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## **WHAT IS THE FATE OF TRADE UNIONS IN ITALY? RESULTS OF A TRAINING COURSE ADDRESSED TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**Gaetano Bruno Ronsivalle**

*Fellow Professor, University of Verona, Verona, Italy*

[gaetanobruno.ronsivalle@univr.it](mailto:gaetanobruno.ronsivalle@univr.it)

**Arianna Boldi**

*Research Psychologist, Wemole Srl, Rome, Italy*

[arianna.boldi@wemole.com](mailto:arianna.boldi@wemole.com)

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### **Abstract**

*With the rising of technology, occupations will have to face growth, reduction or redesign: therefore, changes in organizations, human capital and processes involving people will occur. We focus on the main Trade Union operating in Italy. At first, we present an analysis of this organization. Then, we describe a training course addressed to a sample of Trade Union Executive Board. Finally, we provide suggestions about some possible development scenarios. As a result, we may underline three critical issues: a) People minimize the potential effects of automation on jobs and on their own career and they are not prepared to this change; 2) The organization is losing its bargaining power and risks to disappear, leaving a gap in the intermediary function between the employer and the employees; 3) The Executive Board fails in making forecasts and strategic planning, to effectively negotiate with the employer. The main output of the course is a Project Work which contains a description of a strategic intervention which could be implemented in the organization to effectively deal with the future changes.*

## **Keywords**

Trade Unions, Artificial Intelligence, Work, Training Course, Innovation

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## **1. Introduction**

In the last twenty years, the world has experienced a profound transformation, with specific consequences in on the labor market: decentralization, new professionalism, change of work-related times and forms of dependence, inter-functionality of roles and responsibility. Both the workers and the trade unions, which are responsible for workers' protection, are affected by these changes, in several ways.

Several authors have contributed to outline the main drivers of transformation of our era. We consider useful to synthesize some of them, because they are particularly critical for regarding the type of organization we have considered, the Union.

On the one hand, the reduction of space-time barriers, assisted by information and communication Technologies (ICT), redefines the role of space and time in tying the links between people: time compression follows space compression. This process generates a single global society supported by a this network in which information exchanges are intensified and intertwined. The systems that emerge from this dense network of exchanges and interdependences are increasingly complex (McLuhan & Powers, 1989) and they concern each level: cultural, social and economic. The network is, in fact, a real tool for organizational and managerial renewal (Valdani, 2000) because the economic processes are increasingly dependent on data, information and knowledge.

In order to adapt to the new market needs, organizations should go toward a re-engineering process (Davenport & Prusak, 2000), focusing on lighter and reticular structures, which leverage on computer technology. From mechanical systems, where the emphasis is placed on authority, hierarchy, formalization and fragmentation of tasks, organizations are encouraged to become more dynamic or flexible. This implies a lesser specialization of the tasks, a greater orientation to the objectives and to the results, the redefinition of the professional roles and the enhancement of the horizontal relationships (Burns and Stalker, 1969; Stewart, 2001). Relations of cooperation, between persons who enjoy increasing operational autonomy, should in fact promote the dissemination of knowledge, on which the new economies are based (Rullani, 2004).

In this new world, new skills, both for people and for organizations, become important. The ability to grasp, select, process information and to make decisions is a form of organizational intelligence and it allows the system to quickly learn and to adapt to changes. Time is a critical factor in business management: in a flexible organization, the gap between the moment when the need for change is felt and when is needed to adapt to it, must be minimized. (Schumpeter, 1950). Speed, as a driver of change, requires organizations to care the quality and the structure of their communication networks, both internal (i.e. among the different sub-systems, ICT and other professionals) and external (i.e. between the system and the market).

Social and psychological changes occur too, as the meaning concerning works are changing too: from a homogeneous job market to one in which the diversification of tasks and professionalism is high. Employment relationships become more and more subjective and workers are increasingly isolated. There is no more possibility of growth and development in a stable context, neither a constant motivation to a specific orientation or coherence in the career path. In a liquid labor market, where long-term planning is impossible, the worker cannot experience anymore that sense of security and containment that comes from belonging to a single working reality for a lifetime (Argentero & Cortese, 2016)

It is important to note that these organizational transformations concern not only the private enterprises, but also non-profit organizations and, of course, trade union organizations. The union, as intermediary between work and person, should be the subject that manages to understand these changes and to interpret them, to continue exercising his main mission, the protection of workers. The first change consists, or should consist, in the transformation of its organizational structure. Let's consider the task and the role that the union has always held: to organize the workers, but above all to inform them. Therefore, unions should renew the communication networks among its internal members and with subjects outside the organization.

Another important drive of change concerns technology, innovation, artificial intelligence and digitalization: these terms are often used in an ambiguous manner or in an interchangeable way. Through the widest lens, we define “innovation” as the process, guided or unguided, by which complex systems generate new phenomena that have a feedback effect on the complexity of that system. The driver of innovation may be a new “technology”, considered as the application of knowledge for practical purposes, which may overcome some limits and constraints of human being: a pair of glasses, a walking stick or a pen are an example of technology. It is commonplace to equate innovation with high-technology sectors. Yet the

agriculture and food sector - traditionally considered low-technology - is an important source of technological change, innovation, and development (World Bank, 2018).

