

# UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MODENA E REGGIO EMILIA

SCUOLA INTERNAZIONALE DI DOTTORATO IN RELAZIONI DI LAVORO

DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN RELAZIONI DI LAVORO

XXVI CICLO

TESI DI DOTTORATO

## **High-Performance Work Systems, Participation in Decision-Making and Job Satisfaction. The case of an Italian wine cooperative. A qualitative analysis.**

Candidato: MARIA GIULIA CASANOVA

Relatore: Prof. Tommaso Maria Fabbri

Correlatore: Dott.ssa Ylenia Curzi

Direttore della Scuola di Dottorato: Prof. Luigi Enrico Golzio

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people without whose help, support and guidance I would never have completed this thesis. My greatest debt of thanks is to my supervisors, Prof. Tommaso Fabbri and Dr. Ylenia Curzi, for their support and guidance in both the PhD process and my academic career. They were extremely supportive and patient throughout the process and without their encouragement, this thesis would not have been possible.

I am particularly grateful to Doctor Matt Vidal of King's College and Prof. David Marsden of LSE for their advice and encouragement during my visiting research period at London School of Economics and Political Science.

Collective and individual acknowledgements are due to my colleagues at Marco Biagi Foundation for their support throughout the project. I would particularly like to acknowledge the support and friendship of Sabrina Grivet Fetà, Chiara Pederzoli and Giulia Trimarchi.

I would like to express my thanks to the employees and managers at Caviro who freely gave their time to participate in this study. Thanks in particular to Dr. Monica Bernardelli who facilitated my access to their organisation to undertake the study.

Finally and most importantly, I want to thank my family and my husband Marco, who have always been extremely supportive of me and were always there for me through the highs and lows of Ph.D's experience.

*“Work is about more than making a living, as vital as it is. It’s fundamental to human dignity, to our sense of self-worth as useful, independent, free people.”*

*Bill Clinton*

*“Back to work” (2011), New York: Alfred A. Knopf*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTER 1: THE FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH.	
1. THE THEORY OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORK SYSTEMS MODEL.	
THE RESEARCH INTEREST.....	13
2. RESEARCH ON PARTICIPATION AND SATISFACTION.....	32
3. TOWARD THE DEFINITION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....	35
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY. APPROACH AND METHODS OF RESEARCH.	
1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY.....	39
i. THE THEORETICAL APPROACH OF MY RESEARCH. HOW I LOOK AT ORGANISATIONAL REALITY.....	43
2. FIELDWORK. THE PROCESS OF ETHNOGRAPHY.....	45
3. FROM METHODOLOGY TO THE METHODS.....	47
i. FOCUS GROUP. THE FOCUSED INTERVIEW.....	47
ii. INTERVIEWING AS A CRAFT.....	59
CHAPTER 3: THE OUTPUT OF THE FIELDWORK. FIRST ORDER AND SECOND ORDER ANALYSIS.	
1. THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES VERSUS THE ROLE OF JOB CHARACTERISTICS.....	72
2. WHAT REALLY MATTERS FOR WORKERS.....	77
CONCLUSION.....	84

# Introduction

My previous experience as a consultant in a management consultancy specialised in Lean and Six Sigma Methodologies has raised my interest in the topic of participation of the employees. To put it in a simple way, I can not help wondering how far the emphasis on the benefits for the employees of their participation into the organisation's decision-making was a mirror of reality or just a managerial rethoric. As Wilkinson and Dundon (2010) correctly underline, we could, alternatively, find the concept of participation expressed with other terms: engagement, voice, involvement or empowerment. Moreover, the concept of participation varies depending on the academic discipline. It can relate, on one hand, to trade union representation, to worker cooperative or to some legal forms of joint decision making between employee representatives and employers and, on the other hand, to that Human Resource Management's mechanisms such as provision of information, problem solving-groups or job enrichment programmes that use their skill/discretion (Wilkinson et al. 2010). Following this reasoning "employee involvement and engagement are more likely to have their roots in human resource management where the focus tends to be on the role of workers as individuals and their relationships with line managers" (Wilkinson et al. 2010). With the use of term participation I am here referring to all company's initiatives that give the employees the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.

