop, 1996): in some way, workers make difference and their care represents one of the most relevant dimensions in the construction of the competitive advantage. Already Barnard (1938) depicted organization as a cooperative system more effective than the single actor in achieving goals and underlined that the relationship between contributions and incentives has to be in balance according to the different needs, the different expectations and so on. So, a strategic task in organization is managing people. If we define HRM as the way an organization manages its staff and helps them to develop (Beer et alii, 1985), we easily understand that - if workforce becomes more and more a diverse labour force - the task becomes more challenging.

Diversity Management is nowadays one of the most relevant challenges in HRM field: each organization has to identify its specific strategies and

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[1]A previous and deeper version of this paper. - written together with Sara Campi, member of the research group - has been accepted for the VI International Workshop on Human Resource Management, University of Cadiz-Jerez de la Frontera (Spain),17th-18th May 2007.

methods, on the one hand, to ensure that all employees (of different race, colour, economic status, sex, disability, etc.) have the opportunity to maximize their potentials and, on the other hand, to enhance workers' self-development and to enlarge their contribution to the organizational goal (CIPS, 2005; European Commission, 2003).

The topic is debated in academia, either from the theoretic point of view and from the research one (Cox and Blake, 1991; Ellis and Sonnenfeld, 1994; Barabino et alii, 2001; CIPS, 2006). Many of the studies argue that this practice is the only way for having a successful management about a moreover different workforce. Some critics point out that there is too little evidence about it from research.

The research we present in this paper focused on one topic: it studies the practices of DM by Italian enterprises compelled by law to employ disabled persons. More specifically, if we consider that these organizations are compelled to employ disabled persons - but no obligations are expressed about the management of their diversity (both in terms of "whether" to manage and "how" to manage - and probably these aspects are impossible to be defined by law with a real and successful benefit) - the question we try to answer through the paper is whether DM can be considered the new perspective for HRM.

In order to target this goal, the paper first identifies the scope of the DM, putting in evidence its evolution and its areas of interest, then it clarifies the important differences that can be observed about disability as regard the other fields of DM application. Afterwards, the research is described in order to put in evidence its principal results in terms of enterprise culture about diversity and of concrete operational procedures for the integration of disabled persons.

Finally, on the basis of this empirical evidence, some conclusions are proposed in order to understand if DM can represent a concrete way to manage labour force (it's the future for HRM) or if real practices are still far from an effective attention to specificities of each worker.

2. Diversity management and disabled people

Interest of scholars about DM practices and strategies dates back to the '80s, when the emerging changes in the labour market indicated that the workforce of the future will consist largely of "diverse people" (Ellis and Sonnenfeld J.A., 1994; Kerstern, 2000). At the same time, the international literature on HRM began to propose theoretical considerations and operative indications on how organizations can manage with success this increasing heterogeneity of workers (Beer et alii, 1985) [2]. Williams and O'Reilly (1998:120) concluded "that diversity is most likely to impede how organizations function. In order to reap the benefits of workforce diversity, organizations must actively manage it". The next question is how to manage diversity in connection with a preliminary cultural idea of diversity. Ivancevich and Gilbert (2000) underline that the organizations have some choices in facing this increasing diversity: exclusion of the diverse; denial or mitigation of differences; assimilation of each difference, suppression of differences; compartmentalisations of differences; tolerance; building relationships; mutual adaptation.

In our opinion, all the mentioned alternative – except the first- can be identified as different DM strategies, because they need of a voluntary decision by organizations in front of each example of diversity[3]. It's to underscore that the

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[2]Some scientists prefer to use the expression "Variety Management" vs. "Diversity Management" (i.e. Costa and Giannecchini, 2005). If it's true that the lexical question never represent a real problem, in this case the question can be soft. The reason for this proposal is connected to the idea that the expression DM itself gets up from the discrimination approach that it proposes fighting: diversity involves the existence of normality, that can be managed through the definition of standards and of general indications; managing diversity aims, on the contrary, to avoid these standards towards management tools able to understand and to evaluate the specificities of each worker. So, variety underlines the existence of many different situations, each of them to be considered in its specific dimension: not a rule and an exception, but all exceptions.