Moreover, not all technologies are “digital” as this refers to the mathematical way the information contained in that specific tool is recorded, stored or represented. And what about the impact of Artificial Intelligence? According to Yudkowsky (2008), when we talk about “AI” we are really talking about minds-in-general, or optimization processes in general. Artificial Intelligence refers to an Automatic Information Processing system, such as hardware or software, able to support human intelligence, under complex environmental conditions. Therefore, before talking about the impact of AI on the job sector, we should at least define the specific domain.

Each of these elements has a role in the organizational transformation which, after all, can resist certain forms of change. However, innovations are not intrinsically "positive" or "negative" as an emerging phenomenon. On the other hand, as our universe has positive entropy, there is no possibility of "going back": organizations are forced to consider the changes, to recognize them and to act accordingly.

Considering this context, two questions guide our research: in this new world, how do union organizations carry out their mission? What resources or tools should union organizations have to achieve their goals?

The aim of the paper is to present the results of a training course aimed at executives of a union organization present on the territory at a national level. The objective of this training course is the strategic planning (of the union organization). The paper describes the design process, regarding the phase of analysis and micro design, and it presents the results obtained. These results allow to enrich the analysis and to answer the specific questions of the research: *“How much are the leaders of the trade unions aware of the change in progress? What strategies have they implemented to respond to environmental stress?”*

The collection of the material produced during the training allowed us to gather new information to make a more thorough analysis of the context and to suggest strategies of actions and possible scenarios for the future development.

## **2. Method**

The central element of the paper is the training experience addressed to the executives of the agricultural sector of the major trade union association in Italy. The course is the result of a literature analysis integrated with real experiences in which the authors were involved, in the

guise of consultants in the main union associations. The course has been built within the instructional design methodological framework, according to the guidelines contained in Ronsivalle, Carta & Metus (2009).

In this section we focus on the description of the preliminary phase: the analysis concerning the demand's analysis and the organizational context, with the aim to place our intervention within a well-defined frame. The goal is to outline the challenges that the organization faces, consistently with the purpose of this paper – to outline a series of suggestions for trade unions' executives. By following the instructional design method, every consideration we made in the next paragraph is coherent with the introductory comments and the contents of the project: therefore, this reading is preparatory to understand the choices we made at every stage of the design, which can be found in the result section.

Another important aspect is our theoretical approach, the core of our methodology. When approaching an issue concerning a complex system we should be aware that the problem is intrinsic, it is part of the system: the roots of the cause should be found in the functioning of the system, which includes the interconnections with the context it belongs to (Meadow, 2008).

Consequently, in our analysis we focus not only on the “external” problems, but also on the way that system, the trade union, react to them. Therefore, we collected sources that both analyze the elements composing the organization, underlying the main issues concerning its functioning, and give a wider picture of the external events named in the introduction of this paper: artificial intelligence, digitalization, financial crisis, social issues, which are affecting the market labor and, consequently, the trade unions.

## **2.1 Demand's analysis**

As consultants and trainers, we have been contacted by the organization responsible for the training activities of the Union, to develop a training course in two days to “*face the critical issues in playing the manager role and to develop personal and group resources or coping strategies*”. The contents of the course should have concerned with a series of core competencies as the ability to manage meetings, problem-solving and decision making, time and stress management.

First, we gathered all the documentation related to the training application, analyzing the drafts made by the planners of the institution. We identified the key words that made up the parts of the general training objectives and the contents. Subsequently, we evaluated the viability of the objectives, as formulated, in relation to the resources and the constraints of the intervention.

After these first evaluations, we conducted two interviews with the clients, to go deeper into the real need for training. Finally, we proposed a change in the training objectives and in the contents, having collected further material from the literature, which is presented in the next paragraphs.

## **2.2 Target**

The intervention was conducted on an agricultural trade union, counting hundreds of members in 2011. It counts more than a hundred territorial offices, 21 regional offices and a national headquarter. We counted 30 participants for each edition of the course, with a male majority, for a total of 90 participants, aged between 40 and 60, coming from different parts of Italy (north, center and south).

## **2.3 Organizational structure**

The trade unions in Italy are rather complex and differentiated organisms: the complexity is given by the fact of being composed by many sub-structures, which enjoy a certain economic and political-organizational autonomy (Della Rocca, 1998). This organization, reticular and decentralized, is composed - like the others – by a myriad of decision-making centers with the capacity to choose autonomously. For this reason, it is difficult to implement innovative systems, of any kind, in a homogeneous way.

This phenomenon of non-homogeneity is also due to the geographic location and to the size of the structures spread throughout the country. In fact, small offices or work rooms located in peripheral areas are hardly reached and updated. The agricultural sector, more than others, is affected by the fragmentation of the organizational sub-structures: the decision-making autonomy at provincial level is aimed at maintaining a strong adhesion with the territory that is variegated and that needs, on the one hand, ad hoc regulation. This fragmentation concerns every level of negotiation, starting from the way the professional profiles are described and regulated by national and provincial collective agreements in Italy.