## *Theoretical background*

For the last decade, Human Resource Management scholars have declared the success of the so-called *High Performance Work Systems (HPWS)*. The organisation design shaping the HPWS enhances the role of workers' contribution and commitment in terms

of knowledge, experience and discretionary effort as tools to elicit company's performance.

Bailey (1993), as reported in Appelbaum et al. (2000) considers three elements capable to make the discretionary effort effective: the motivation, the skills and the opportunity to participate into the decision-making process. Appelbaum et al. (2000) elaborated Bailey's considerations defining the AMO (ability-motivation-opportunity) model which represents the theoretical framework for most of the studies on HPWS. According to the AMO model the performance is the result of the combination of three elements: motivation to use the discretionary effort, ability to make it effective and opportunity to participate into decision-making process. The participation as expressed above, is therefore a key element of AMO model. Appelbaum et al. (2000) state that:

“The core of a high-performance work system (HPWS) in manufacturing...is that work is organised to permit front-line workers to participate in decisions that alter organisational routines.” The passage from the management of control towards the management of commitment (Walton 1985) is expressed by HPWS supporters with the emphasis on the worker's empowerment.

In this framework, the competitive advantage for enterprises is achieved by raising the level of the commitment of workers to the organisation, which induce them to perform better in terms of work productivity and product quality. Other scholars stress the role of involvement/participation, instead of commitment, concentrating on the enhanced opportunities for the employees to take initiatives (Ramsay et al. 2000). To increase the workers' commitment (and/or involvement), a range of human resource management (HRM) practices is used in certain combinations or bundles which result in synergistic benefits through an interactive and mutually reinforcing impact (Huselid 1995). Of the 26 Human Resource Management practices individualised by Boselie et al. (2005) in their analysis many have a direct link with the concept of participation: direct

participation, autonomy and decentralised decision-making, communication and information sharing, to name but a few. However, it is important to underline that, although the AMO theoretical framework reminds to intrinsic motivation, many practices can be attributed to extrinsic motivation in Boselie et al.'s list (2005). This consideration introduces the controversial role of the black box of employees attitudes between input (HRM practices) and output (performance), so called because "we know little of what happens at this stage, and hence its content remains mysterious" (Boselie et al. 2005). Schneider et al. (2003) demonstrate that extrinsic satisfaction depends on performance and not on practices while they do not draw a conclusion about the antecedents of intrinsic satisfaction. An alternative view of the nature and outcomes of HPWS is put forward by the studies referable to the Labour Process (LP) Theory. According to Ramsay et al. (2000), mainstream approach and LP studies agree about the positive relation between HPWS practices, employee discretion, and the organization's performance. Their differences lie in the anticipated employee outcomes of the practices. The neo-Fordist LP critique defines HPWS as an approach to maximizing the contribution of workers to production, which overcomes the limitation of Taylorist deskilling and direct control. However, the LP studies consider the new practices as a tool to control the workers, imposing the working rhythm. The high performance work practices are seen as detrimental to employees' welfare, resulting in job losses and effort intensification. According to the LP approach, the major autonomy leads, directly or indirectly, to work intensification and job strain, the latter being a key explanatory factor in improved organisational performance.

Ramsay et al. (2000) constructed indicators of HPWS practices, of employees outcomes and of organisational performance in order to investigate the associations among these phenomena, coming to the conclusion that HPWS orthodoxy and LP model are questionable for different reasons. The results of their research show that the assumption, shared by most scholars of mainstream theory,

that everyone benefits from managerial innovation, has been accepted too uncritically. On the other hand, they argue that it would be too simplistic to accept the LP's counter argument that states that management always come at the expense for labour of degradation of work.