[3]The opinion of Subeliani and Tsogas (2005) is quite different. In fact, they identify as DM only the most advanced experiences in the field, characterized by also a strategic approach connected with the goal of maximizing the contribution of all the employees: consequently,

law pressure can be seen and managed as an opportunity to begin in diffusing positive behaviours towards DM and in organizing new human resources policies (so as, in our research, it seems to come out).

Over the years, scientists have proposed several organizational-level model of DM[4]: Cox (1991) identifies three kinds of organizations, according to their relation with diversity: monolithic one, that essentially doesn't manage diversity and asks for transformation to its minority members; pluralistic one, that succeeds in engaging in DM practises; multicultural one - that the author consider the model for the future – where diversity simply doesn't exist because it has been absorbed and interiorized.

Thomas and Ely (1996) focused on processes by which DM affects the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational outcomes variables and argued for three types of diversity perspectives with specific approaches (the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm; the access-and-legitimacy one and, finally, the emerging one), which represent the evolution of managers' attitude towards diversity. Traditionally, managers think of DM as a matter of equal opportunity with respect to groups of workers often kept out of the organizations because of prejudices (about race or gender, for example). According to this discrimination-and-fairness paradigm, DM initiatives are successful when fairness is guaranteed in recruitment and retention of workers.

In the competitive climate of the late '80s, some managers change attitude towards diversity, beginning to think of it as a strategic asset useful to gain access to differentiated segments of markets.

DM reference is all workers (and not only the ones belonging to the so called "minority groups", but not even the professed "talents").

[4]Dietz and Petersen (2006) identifies two approaches to DM: the first is defined organizational-level one and it suggests organizational change processes toward the multicultural organization; the second one favours the comprehension of psychological conditions about discrimination and social relations, proposing interventions to reduce conflicts and to maximize cooperation. The strategic relevance of this last approach is evident, but in this paper we restrain the exposition to the first, whose internal coherence with the organizational approach of the presented research is major.

In the late '90s, a new paradigm emerges in a little amount of organizations, thinking that workers' value and potential lie above all in their differences, not only in terms of gender, race, physical abilities, etc. but also as their personal culture, their aspirations, their own attitudes towards work, etc. So, the potential success of this emerging paradigm derives just from its structural capability of integration of different values and cultures in the organization, just till each form of diversity.

We can thus notice that the proposed typology shows how the change of attitudes towards DM can be appreciated also in terms of shift from a "narrow concept" of managing diversity to a "broad concept" (Ivancevich and Gilbert, 2000). In the past the diversity of workforce was intended only in term of race and gender while, now it is usually defined in a broader sense, including differences in soft dimensions (values, personality, attitudes, religion, educational level, job tenure, etc.) (Rijamampianina and Carmichael, 2005).

Other authors underscore that in the narrow concept are included those elements that can be measured, while in the broader one, changing and developing dimensions have to be put into (Barabino et alii, 2001).

The evidence of the emergence of this new paradigm of DM makes many scholars focusing their researches on its implications for organizational competitiveness. Cox and Blake (1991), for example, justify – on the basis of the results of a great number of previous researches - the benefits of managing diversity in terms of: costs due to absenteeism and turnover; success in attracting talents; creativity and problem solving (because of the variety of perspectives); flexibility; etc.

In short, we can conclude that nowadays researches on DM assume two different perspectives. The first (e.g.: Ivancevich and Gilbert, 2000; Subeliani and Tsogas, 2005) presupposes that diversity in the workforce is a value for organizations which have thus to look for diverse workers. In coherence with this, DM can be defined as "a systematic and planned commitment by organizations to recruit, retain, reward and promote an heterogeneous mix of

employees" (Ivancevich and Gilbert, 2000: p. 85). The second perspective, indeed, identifies DM as a "diversified approach to management of HR, whose aim is to create an inclusive working environment, to favour the expression of individual potential and to use it as strategy to reach the strategic objectives (Barabino et alii, 2001, p. 14: our translation). In this view, diversity is rather a reality to face and manage through effective and suitable strategies and actions rather than a value to pursue (Flood and Romm, 1996).