## **2.4 Organizational challenges**

What about the major issues and problems trade unions must face today? To sum up, there is an intrinsic fragility due to the complexity of the organizational structure, that it is no more adequate to understand the world and to make valuable decisions. The level of the competencies of the professionals working in the trade union is lowering and they are losing adhesion and bargain power: the organization is facing an internal crisis and it suffers a strong

absence of the workers, especially young people, as we will explain the next section of this paper.

From Istat data (“Provincia di Torino”, 2013) a “bleak” picture emerges: only 1,3% of the population in Italy has carried out, at least once a year in the last 12 months, a free activity for a trade union. The social participation is scarce or at the least static. We should also consider, however, the transformation of the social and economic asset, which has changed after the financial crisis, the advent of automation and digitalization, accelerated by the application of artificial intelligence tools (Arntz, Gregor & Zierahn, 2016).

#### **2.4.1 Membership**

The effects on the Union are disruptive in terms of representativeness and unionization rate. The spread of excessive flexible employment relationships creates precarious conditions where the risk of psychological blackmail towards workers is high: this phenomenon does not favor the membership. Moreover, the ideological adhesion to the Union has certainly diminished.

Therefore, one of the elements of suffering of the Union lies in the so-called "crisis of representation", that is the increasing inability to be recognized as an interpreter, a spokesman and a problem-solver in relation to workers' problems and interests.

#### **2.4.2 Social context**

With the advent of the so-called post-industrial society within a globalized world, the securities on which the union had been modelled collapsed. Consequently, the backbones of its organization became uncertain and contradictory. The last two decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the year 2000 marked a strong discontinuity with the past in the political, economic and social reality.

The Union was born, in the west, in a historical period characterized by a series of epochal changes: the evolution of law in terms of rights and social services is related to the transformations of the social, economic and political structure of the countries. Currently, the world is facing with epochal changes again or, we can say, a change of an epoch (Sassen, 2010). The current technological innovations, the market expansion and the progressive disappearance of the middle class do not fit the welfare model. In Italy, the crisis of the Welfare state is more than ever connected to the work issues: both because, in a conservative-corporate welfare state model, the citizen's rights and protections depend on the profession practiced, and in recent years the basic conditions of organized work have been transformed.

The labor market is increasingly fragmented: the variety of the employment contracts has risen after various reforms in the last decade. The national bargaining is in crisis because of the employers' attitude, so that the second level bargaining prevails in the companies. The spread of precariousness and the relative absence of a series of protections for many workers mean that bargaining often takes place on an individual level. A "singular protection" appears necessary, that it is addressed to all the workers who have lost the collective dimension of the work. Moreover, in the last twenty years an increasingly individualistic society has developed, and the sense of belonging to the collectivity has broken down.

### **2.4.3 Political context**

Trade unions were born and raised within a precise political, and sometimes party, environment: the strategy of proselytism, which is necessary to ensure the survival of the system, was mostly based on this ideological affiliation. However, in the general crisis of the representation, which strikes the political parties, even the trade unions suffer from a certain mistrust and disaffection which backfire on the economic ability of the union to support itself.

Politics is a crucial key to understanding the current situation of the unions. Firstly, the quality of the policy is one of the conditions for innovation, i.e. it creates, together with others, a suitable environment for its emergence. While innovation is an emerging consequence of a complex system in motion, the story is full of examples in which innovation has been driven and planned. Attempts to understand the phenomenon led to highlight the role of political stability. This stability poses the basis for the creation of long-term plans and strategies, as well as the ability to make targeted investments.

If we look at Italy, the political environment is declined in two indicators: the "Political stability" and the "effectiveness of the Government" (Cornell University, INSEAD & WIPO, 2017). The first indicator is an index that measures the perceptions regarding the likelihood of the political instability and/or the politically motivated violence, including terrorism. The second one is an index that reflects the perceptions concerning the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the commitment of the government to such policies (World Bank, 2018). Data, updated to 2015, correspond to a value of 72.2 points (for a range from 0 to 100) and 53.8 points, placing Italy at the 46<sup>o</sup> place in the world ranking.



#### **2.4.4 Technological context**

Another way to analyze this scenario is trying to understand if and how the advent of the AI has changed the global market, in which the trade unions operate.

Firstly, we must point out that when we face such a complicated and pioneering issue as AI, a series of biases in reasoning occur. They are particularly insidious because they affect every step of our reasoning process: for example, we tend to give “motivation” and “intentionality” to AI, we’re being led to believe that a robot designed with AI could willfully behave in a harmful way. We assume that it has desires, emotions and purposes like human beings and we draw easy conclusions, accordingly.

The old “machinery question” (Ricardo, 1821): the same worries, occurred during the industrial revolution, come back today, as the fear that the machines would influence the interests of the different classes of society, oversetting a whole multitude of workmen. We should also consider the "odd paradox" that concerns AI: as some of the technologies developed in the discipline of AI are brought into the common fold, people become accustomed to this technology and they stop considering it as “AI”. As a consequence, a newer technology emerges. AI is not simply coming, but it is already influencing our everyday life. In these cases, the “antidote” is to know and to be aware of the traps we could fall in.