This polarization of view has enabled a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to new work practices. Edwards et al. (2002), as cited by Geary (2003), have argued that management initiatives are “more limited and controlled than the enthusiasts claim, but more constructive than the critics admit”. In Geary's view HPWS do not have undifferentiated effects on workers, but they are likely to be contingent on a series of factors, such as the way of introducing the change, the degree of representativeness of employees, employees' prior experiences and expectations, the degree of employment security and the adaptability of HPWS to the organisation's context.

For example, Geary (2003) underlines that the effects of HPWS on employees' attitudes could not be seen as uniform throughout the organisation. Moreover, while they have the opportunity to participate in the organisation of work, the empowerment is limited by managerial authority. According to Geary the management needs continuously to find a balance between control and consensus both giving employees more autonomy and giving them limits and boundaries to their autonomy. This new view states that HPWS bring benefits as well as costs in terms of employees well-being. Edwards et al. (2002) as reported in Geary (2003) argue that “new work practices have their own contradictions: specific ones, such as balancing individual responsibility against loyalty to teams, or reconciling work team autonomy and the need to meet externally imposed targets; and more generic one around the balance between control and autonomy and the extent to which management can insulate autonomy in the labour process from the pressures emanating from capitalist competition. New forms of work organisation are a re-regulation of work, not the end of regulation.”

### *The research problem and contribution of my research*

In the definition of my research problem I found very interesting the work of Vidal (2007) that questions the HPWS's scholars optimistic assumption of the positive association between participatory practices and HRM positive attitudes (such as job satisfaction). Participating in the Advanced Manufacturing Project research consortium Vidal interviewed 55 people throughout nine firms declaring to have implemented practices associated with HPWS. Vidal demonstrates that workers can be unmotivated and unsatisfied under participatory arrangements while they can perceive traditionally organised jobs as challenging and that motivation appears to be unrelated to satisfaction. The choice to implement qualitative methods gave him the opportunity to overcome the limits of the quantitative analyses (predominant in the studies of HPWS). "First, by definition dispositions, orientations...and perceptions vary across individuals. Second, configurations of dispositions, orientations are not static and stable but potentially subject to more or less reflective based on the degree to which work situations, among other experiences, diverge from or conflict with expectations and other aspects of the worker orientation or disposition" (Vidal 2007).

Following Vidal's conclusion, I have decided to look inside the black box, citing the title of the Ramsay's et al.'s work. I aim questioning the simplistic optimistic view of the relation between participatory practices and intrinsic satisfaction, but also the negative approach of Labour Process that denies any outcomes of HPWS but the job strain. This does not want to be a median position, but the results of reasoning based both on practical experience and academic speculation.

In June 2011 I was awarded with a scholarship from the Dalle Fabbriche Foundation (whose statutory goal is to boost the values of cooperation among companies in the Emilia Romagna region) in order to carry out a study related to Human Resource Management and the cooperatives.

Thanks to Professor Everardo Minardi, the academic coordinator for that scholarship, I had the opportunity to choose Caviro, which is a cooperative of wine producers, with nearly 500 employees, based in Emilia Romagna, as my case study.

Together with the Caviro's responsible person for Organisation, I have identified the topic of participation as a hot issue for Caviro because its statutory configuration as a cooperative enables their focus on topic such as participation, workers satisfaction and motivation.

I agreed with Professor Minardi that this study could be useful to other cooperatives of the Dalle Fabbriche Foundation in order to understand the crucial and also controversial role of participation in a similar organisation and to decide to undertake the same kind of analysis. Moreover, this analysis could contribute to the construction of a survey to conduct into a large number of cooperatives in order to use both qualitative and quantitative methods (Mix Method Research).

### *Methodology and structure of the thesis*

The orientation of the researcher towards a specific conception of organisation implies deciding, interpretative and practical choices with regard to any knowledge problem (Fabbri 2010). Since theoretical perspectives are, to a certain extent, analytical constructs, it is possible to encounter research work that is difficult to place with a single, unambiguous perspective (Justesen and Mik-Meyer 2012).

However, I can say, without ambiguity, that I feel more commonalities with the phenomenology perspective than with realist or constructivist perspectives. I firmly believe that it is important to give a voice to who is experiencing the phenomenon (Gioia 2010).