In this paper, we assume this second point of view, since we think that DM often emerges when organizations, even if not committed to gain heterogeneity of the workforce, voluntary decide not simply to accept diversity but to manage it, finding and experimenting effective strategies and managerial tools. Moreover, according to our opinion and the results of this research, this is the situation of the great majority of organizations employing disabled people.

Finally, it is important to underline that, even if the two perspectives arise from different strategic paths, both of them have implications on HRM, because they both need a coherent adaptation of all the tools in the different phases of the managerial process. Organizations, that have traditionally used homogeneity as basis criterion, find now themselves to compare with an increasing attention towards the multidimensionality of its most important asset, people[5]

Disability has been only in the '90s widely included into the list of the sources of diversity, exactly after the American Disability Act. In Europe and from the beginning of the interest for this issue – that goes back to the last '90s - disability represents one of the most important aspect and integration of disabled persons is one of the declared objectives to pursue in Community work policies, being considered work for disable people an occasion for them to participate in social and economic life (EC, 2003).

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[5]The needed change in HRM is considered so important by scholars that someone – i.e. Kossek and Lobel (1996) and Cox and Blake (1991) - suggests to provide a framework to put into and connect strategic choices, human resource policy areas and the dimension of diversity, which is moreover present into and out the organizational environment. By the way, also managers and operatives are engaged in developing new practises in this field, as we can argue looking to recent conference documents by Aidp-Italian Association of Human Resource Managers (see http://aidp.it).

In general, the approach to diversity[6] has been developed in according to the idea of group. So, diversity gets up when we want (or have) to put together people coming from different identified groups. From the managerial point of view, the problem is how to find, see, accept the minority characteristics and how to respect and evaluate them in according to the goals of the organizations. With specific attention to disabled persons, it's interesting Roberts' conclusion (1996). She remarks that disability, which is without doubt a dimension of diversity, cannot be considered as the other sources of diversity, either from a structural point of view or from an intrinsic perspective. About the first dimension, she underlines the evolutionary nature of disability, that makes situation changing during the time; about the second, the scholar observes that the causes are so many and so various, that it's quite impossible to put them together, without a forced and useless simplification, whose consequences for person and also for organization are negative.

However, Roberts observes that the mistakenly generalizing idea that individuals with disabilities constitute a group is diffused and she asserts that this is one of the principal causes of unsuccessful use of DM tools in disability field.

In fact, the particular nature of disability (first of all, the difficult to find a common dimension among many disabled people) poses unique challenges to HRM, more over than a simple DM strategy. A disabled person cannot be consider a member of an internal homogeneous group, but each disability requires individual consideration and individual solution. Paradoxically, this is the principal reason for DM; its essence is to promote and encourage the value

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[6]As before mentioned, Rijamampianina and Carmichael (2005) propose a classification about the sources of diversity composed by three clusters, organized according to decreasing visibility of diversity and to rising management opportunity; the first includes race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability; the second collects religion, culture, sexual orientation, thinking style, economics status, political orientation, education and so on; the last puts together beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, attitudes, felling, values, characteristics that deeply influenced individual behaviour and his participation to organizational mission and goals. It can be interesting to remark that disability is positioned at the same level of other fixed dimensions, as it were an unchangeable fact, so that we know it isn't true.

of individual and his talents. This can become a valid approach for disability, too. In this view, a long way has still to be gone: Cipd last report (2006) puts in evidence that the first key driver for diversity is the legal pressure and that the most important category covered by diversity policy and practice is disability, just for the same reason.