According to the perspective on the topic, the estimated share of “jobs at risk” must not be equated with employment losses from technological advances, for three reasons:

- The utilization of new technologies is a slow process, so that technological substitution often does not take place as expected.
- Even if new technologies are introduced, workers can adjust to changing technological endowments by switching tasks, thus preventing technological unemployment.
- Technological change also generates additional jobs.

Automation and digitalization are unlikely to destroy large numbers of jobs. However, low qualified workers are likely to suffer as the automation of their jobs is higher compared to highly qualified workers. In Italy, the 10% of the people are at high risk, that means their automation is higher than 70% (Standage, 2016). The authors talk about “people” and not “jobs” because, according to their analysis, a certain task can be automated or not – and not a full occupation or role.

### **2.4.5 The role of Artificial Intelligence**

In what way will the AI have an impact on the world? What kind of changes will occur? According to Standage (2016), not every job will be completely replaced. The changes in the employment will happen gradually. Large organizations will disappear, as AI could take over many functions that are now scaled only by adding human labor, both horizontally (by adding more and more professionals) and vertically (by empowering the competences of single professionals).

Some jobs will be replaced while new jobs will be created – and new skills will be required to the workers. Focusing on the latest consideration, the middle-skilled will be affected by digital technologies more than lower-skilled and higher-skilled works. It is important to notice that these changes will require a political, and not only an economic, response concerning what kind of social safety we should put in place to protect people from large, structural shifts in the economy.

In which domains, different sectors of the economy and the society, does AI have a major impact? Again, according to Standage (2016), we can outline some main areas: 1) transportation; 2) home/service robotics; 3) healthcare; 4) education; 5) public safety and security; 6) entertainment. These main areas are important to understand how the labor market will change in the next years. For an organization which is accountable for protecting the job and the workers, it is important to reflect on the areas where AI impacts, to be able to ask the right questions and to be prepared to the future.

Does it have sense to ask whether AI is good or bad for humanity? In fact, according to several authors AI is not bad or good (Yudkowsky, 2008; Smit, Wallach & Lasker, 2005; Bostrom, 2009). It is not naturally “friendly”. It is like nature or evolution: it is indifferent. AI may find solutions to our problems, but we don’t know how it would do it, we don’t know the output. If we want AI to be useful and friendly to humanity, we should, in the first place, build a friendly AI, to be sure that the decisions taken would be good for us.

In summary, we should not ask ourselves whether the AI is good or bad, but we should firstly identify the problems affecting organizations and the labor market today. After that, we should formulate the interventions to counteract these problems in a clear, simple and operative way: this depends on a definition of the objectives and the results that we want to achieve. Thirdly, to clarify the ethical principles that guide the creation of an instrument that supports these interventions, by rigorously design the initial conditions, the methodology and the results.

AI could be the response to some of the greatest problems that humanity is facing today, including unemployment and poverty, but also the loss of social ties. Therefore, AI must be integrated with the human intelligence in a conscious manner, in such a way that it is configured as a real tool among those available for humans, necessary to pursue their own objectives.

## **2.5 Limitations and constraints of the intervention**

Training has never taken on a political prominence, because it has not so far formed a significant criterion for the selection and for the paths of growth. The recruitment of the executives is substantially based on three criteria: 1. representativeness in the workplace, 2. political/party affiliation, 3. co-opting by the old Executive Board.

The limited political visibility of the training is a consequence of its organizational and structural weakness: the former does not give consistency to training (resources, endowments, political evidence, strategic importance) and the latter does not affect the growth pathways at all, leading to a culture in the Organization where training is considered unimportant.

As a result, there is little willingness to participate or courses are approached as union meetings and debates. Today a "political animal" is not enough to be a good union leader, just as the traditional "tool briefcase" is no longer adequate to meet the challenges led by the times. In the next section, we will see our proposal in terms of critical competences for trade unions' leaders.

## **3. Results**

In this section we describe both the course design and the results we have collected. We only illustrate the phases (and the sub-phases) that are more meaningful or interesting for the topic, the macro-design and the micro-design phase.

### **3.1 Macro-design**

In this section, the following elements of the macro-design phase are described: a) content analysis and conceptual map, b) the tree of didactic objectives, c) the flow chart.

#### **3.1.1 Content Analysis: Conceptual Maps**

We organized and ordered the system of knowledge concerning the course. Later, a formal description of the results of the content analysis was proceeded through the elaboration of a general conceptual map and a series of detailed maps. These maps are aligned and coherent with the structure of the indicators and with the sub-objectives of the tree of didactic objectives: each objective is linked to a detailed conceptual map.

### **3.1.2 Tree of didactic objectives: observable indicators**

Then, we proceeded with the description of the structure of indicators, to identify the observable behaviors corresponding to the various conceptual nuclei of the map: the result is the tree of didactic objectives, a logical-functional representation of the various indicators. Simultaneously, we attributed the complexity levels and the semantic density to the indicators, by following the Anderson and Krathwohl's Taxonomy (2001).