Adopting a phenomenological perspective has a number of methodological consequences: the researcher, not neutral, as in the realist perspective, is able to emphasize with others' world and focuses on the unique experience instead of looking for generalisation.

(Justesen and Mik-Meyer 2012). With regard to the qualitative methods I adopt, I opt for not-structured interviews that “aimed at extracting examples from the interviewee’s everyday life” and for focus-group to investigate the intersubjective aspect of the phenomenon.

I have decided to divide my research in three phases:

1. *Pilot study* - In March 2013, I am interviewing two Managers, two employees and two workers as pilot study. Furthermore, I will work side by side with the Responsible for Organisation to understand both the formal and informal organisation and in particular the tools that the company has implemented to provide incentives for participation.

2. *Phase of interpretation* - Between April 2013 and July 2013, I am interviewing nearly 50 persons and I am conducting 5 focus group sessions on nearly 50 persons in order to collect and organize the employees’ inputs.

3. *Phase of assessment* - Between September 2013 and December 2013, I will assess my findings and compare them with the state-of-the-art literature.

# REFERENCES

Appelbaum, E., Bailey, T., Berg, P. & Kalleberg, A.L. (2000). *Manufacturing Advantage. Why High Performance Work Systems Pay Off*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

Boselie, P., Dietz, G., Boon, C. (2005). Commonalities and contradictions in HRM and performance research, *Human Resource Management Journal*, 15 (3), 67-94.

Fabbri, T.M. (2010). L'organizzazione: sistema predeterminato, entita' emergente, processo di azioni e decisioni. In T. Fabbri (Ed.), *L'organizzazione: concetti e metodi* (pp. 15-35). Rome, Italy: Carrocci.

Geary, J. (2003). New forms of work organisation: still limited, still controlled, but still welcome?. In P.Edwards (Ed.), *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice* (p.338-367). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Gioia, D. (2010). L'approccio interpretazionista nella ricerca organizzativa. In T. Fabbri (Ed.), *L'organizzazione: concetti e metodi* (pp. 123-132). Rome, Italy: Carrocci.

Handel, M.J. & Levine, D.I. (2004). Editors' Introduction: The Effect of New Work Practices on Workers, *Industrial Relations*, 43 (1), 1-43.

Herner, M. (2012). Employee Reaction to High Performance Work Systems in the Service Sector: Assessing the Role of Organisational Justice Theory, *Dissertation Thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway*.

Huselid, M.A. (1995). *The impact of human resource management practices on turnover, productivity and corporate financial performance*, *Academy of Management Journal*, 38 (3), 635-672.

Ramsay, H., Scholarios, D., Harley, B. (2000). Employees and High-Performance Work Systems: Testing inside the Black Box. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38 (4), 501-531.

Schneider, B., Hanges, P.J., Smith, D.B. and Salvaggio, A.N. (2003). Which comes first: employee attitudes or organisational financial and market performance?. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88 (5), 836-851.

Vidal M. (2007). Lean Production, Worker Empowerment, and Job Satisfaction: A Qualitative Analysis and Critique. *Critical Sociology*, 33, 247-278.

Walton, R. (1985). From control to commitment in the workplace', *Harvard Business Review*, 53(2), 77-84.

Wilkinson, A. & Dundon, T. (2010). Direct employee participation. In A. Wilkinson, P.J. Gollan, M. Marchington and D. Lewin (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of participation in organisations* (pp. 167-185). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Wilkinson, A., Gollan P.J., Marchington M and Lewin, D. (2010). Conceptualizing employee participation in organisations. In A. Wilkinson, P.J. Gollan, M. Marchington and D. Lewin (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of participation in organisations* (pp. 3-25). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

# Chapter I

## The focus of the research

### 1.1 The theory of High-Performance Work Systems model. The research interest.

At page 41 of “Shop Management”, published in 1903, F.W Taylor explains that each workers, whatever his importance, needs to have, every day, a firmly defined task, clearly circumscribed and not easy to do. The author stresses the role of the working methods: the increase of the productivity is due to the introduction of standardisation. The worker, strictly following the instructions of his task, increases his productivity and, consequently, his pay. Extrinsic motivation seems to be central to the fordist model and is considered the antecedent of productivity.