So DM has became an increasingly interesting perspective, because it is a sort of cultural and organizational change managed from inside the organization, without any simplification and without transforming differences in inequalities. This last question, as we'll see in the presentation of the research results, makes up one of the most diffused risks in handling disability. We cannot consider as similar situations that are undoubtedly different, because so doing we create a different - but not less relevant - source of diversity. Diversity exists, also and more in disability that in other more studied dimensions - and the first important action is to dialogue with disabled people as disabled people and to build together solutions, which are. at the same time able to do something useful for them, for organizations and for society.

3. The research within PERSONE project

The research has been run by a research group in the University of Genoa between September 2005 and June 2006 as the first phase of an Equal funded project[7], named PER.SO.N.E. (that is the Italian acronym of paths of occupational sustain in the new economy).

The project aims at experimenting innovative forms of services for both workers and enterprises. On the one hand, the project supports people with occupational disadvantages in order to make them access the labour market and/or to remain in it. On the other hand, the project activities have been realized in order to help enterprises employing these workers (or willing to) in

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[7]European References: Equal – second phase, N. IT-G2-LIG-029.

managing the diversity in their workforce, coming from the assumption that recent economic evolution toward the so called new economy can offer opportunities for disabled people, but it can also create new barriers.

The research we realized supported the achievement of the above mentioned macro-objectives developing an analysis of the state of the art in the relationship between enterprises and disabled workers through in-field research involving either enterprises or disabled people. On the whole, the study developed into six phases[8], but for the purposes of this paper, the most relevant outcomes come from the last two, whose results are then discussed in order to support our conclusions about DM practices and culture in Italian enterprises employing disabled workers. More in detail, we present:

- the analysis of the enterprises attitudes and experiences towards disabled workers by the way of 34 semi-structured interviews to human resources managers of private enterprises (selected with the help of public authorities in charge of work integration policies, business associations and trade unions) bound by law to employ persons with disability and, consequently, employing them at the moment of the research.

  - the cross analysis of the results and discussion of the hypothesis.

We thus introduce: first, the scope and the objective of the analysis, then the hypothesis and the methodology and, finally, the concrete experiences of integration in the enterprises of our sample.

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[8]The phases are so organized: definition of boundaries of the field of analysis through a bibliographical study and 37 interviews to qualified testimonials (working for public institutions, trade unions, business associations, non profit sector, etc.); quantitative study of disability and work on the basis of institutional data at the Italian level (Istat, 2001; 2003; 2005), and at the European one (Grammenos, 2003); definition of the research hypothesis in order to precisely define the methodology for the study of the disabled persons work experiences and the ones of the enterprises employing them; analysis of the experiences of disabled workers by the way of eight focus groups (Bloor et alii, 2002) - with a total of 53 disabled persons involved with quite an equal distribution in terms of age, sex and educational level.

3.1 The context of the analysis: scope, objectives

Italian situation about disabled people is guided by a specific law, titled "Regulations for right to work of disabled people", n. 68/99, that replaced a previous one, dated 1968. The new law introduced a different system for helping disabled to enter job market: not more enterprises obliged to insert someone from a list of disabled persons, without any specific attention to their real capabilities, on the hand of the person, and to real productive needs, on the hand of the enterprise; but a targeted intervention whose main intention is a good and durable solution for both the subjects. So, the great innovation introduced by this law – and that we want to put in evidence here, in coherence with the interest of this analysis – is first of all a cultural one, whose operative implications have changed the approach to the relationship between disabled people, work and organization.

The conversion from the imposition way to the specific employment for disabled people is inspired by the philosophy "right man to right job": that means to succeed in bringing on capacities and competencies of a worker, whose situation from the health point of view is problematic. In summary, the most important innovations can be so summarized (Isfol, 2003):

- the prevision of evaluation proceedings about impairment and the analysis of the compatibility between job and disability for each situation;

- the introduction of a nominative demand; then, the formulation of a new tool, the convention, that can be used according to specific rules and in certain situations, just to favour a good relationship;

- a new territorial organization of publics services for work, where also those for targeted employment have found location.