This activity played a crucial role in determining the learning periods and in structuring the working days. The output is represented by an integration of the tree of didactic objectives. Figure 1 represents the tree of didactic objectives.

### **3.1.3 Flow Chart**

The flow chart defines the path architecture. It includes a) a detailed and sequential representation of the logical structure of the training course, b) the declination of the individual modules in various didactic units, c) the temporal scanning of the various formative moments and d) the formal description of the various didactic strategies adopted to achieve the objectives of the tree. Figure 2 represents the flow chart: it includes the description of the contents, the objectives related to each topic, the evaluation moments and a brief description of the activities.

## **3.2 Micro-design**

Micro-design consists in translating general macro-design guidelines into a series of storyboard documents. In our case, we will submit the documents concerning the activities of the classroom, the description of the exercises.

### **3.2.1 The leader role in the organization: group work**

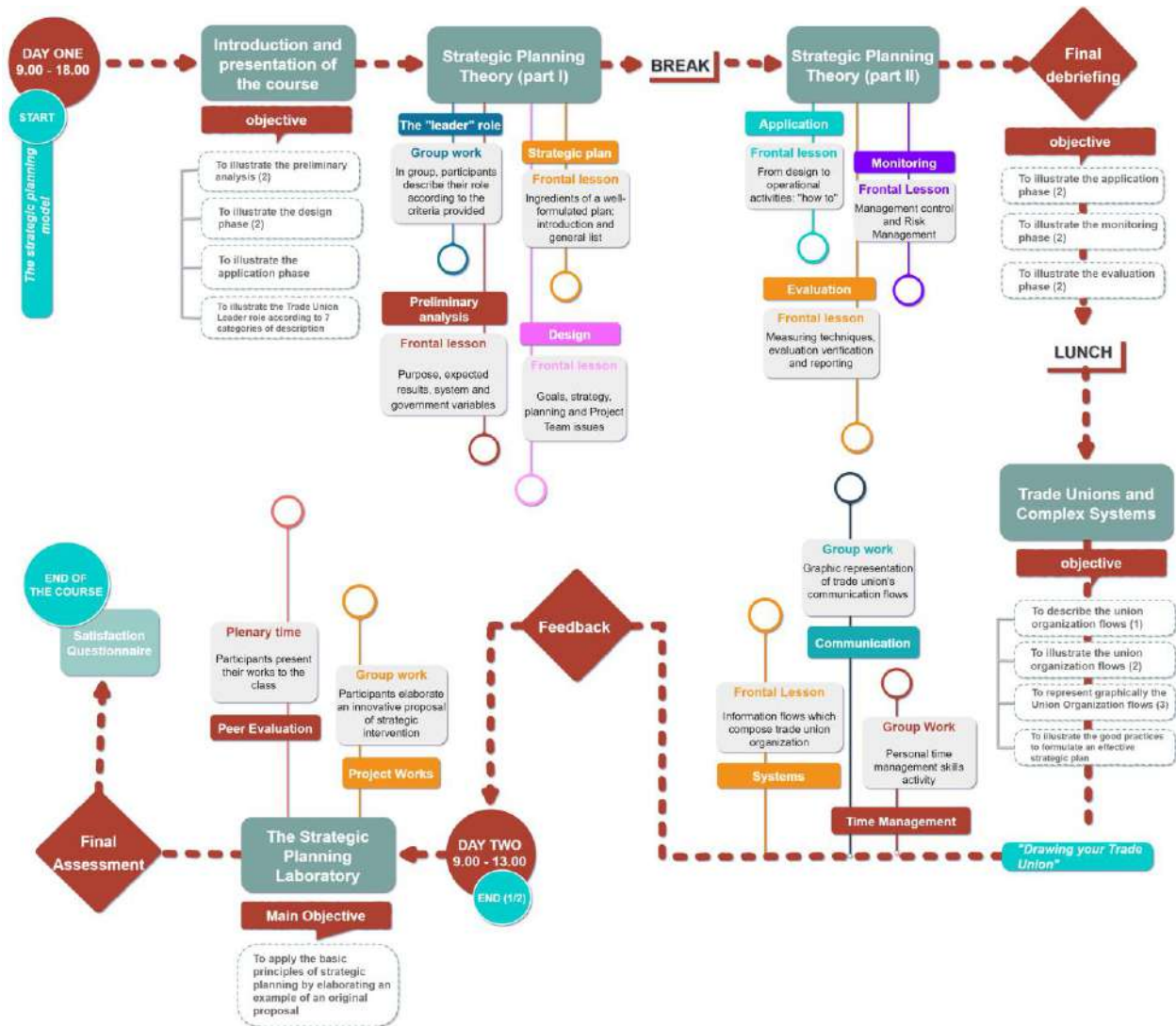
- Objective: To describe the role of the Union and the union leader, through a series of categories: a) purposes, b) activities, c) stakeholders, d) responsibilities, d) resources, f) tools and g) constraints. This activity is a first step towards an analysis of the communication flows of the organization.
- Description: Participants are divided into groups of 4/5 people to discuss how they perceive their role and the Union mission. Then, they choose one or more words that describe the categories proposed and write them down on several sticky notes. Sticky notes are attached to the wall and participants can read the words produced by their companions. Then the sticky notes are collected by the teacher. The teacher read the words, normalizes them and uses a software that creates tag-clouds to elaborate them: for

each category an image and a series of more frequent and meaningful words is offered. The tag-clouds images are projected and discussed in plenary with the participants.