In contrast with the fordist view, Appelbaum et al. (2000) propose a model called AMO (acronym for ability, motivation, opportunity to participate), which represents the dominant theoretical framework for most of the studies on HPWS (High Performance Work Systems) (Boselie et al. 2005).

The essence of the model is represented by this basic equation, which states that that organisation performance is a function of the three AMO’s elements:

Performance = f {employees’ Ability, Motivation and Opportunity to Participate}

According to MacDuffie (1995, 201) “workers must have both a conceptual grasp of the production process and the analytical skills to identify the root cause of the problems in order to identify and resolve problems as they appear on the line”. This implies the reintegration of conception and execution , differently from the tayloristic view.

The onset of this research stream is on the mid-80s (Walton 1985) but it was on the mid-90s that scholars begin to report evidence on the link between “high-commitment” practices and company performance (Mc Duffie 1995, Ichniowski et al. 1997).

In the following table a summary of the key research findings for HPWS studies on organisational performance outcomes is presented:

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
USA	Arthur (1994) In a sample of steel minimills – compare between control and commitment systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour efficiency (significant increase)</li> <li>• Employee retention (significant increase)</li> </ul>
USA	MacDuffie (1995) 62 automotive assembly plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour productivity (significant increase)</li> <li>• Quality (significant increase)</li> </ul>
USA	Ichniowski, Shaw and Prennushi (1997) 36 steel production lines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Productivity (significant increase)</li> <li>• Product quality (significant increase)</li> </ul>
USA	Delaney & Huselid (1996) 590 for – profit and non – profit firms from the National Organisation Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived organisational performance (significant increase)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
USA	Delery & Doty (1996) Study on bank loan officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial performance (significant increase)</li> </ul>
New Zealand	Guthrie (2001) A multi-industry sample of 164 New Zealand firms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Firm productivity (significant increase)</li> <li>Employee retention (significant increase)</li> </ul>
USA	Batt (2002) A nationally representative sample of the US telecommunications services industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sales growth (significant increase)</li> <li>Quit rates (significant decrease)</li> </ul>
UK	Thompson (2002) The UK Aerospace industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovation (significant increase)</li> <li>Productivity (significant increase)</li> <li>Psychological contract (significant increase)</li> </ul>
UK	Guest, Michie, Conway & Sheehan (2003) A multi industry sample of 366 UK companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Labour turnover (significant decrease)</li> <li>Labour productivity (not significant)</li> <li>Profitability (significant increase)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
USA	Richard & Johnson (2004) 80 banking companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing performance (significant increase)</li> <li>• Growth in sales (significant increase)</li> <li>• Profitability (significant increase)</li> <li>• Market share (significant increase)</li> <li>• Organisational innovation (significant increase)</li> </ul>
Ireland	Flood, Guthrie, Liu & MacCurtain (2005) Survey of 165 Irish business organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour productivity (significant increase)</li> <li>• Employee retention (significant increase)</li> <li>• Sale growth (significant increase)</li> <li>• New product innovation (significant increase)</li> </ul>
Ireland	Heffernan, Harney, Cafferkey & Dundon (2009) Survey of 169 top performing firms in Ireland multi-industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational performance (significant increase)</li> <li>• HR performance (significant increase)</li> <li>• Employee performance (significant increase)</li> <li>• Innovation (significant increase)</li> </ul>
UK	Michie & Sheehan (2005) Study of stratified survey sample of publicly quoted UK manufacturing and service sector firms with 50 employee or more.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business strategy and HPWS (significant increase)</li> <li>• Sale growth (significant increase)</li> <li>• Labour productivity (significant increase)</li> <li>• Profitability (significant increase)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