By the law, targeted employment is described as "all those technical and support instruments that permit an appropriate evaluation of the disabled person, with regard to his labour capacity, and to employ him in the right job,

through deep analysis of the job itself, with specific supports, positive actions and interpersonal relationships on the workplace" (our translation from art. 2 and 3, law text).

The law has been positively evaluated either from the disabled point of view or from the enterprise one. About the first subject, we note that it considers his attitudes and competencies as departing point, giving less relevance to his health problems. We note a positive approach in place of a limitative one: what is he able to do? Not more: what is he unable to do?.

About the point of view of the enterprises, many elements are interesting. Also small enterprises (with 15-35 employees) are obliged to employ disabled people even if they have more time to perform this duty; the percent of the total workforce used to calculate the number of disabled persons to take in charge has been reduced. Another notable aspect concerns employment formalities: law proposes the nominative demand, but it offers other solutions[9].

The new approach opens important opportunities, but demands also significant resources to find the appropriate settlement. In the described situation, employment services play an important role, because they have to put themselves as specific connection between a potential worker and a potential employer, using all kinds of support for a match between professional skills of disabled people and professional needs of enterprises. Only this perspective assures contemporary the respect of ethics and economics principles.

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[9] In detail, these solutions are: convention consists in a specific agreement with which enterprise and employment services define personalized program, whose aim is an effective and definitive integration of the worker having at disposition support such as training and apprenticeship; territorial compensation (which offer the possibility to manage the number of disabled people with reference to all the offices) and partial exemption have been introduced to favour a positive attitude by the enterprise, in the evidence that past duty produced few results: disabled people parked and easily unsatisfied of their activity and usually unproductive for organization.

Into the just described context and in order to give PERSONE project usufull inputs, the analysis aimed at pursuing two general objectives:

• studying the characteristics of the relationship between organizations and disabled persons with particular reference to the DM strategies and methods used by enterprises with reference to: strategies developed in order to comply the mentioned law n. 68/1999 and pursuing organizational goals; selection criteria used for disabled persons; use of services for the recruitment of disabled persons or for sustaining in difficult situations during the working time; the professional opportunities given to these workers; their relationships with colleagues; the existence of training activities specifically designed for disabled workers or for their colleagues; the existence of an enterprise tutor for these workers; etc.

• analysing the problems in the relation between disabled persons and enterprises in order to identify their needs of further support services (for example, training, recruitment, transport and tutorship ones) able to make the relationship more fruitful.

3.2 The hypothesis and the methodology of the research

The research is based on eleven hypothesis considered by researchers, on the tradition of popperian approach,[10]. Anyway, in order to avoid any form of "relativism of knowledge", the research activities have been designed applying rigorous criteria allowing to get to relevant results.

The hypothesis are put together into four groups so to enlighten the different dimensions of the complex phenomenon of disability: disabled person, disabled

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[10]As known, "hypothesis are provisional statements, presented as relationships among two or more concepts that have to be verified empirically" (Popper, 1970, p. 75, our translation). So hypothesis are necessary as heuristic tolls and not as value judgements: the research activities are engaged in falsifying the beginning hypothesis to coming to relevant (till a new falsifying process) ideas about the studied phenomenon.

worker[11], enterprise and organizations offering services to disadvantaged workers and enterprises aiming at making their relation easier.

For the purposes of this paper, the hypothesises on enterprises are the most relevant ones, since they allow to discuss about DM topics and we restrict the exposition to them[12].

HP1: enterprises are usually wary of disabled persons and so the application of law 68/99 derives from the need to respect legal obligations rather than from the will to take an opportunity;

HP2: if supported and stimulated, enterprises easily evolve from an "obligation culture" to an "opportunity culture";

HP3: enterprises think that the availability of persons with tutorship roles for disabled workers is particularly relevant for the successful integration of these persons.

These hypothesis have been constructed on the basis of some theoretical assumptions and of the results of various researches on the specific topic of work integration of disabled persons.