**Table 1: The tree of didactic objectives and their levels of complexity**

Tree of didactic objectives		
ID	Description	Complexity (1-6)
<b>Main Goal</b>	<i>At the end of the intervention, participants will be able to develop a proposal for the Union strategic planning based on the design method and on a common description of the Trade Union organization and on the leaders' role.</i>	<b>3</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>To describe and to apply through an example the fundamental principles of strategic planning on Trade Union's context</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1a</b>	<b>To describe why the strategic planning is important for trade unions to deal with their challenges</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1a.1</b>	To define the concept of strategic planning	<b>2</b>
<b>1a.2</b>	To describe the main challenges for trade unions	<b>2</b>
<b>1b</b>	<b>To illustrate the 5 main phases of a strategic plan</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.1</b>	<b>To illustrate the preliminary phase</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.1.1</b>	To describe the objectives of the preliminary phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.1.2</b>	To describe the tools of the preliminary phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.1.3</b>	To describe the outputs of the preliminary analysis	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.2</b>	<b>To illustrate the design phase</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.2.1</b>	To describe the objectives of the design phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.2.2</b>	To describe the main outputs of the design phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.3</b>	<b>To illustrate the application phase</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.3.1</b>	To describe the objectives of the application phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.3.2</b>	To describe the outputs of the application phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.4</b>	<b>To illustrate the monitoring phase</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.4.1</b>	To describe the objectives of the monitoring phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.4.2</b>	To describe the outputs of the monitoring phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.5</b>	<b>To illustrate the evaluation phase</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.5.1</b>	To describe the objectives of the evaluation phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1b.5.2</b>	To describe the outputs of the evaluation phase	<b>2</b>
<b>1c</b>	<b>To illustrate the good practices to formulate an effective strategic plan</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1d</b>	<b>To apply, through an example, the guidelines of strategic planning on a real case in the trade union's organizational context</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1d.1</b>	To describe the real cases proposed for the exercise: title, objective, resources and time	<b>2</b>
<b>1d.2</b>	To describe the expected results of the exercise	<b>2</b>
<b>1d.3</b>	To describe the working methods: group division, time and resources	<b>2</b>
<b>1d.4</b>	To describe the evaluation methods: criteria and scoring	<b>2</b>
<b>1d.5</b>	To apply the principles of strategic planning on a real case to propose an example of strategic planning	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>To give a graphical representation of the Union organization</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2a</b>	<b>To illustrate the Trade Union Leader role according to 7 categories of description</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2a.1</b>	To list the category to describe a trade union organization	<b>1</b>
<b>2a.2</b>	To describe the "finality" category	<b>2</b>
<b>2a.3</b>	To describe the "activity" category	<b>2</b>
<b>2a.4</b>	To describe the "resources" category	<b>2</b>
<b>2a.5</b>	To describe the "responsibilities" category	<b>2</b>
<b>2a.6</b>	To describe the "tools" category	<b>2</b>
<b>2a.7</b>	To describe the "stakeholder" category	<b>2</b>
<b>2a.8</b>	To describe the "constraints" category	<b>2</b>
<b>2b</b>	<b>To graphically represent an example of the information flows between the Trade Union and its stakeholders</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2b.1</b>	To describe the information flows in a organization	<b>2</b>
<b>2b.1.1</b>	To define the concept of "information flows"	<b>1</b>
<b>2b.1.2</b>	To describe the typology of information flows	<b>2</b>
<b>2b.2</b>	To describe the Trade Union's stakeholders	<b>2</b>
<b>2b.2.1</b>	To list the Trade Union's internal stakeholders	<b>1</b>
<b>2b.2.2</b>	To describe the objectives of the Trade Union's internal stakeholders	<b>2</b>
<b>2b.2.3</b>	To list the Trade Union's external stakeholders	<b>1</b>
<b>2b.2.4</b>	To describe the objectives of the Trade Union's external stakeholders	<b>2</b>
<b>2b.3</b>	To describe the relationships among the Trade Union's stakeholders	<b>2</b>
<b>2b.4</b>	To describe the information flows among the Trade Union's stakeholders	<b>2</b>
<b>2b.5</b>	To represent through a graphic example, by following a given legend, the information flows between Trade Union and its stakeholders	<b>3</b>

Source: Elaborated by the authors during the macro-design phase



**Figure 1:** The flow chart of the course, the contents, the objectives, the activities

Source: Elaborated by the authors during the micro-design phase

- Resources: sticky notes, pens, sheets, n. 1 open-source tag cloud software creator, n. 1 projector.
- Time: 30' for exercise, 70' for plenary discussion.
- Results: participants perceive the organization and their role in a very uneven and variegated way. Some people focused more on operational activities (negotiation, bargaining, proselytism, etc.), while others paid much attention for the purposes of the union (representation, search for the "common good" and so on.) or focused on the internal dynamics of the organization (statutory constraints, conflict management). Almost all of them tried to decline their descriptions according to the Statute, with very

different outcomes. To sum up, the activity revealed the great fragmentation of the leaders in using the keywords of the organization they belong to. This fact may depend on the absence of a shared vocabulary to describe, and to diffuse, the main ideas of the organization. At the end of the exercise, the participants realized their poor attention towards a common linguistic framework and considered to improve their sensitivity to this issue, as communication has always been considered a critical competence in trade unions.