China	<p>Ngo, Lau &amp; Foey (2008)</p> <p>Study of 600 enterprises across 4 Chinese regions. Majority of respondents were in the manufacturing sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial performance (significant increase)</li> <li>• Operational performance (significant increase)</li> <li>• Employee relations climate (significant increase)</li> </ul> <p>Moderating variable: ownership type</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial performance (significant increase)</li> <li>• Operational performance (not significant)</li> <li>• Employee relations climate (not significant)</li> </ul>
Netherlands	<p>Den Hartog &amp; Verburg (2004)</p> <p>175 organisations from different sectors in the Netherlands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firm performance (not significant)</li> <li>• Beyond contract (significant increase)</li> <li>• Economic outcome (significant increase)</li> <li>• Employee turnover (not significant)</li> <li>• Manager/specialist turnover (not significant)</li> <li>• Employee absenteeism (not significant)</li> <li>• Manager/specialist absenteeism (significant decrease)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
France	Guerrero & Baraud-Didier (2004) Multi industry sample of 180 organisations HRP bundles and individual HR practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social and organisational performance - includes quality of products/services, employee productivity, work climate and employee attendance (significant increase)</li> <li>• Economic profitability (not significant)</li> </ul>
Russia	Fey, Bjorkman & Pavlovskaya (2000) 101 foreign firms operating in Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR outcomes mediate HPWS – firm performance relationship (significant increase for managers only)</li> <li>• HRM practice – strategy fit – firm performance (not significant)</li> </ul>
Spain	De-Saa Perez & Garcia-Falcon (2002) 50 banks in Spanish saving bank industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profitability (significant increase)</li> </ul>
European Union	Gooderham, Parry & Ringdal (2008) Data derived from 1999 CRANET survey across 16 countries (n=3281 firms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firm performance - calculative HRM model (significant increase)</li> <li>• Firm performance - collaborative HRM model (not significant)</li> <li>• Firm performance – intermediary HRM model (significant increase)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
Hong Kong	Lau & Ngo (2004) 332 multi industry companies in Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation as mediated by development culture (significant increase)</li> </ul>
US and Canada	Wright, Gardner & Moynihan (2003) Survey of US food services company (50 business units)	<p>HRM impacts performance via commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worker compensation (not significant)</li> <li>• Quality (not significant)</li> <li>• Shrinkage (not significant)</li> <li>• Productivity (not significant)</li> <li>• Operating expenses (significant increase)</li> <li>• Profitability (significant increase)</li> </ul>
Belgium	Sels, De Winne, Maes, Delmotte, Faems & Forrier (2006) Survey of 416 small businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary turnover (not significant)</li> <li>• Labour productivity (significant increase)</li> <li>• Share of personnel costs in value added (significant increase)</li> <li>• Profitability through productivity (significant increase)</li> <li>• Liquidity – indirect effect (not significant)</li> <li>• Solvency – indirect effect (not significant)</li> </ul>
US	Subramony, Krause, Norton & Burnes (2008) 126 large publicly traded U.S organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial performance (significant increase)</li> <li>• Labour productivity (significant increase)</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction (significant increase)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
Hong Kong	Chan, Shaffer & Snape (2004) 49 matched responses from multi industry sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived organisational performance (not significant)</li> <li>• Perceived market performance (not significant)</li> </ul>
US	Collins & Smith (2006) 136 technology companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sales growth (significant increase)</li> <li>• Revenue from new products/services (significant increase)</li> </ul>
China	Bjorkman & Xiucheng (2002) 62 manufacturing Chinese – Western joint ventures and wholly owned subsidiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subjective firm performance measure (significant increase)</li> </ul>
US	Way (2002) Survey of 446 small firms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce turnover (significant decreased)</li> <li>• Labour productivity (not significant)</li> </ul>
Greece	Katou & Budwar (2007) Survey of 178 firms from 23 industries in the manufacturing sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectiveness (significant increase)</li> <li>• Efficiency (significant increase)</li> <li>• Innovation (significant increase)</li> <li>• Quality (significant increase)</li> <li>• Overall organisational performance (significant increase)</li> </ul>