From the theoretical point of view, we considered the relevant part of economic and managerial literature stating that enterprises do not pursue profit objective only since they are committed to the achievement of a complex mix of economic and social goals (Onida, 1960; Barnard, 1938). Anyway, in a context of growing quality-based competition, we think that the integration of disabled workers is seen by enterprises mainly as a legal obligation to respect (HP1).

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[11]As we underline in the final report, the first two groups of hypothesis have been studied together in the research development - being quite impossible to distinguish person and worker, in labour situation and to forget human dimension in labour activities, but we consider this preliminary choice necessary to emphasize human dignity and person's hopes, that we consider so important not to be put behind productive and efficiencies needs. Each of us is person and then worker and nobody can be considered worker without respect for his *status.*

[12]For each further deepening, the complete report (with its statistical and documental enclosures) is available in: http://www.equalpersone.it/prodotti/ricerca.

Moreover, in dealing with our research we assumed that the evolution from an "obligation culture" to an "opportunity culture" is possible only if enterprises are stimulated to do this not only by legal obligations and connected facilities (i.e. the tax relieves) but also by operational support in dealing with the problems connected to the selection of the right disabled worker for the open position, its daily interaction with colleagues within the enterprise, etc. (HP2 and HP3).

It's important to specify that the hypothesis on enterprises have been expressed also on the basis of some interviews with qualified witnesses, operators with specific experience in work integration of disabled persons in different kinds of organizations. During the research, indeed, 37 persons of different professional and ideological status have been involved because of their experience of work and disability in different fields: education, work integration, services to enterprises, etc..

In order to discuss the above described hypothesis, the research has been run mainly according to qualitative methodology, considered more suitable than quantitative one in analysing such a delicate and complex topic.

Thus, the enterprises have been involved in the research with semi-structured interviews with persons working in the human resource management area. The panel of enterprises is a non-probabilistic one, made up of organizations willing to give their contribution to the research. This methodological choice is considered satisfactory since, on the one hand, statistic representativeness isn't pursued by the project and, on the other, since the discussion about such a delicate topic as disabled persons integration can be effectively realised only if interviewees are committed to contribute to the research.

The interviewed enterprises are quite equally distributed in terms of: sector (industry and services), size (small and medium enterprises but also big corporations), scope of their activity (regional, national, international).

Table 1: Enterprises in the sample for number of workers
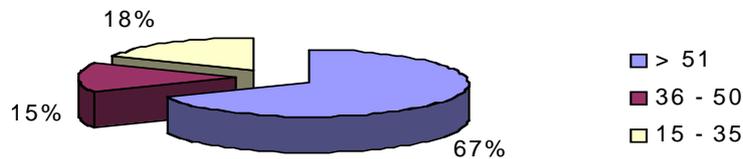
The interviews with managers were based on a scheme previously sent to the interviewees, and dealt with the following topics: the selection criteria used for disabled persons, the specific managerial instruments used to manage these workers, the eventual changes in the organizational climate caused by their presence etc. We think important to notice that the interviews were managed as semi-structured ones and so, even if all of them were based on the same scheme, the discussions and the collected information are quite heterogeneous one from another.

Finally, the interpretation of the results coming from the interviews have been done relying on the HRM theory (first of all Beer et alii, 1985, but - especially on its motivational deepenings, - Hertzberg, 1966; Maslow, 1954; Hersey and Blanchard, 1977), and with particular reference to the authors studying the DM topics (Barabino et alii, 2001; Cox and Blake, 1991; Belfrey and Schmidt, 1989;).

3.4 The experiences of integration of disabled persons

First of all, the research shows that all the enterprises of the sample respect legal obligations compelling the integration of disabled workers in their organizations and have a significant know how about the requirements of law.

Enterprises spend a lot of resources (above all non-monetaryones: time, dedicated human resources, etc.) to manage the law implication, whose compliance is probably considered a moral duty, so important in this period when corporate social responsibility plays an important role in company communication strategies.