### **3.2.2 Communication flows: group work**

- Objective: to represent the communication flows that describe the organization, both internal and external.
- Description: participants are divided into groups of 4/5 people to discuss how they perceive the organization of the Union and its relationship with the stakeholders. Then, they choose a metaphor to describe the organization and its communication flows. They have a legend to refer to when drawing. These posters are then attached to the wall, so everyone could see them. During the plenary discussion, a representative of the group presents the work done. The teacher uses the material produced to make final consideration and observations, with a training value.
- Time: 60' for exercise, 30' for presentation and 60' for plenary discussion.
- Resources: A1 sheets, pens, markers, instructions for drawing.
- Results: The outputs of the various groups showed significant divergences in the way of representing the communication flows within the Union. These differences are related to: a) the description of the logical structure of the flows (hierarchical, radial, reticular, open), b) the identification of the stakeholders (workers, confederal Union, institutions, other trade unions, companies, etc.); c) their role in the process (decision-makers, hostile interlocutors, interlocutors acting as senders and recipient, in a more or less proactive way and so on), d) the definition of the way the actors interact and the tools they use (social channels, e-mail, mobile, etc.). In general, the posters realized by different groups demonstrate that there is no a shared representation of the information flows, that are the way the organization acquire data, process information, share this information and support the decision-making process effectively. In short, many representations of the same organization, many logics of power, many ways to interpret the role of the Union in managing the relationships with the stakeholders, emerged from this exercise.

### 3.2.3 Final assessment: Project Work

- Objective: to elaborate a strategic plan proposal choosing one of the topic proposed. The topics are: 1. “Digital agenda and automation processes in agricultural enterprises”; 2. “To promote the union organization, inside and outside the agricultural sector”; 3. “Promoting compliance, security and law-abiding culture in the agricultural sector”; 4. “Mapping and certification of competences to support the bargaining activities”; 5. “Union executives’ selection, training and development”.
- Description: participants are divided into groups of 4/5 people and they elaborate their proposal. An Evaluation Commission, composed by some participants (a member for each group), is chosen, to evaluate the projects, according to a grid. Then, the group choose a spokesman to present its proposal, evaluated at the end by the teacher. Then, a final discussion follows.
- Time: 60’ for exercise, 60’ for presentation and 30’ for plenary final discussion.
- Resources: sheets, pens, presentation slides containing the rules and the instructions for presenting an effective strategic plan.
- Results: the contents and the quality of the proposals made by the different groups show that the participants have acquired all the fundamental concepts and the operational categories, as planned in the course. We present the results by following the grid we shared with the participants: 1) the proposals have been formulated in accordance with the *format* and the *method* suggested by the teachers; 2) the *phases* and the *activities* of the strategic plan were declined as shared during the lessons; 3) the *terminology* adopted by the various groups in describing objectives, expected results, activities and monitoring tools showed a higher level of awareness of the importance of language and a good evolution in terms of sharing the reference language frame; 4) the quality *operational scanning* of tasks, times and resources was adequate, showing their improved ability in adopting a model to manage processes and projects.

As this was the main objective of the course, we conclude that the participants have been able to apply the guidelines provided (Level of Complexity: 3).

## 4. Conclusions

Trade unions have traditionally seen their role as protecting the rights of their members/workers who sign up for union membership, but that is no longer sufficient. The crisis



in trade union sector is due to several factors both in the industrial, in the social and in the economic systems.

As other trade unions associations, this organization risks to lose its bargaining power and to disappear, leaving a gap in the intermediary function between the employer and the employee. After conducting a training course in the last year, addressed to the executives, we have collected new insights to possibly answer this question: *what kind of innovations should trade unions implement, to face the current scenario? What will be the consequences if they do not implement any innovations?*

Trade unions' executives minimize the potential effects of automation on their own organizations and they not seem fully prepared to this change: this depends both on the historical culture which permeates the whole organization and the role given to the training. We can describe two possible scenarios: scenario A describes the future of this organization and the impact on the labor market in the next years if no innovations are implemented; scenario B describes the changes trade unions need if they want to survive in this new world.

We should underline the limitations of the intervention, which concern the sample, above all: in fact, we could not select the participants, neither manage the group composition and its variables. Further researches on this topic should also consider a wider cross-section, to obtain more significant conclusions. Nevertheless, we find that the resulting suggestions are aligned with the ideas and the recent works of some authors in the field (Fabian Society, 2017; Kelly, 2017; Kelly et al., 2016; Stearn, 2016; Collins, 2015), even if the social, economic and political tissue is different.