The interviews realized with human resources managers explain that this tendency is due first of all to the fact that they are wary of disabled people since they think an effective integration process is a result hard to achieve. As a consequence, the great majority of the involved enterprises invest a great amount of resources in the selection of the "right" disabled worker. In fact, only a little part of the organizations of the sample find the persons to hire into the list got ready by the Province offices – considered nowadays "exhausted" by many of the interviewees[13] – and so have to find different and more time-consuming channels. In some cases,organizations can rely on self-candidature of disabled people who sent their curriculum vitae or participated in public selections. On the contrary, many small and medium enterprises need to use the services of selection agencies, education organizations or personal contacts of the entrepreneur or other workers.

This evidence can be interpreted in two contrasting ways. From the one hand, we can focus the attention on the pretended "promotion culture" of the organizations spending their resources to find the disabled person whose integration path in the enterprise can be fruitful (obviously for both the worker and the organization itself). In this perspective, the managers decide to invest in the selection process in order to hire a particular disabled.

From the other hand, we can notice that the attention in the selection process very often leads organizations to hire "strong" disabled persons whose disability, although really existent and certified by law, is quite not relevant for

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[13]The great majority of managers involved in the project explained that nowadays (after some years from the promulgation of the law 68/99) the list is made up of "difficult" disabled persons, whose clinical and/or personal situation makes an effective work integration process hard to realize.

the enterprise (persons who suffered transplants, others using wheelchairs, etc.). This is not in violation of law but it is a partial interpretation of it, since these "strong" disabled people probably are not the weak workers the law wants to support in the labour market.

The research shows that enterprises invest their resources also in finding out the way to exploit all the opportunities offered by law 68/99 to avoid the obligation to integrate disabled persons[14] (or, more often, to limit the number of disadvantaged workers they have to hire) or to postpone it, for example using the so called "conventions".

In this second case, in our opinion two are the possible interpretations. In some cases, the spirit of the law is respected by the enterprises which choose the "conventions" as an instrument to "create candidatures" that is to carefully prepare the integration (with the support of Province services) transferring to the disabled person they selected some abilities and competences (both professional and relational ones) necessary for a successful integration in the organization and/or creating in the enterprise a suitable role for this worker. In other cases, on the contrary, the "conventions" are seen by the enterprises only as a mean to avoid the problem of the integration, delaying it to the future without the definition of a project on the person and/or on the organization.

The interviews show that the resources invested by enterprise in the two mentioned areas (selection process and conventions) give important results: the majority of organizations of the sample have little problems with disabled workers since they can realize the tasks assigned, they often have good relations with colleagues and they have no negative influence on organizational climate. Anyway, we cannot avoid remarking these results are less optimistic if we consider that the positive integration experiences are mainly the ones involving workers whose disability is "compatible".

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[14]This is possible, for example, in case of enterprises carrying out dangerous activities or acting in dangerous environments (i.e. chemical or building sectors) or for public organizations recently transformed in private ones, etc.

In conclusion, we can confirm some but not all the proposed.hypothesis The first seems to well represent the state of the art since the research clearly shows that investment made by enterprises for the integration of disabled people does not come from the idea that disabled workers have a special value for organizations, but simply from the will to respect law.

Even if legally driven, the investment in work integration in many cases leads enterprises to a careful DM aiming at transforming the obligation into an opportunity to hire a valid worker benefiting, in the same time, of tax relieves. As suggested by our second hypothesis, specific support is needed in order to do this. Province offices' new role is considered satisfactory by many enterprises of our sample appreciating above all their attempt to create a trust relationship with enterprises through considering their specific situations and needs. Anyway, enterprises need more support from public institution above all in dealing with the process of selection of the "right" disabled worker.

On the contrary, the sustain in managing the process of integration after the selection of the worker (i.e. tutorship) is not equally demanded by enterprises which prefer – as already pointed out – to invest in the selection of the disabled persons whose characteristics are so suitable for the organization and their role to make tutorship quite un-useful. Our third hypothesis is thus not coherent with the reality we analysed.

4.   Conclusive considerations: Diversity Management as a new approach for Human Resource Management

Now it seems important to succeed in organizing some considerations about recent evolution in disability-based DM. Moreover, the evolving practices in HRM shows an increasing attention for a wide-ranging workforce, whose appreciation builds competitive advantages.

Undoubtedly, we observe increasing DM practices; but the analysed enterprises seem to pursue the objective of reducing the diversity to manage, rather than experimenting processes of DM first as cultural change and then as specific tools to use in the process of HRM.

The new law has deeply changed the system of working inclusion of disabled people (duty which before enterprises succeeded in escaping and that now they accept fairly using their energy to manage better the engagement[15]): so, the enterprises of our sample are more and more conscious not only of the need to respect law but also that an "evident" diversity (in terms of capacities and not only in physical terms) cannot be unmanaged. As a consequence, they can choose between two different paths: as Galbraith (1974) explained with reference to uncertainty, the alternatives are to accept and manage diversity or to avoid it thus reducing the DM needs. On the one hand, enterprises can integrate "strong" disabled persons - characterized by being "diverse" – and invest in finding effective DM tools in order to manage their diversity and realize a fruitful experience for both the enterprise and the workers. On the other hand, enterprise can decide to avoid investment in DM by reducing at the minimum the diversity in their workforce, for example selecting "weak" disabled persons whose disability is not influential for the organization.

The results coming from the interviews showed that second path is preferred: we found that enterprises currently have developed DM strategies and methods mainly based on the selection of the "right" disabled person to employ, "right" according to their idea of minimizing impact problems and offering the same level of productivity of the other employees. The implication is that most of disabled persons working in enterprises have equal opportunities as other colleagues, but it doesn't often depend on a specific organizational investment in developing their potential; on the contrary it is due to the careful selection

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[15]Some interviewed managers declared their personal favour toward a law whose aim is to promote and guarantee work right for disabled people.

process leading enterprises to employ persons whose disability is, for its nature and evident characteristics, not relevant for the position they have to cover[16].

The conclusion we can draw out is that enterprise wants to consider a disabled worker not as a diverse worker (just he really is), but as a person with whom it creates a contribution-incentive balance, according the barnardian[17] approach and in total similarity to the relationship with each other worker. Dominant culture in interviewed enterprises considers "not satisfying" a relation with disable person, based on less contribution in front of less incentive. The investment that organization does in disable worker is, consequently, heavier only during the selection phase, which becomes the most important one, as we before wrote. From the organizational point of view, this situation can be explained according to the transition cost analysis (Williamson, 1975): indeed, these costs are considered weighty and excessive as regard the purpose.

This last aspect puts in evidence the important role that can be played by specific services suppliers[18], mainly concentrated in the preparatory phase of the meeting, where it's possible to create conditions of best coherence between organizational expectations and personal ones; but the services demand can grow if enterprises develop their specific attention and begin in using more and more supports, cultivating inside an inclusive and evaluative culture.

In conclusion, if we assume that DM means a voluntary effort in evaluating diversity, as we indicated in the second paragraph, we are inclined to think that it isn't nowadays a real commitment and an effective practice in the enterprises of the sample of our research. So, there is still a lot of work to do in this direction.

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[16]For example, we found very few psychical disabled persons in organizations belonging to our sample: it's easy to think that the difficulties connected with the relationships with this kind of problems dishearten. We have also to remark that often enterprises aren't ready to accept external professional support, that could favour comprehension and solve inconveniences.

[17]As known, Barnard (1938) defines organization as a cooperative system founded on balance between contributions given by each worker and incentives he receives (both material and not material). According to this approach, the balance point has to be constructed on the two sides, on the basis of the evaluation that each subject does of his specific convenience.

[18]It's opportune to remember that the aim of PERSONE project was exactly focused on the services topic and to their characteristics, just to favour opportune DM attitudes.

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