#### **4.1 Scenario A: Innovations are not implemented**

- Membership fall. As most of membership is currently composed of old people, millennials are less supportive of collective welfare institution, therefore trade unions will face serious problems of participation, which is an important source of economic income and power. Trade unions will be increasingly unrepresentative of the workforce.
- Multinational rising: although they have been born from international bodies, the trade unions mainly operate at national and local levels, by adopting the first and second-level bargaining instruments. This territorial vocation can be a point of weakness when trade unions are forced to negotiate with extra-national realities, multinational corporations having a significant economic and political power, without any institutional points of reference or national interlocutors to organize a common Union action.

- Workers pressure. We live in a time of exploding technological innovation. While this innovation has brought undoubted benefits, it has also led to an “atomization” of the work-place. Innovation has led to a demand for skilled and flexible workers, putting an increasing pressure on the less skilled, the less flexible and the less mobile.
- Automation. As more jobs become mechanized, particularly the ones further down the pay scale, someone needs to fight for poorer workers’ rights. As more disruptions occur within the public sector, the need for unions becomes ever greater.
- Workers isolation. Today’s young workers risk being excluded from the social supports that should be taken for granted. In a union-free world, abuses on workers would go largely unchecked.
- Tech driven ‘disintermediation’. This is one of the consequences of rising high-technology: probably, much of the energy and action around the work-related issues will come from civil society and new organizations rather than the traditional union movement, which is more and more isolated.
- Missing opportunity. Trade union leaders have not tried hard enough. The new industries of the digital economy, for example, are not so well-known. There is very little response from the organized labor to the threat that automation poses to the traditional forms of work or to the way to exploit the opportunities.

#### **4.2 Scenario B: Innovations are implemented**

The maintenance of strong labor market institutions helps mitigate the impacts of globalization and technological changes. That is why it is very important that trade unions will last in the future.

The main innovation consists in a paradigm shift in the way the trade unionism is conceived and organized, starting from its organization leaders: a change in the goal, method and tools used by trade unions association, to guarantee its survival and to deal with a complex scenario, where workers are isolated, threatened and there is no intermediating power.

These suggestions will have an impact on the way trade unions are perceived and, consequently, on their ability to attract members. They should appear as trustworthy subjects, able to fill the psychological vacuum that organizations have left and to negotiate with powerful interlocutors.

Therefore, unions need to broaden their focus. They need to shift from the narrow perspective on their memberships’ needs to be involved in the much broader discussion of the

nature of work in a globalized market economy. Specifically, this change may consist in 8 major steps:

- The dialectic between trade unions and the Confederal Union is a point of extreme weakness for a union that is facing radical social and economic change, such as those involving Italy and Europe in recent decades. Perhaps, unions should leave the generalist and confederal visions and to rethink this dichotomy: trade unions should better focus on the dynamics involving the category and the sector.
- Ideological shift. Unions should rethink politics and ideology. A high degree of ideology must be combined with pragmatism. Different ideological associations must collaborate to increase their bargaining power. This will certainly have an impact on the membership recruitment.
- Workers participation. Unions have a stronger political influence when adopting an inclusive strategy, covering non-unionized as well as unionized workers. Employees can be representative of the workforce if they formally participate to the decision-making processes.
- Membership diversity. Unions need to set out plans to ensure that their reps, committees, staff teams and leadership are diverse. The size and the diversity of the membership should augment: the idea is to expand, not being more selective. A strategy to attract younger workers should be developed too.
- Training. Training should be a value for trade unions and training courses should be re-designed to be more effective: professionals working in the services need instructional design skills. The content of the courses should be updated too: leaders should be equipped with new knowledge and skills: strategic planning, artificial intelligence, digitalization, data, decision-making and communication skills are some of the proposal.
- Members recruitment. Today's workers who need trade unions protection do not necessarily share their ideology, nevertheless they ask for a protection that transcends belonging to a common political thought to become more universal. Trade unions should be expert in managing the legal and contractual aspects deriving from newly born forms of work, to develop effective strategies.
- Technology. Unions should invest in technology to reach hard-to-reach workers and to develop tools, apps and other tech-based solutions to make it economically viable to organize isolated and dispersed workers.

- Digitalization and data. Trade union association should be low cost and digitally savvy to make the most from data they have. Data should be put to better use to improve the effectiveness of campaigns, recruitment strategies and overall decision-making, to establish a data-driven decision-making process.

None of these effects can be achieved by having a confrontational and aggressive mindset, by exercising the same old weapons to guarantee the workers' right or by defending work practices and by adopting old and unrepresentative ideologies. Rather, unions need to find a credible and constructive place at the heart of policy discussion on the discussion regarding the value of the work in a changing world.

We believe a future research should focus on a more representative sample, to explore whether these conclusions could be nationwide relevant. Then, quantitative data should be collected to acquire more accurate information on the topic. Also, a comparison between different countries could be useful to design and to propose a strategy intervention to improve the strength of Italian Trade Unions and their effectiveness.

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