Source: Heffernan (2012)

However, although the advantage for the enterprise is mostly recognized in terms of performance – financial measures, organisational measures, HR outcomes (Boselie et al 2005) - there is a fertile debate on the effects of the new practices on the workers. In their study on a survey of nearly 4.000 employees interviews from three different industries, Appelbaum et al. (2000) draw the conclusion that the positive effects of HPWS on the workers (satisfaction and lower stress) are mediated by three mechanisms: financial incentives such as gainsharing; the building of mutual trust and intrinsic incentives. In a similar way, Cappelli et al. argue that: “The new arrangements, in contrast, rely heavily on transferring decision making to individual employees – empowerment – and on using teams as substitutes for management structures...as the behavioural research has suggested for decades, employees like the greater autonomy and variety associated with these new work systems and seem to respond with better performance” (1997, 8). The authors state that employees prefer the new participatory arrangements and that they improve employees attitudes. It is noteworthy that both MacDuffie (1995) and Appelbaum and al. (2000) think that the intrinsic rewards of empowerment are not enough to generate motivation and discretionary effort but they underline the role of extrinsic rewards. In particular MacDuffie introduces the role of integrated and overlapped bundles of HR practices generating both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.

According to Handel and Levine (2004) the outcomes of the HPWS are *win-win* solutions between organisation and workers. While the workers contribute to the improvement of working methods, they also receive higher wages, major security and intrinsic rewards in terms of motivation and satisfaction.

Between the input (HRM practices) and the output (some indicator of performance) lies what is popularly referred to as the *black box* since “it is surprisingly rare to find a detailed exposition of

the conceptual model being used to link HRM practices with performance still less a diagram (Boselie 2005, 77)”.

In the following table a summary of the key research findings for HPWS studies on employee outcomes is presented:

COUNTRY	STUDY	EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES
UK	<p>Guest (1999)</p> <p>UK study cross-sectional telephone interview examining HPWS</p> <p>n=1000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological contract (significant increase)</li> <li>• Job satisfaction (no change)</li> <li>• Job satisfaction-mediated model (significant increase)</li> <li>• Pressure at work (slight increase)</li> <li>• Employment security (significant increase)</li> <li>• Motivation (no change)</li> <li>• Motivation-mediated model</li> </ul>
USA	<p>Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg &amp; Kalleberg (2000)</p> <p>Study of companies in steel, apparel and medical electronics manufacturing</p> <p>N=4374</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job satisfaction (significant increase)</li> <li>• Commitment (significant increase)</li> <li>• Stress (significant decrease)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES
UK	<p>Ramsay, Scholarios &amp; Harley (2000)</p> <p>WERS98 data from both management and employees (N=15920)</p>	<p><i>HCM and HIM models</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extrinsic satisfaction (significant increase)</li> <li>• Management relations (significant increase)</li> <li>• Job discretion (significant increase)</li> <li>• Commitment (significant increase)</li> </ul> <p><i>Labour process model</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work intensification (significant increase)</li> <li>• Job insecurity (significant decrease)</li> <li>• Discretion (significant increase)</li> <li>• Job strain (significant increase)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
Canada	<p>Godard (2001)</p> <p>Telephone survey of 508 employed Canadians investigating alternatives work practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belongingness (significant increase)</li> <li>• Stressfulness (significant increase for linear model only)</li> <li>• Commitment (significant increase)</li> <li>• Job satisfaction (significant increase)</li> <li>• Empowerment (significant increase)</li> <li>• Workload (no change)</li> <li>• Fatigue (no change)</li> <li>• Citizenship (significant increase)</li> <li>• Task involvement (significant increase)</li> </ul>
Australia	<p>Harley (2002)</p> <p>1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS95)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discretion (no change)</li> <li>• Job satisfaction (no change)</li> <li>• Attitude to management (no change)</li> <li>• Insecurity (no change)</li> <li>• Effort (no change)</li> <li>• Stress (no change)</li> <li>• Composite discretion (no change)</li> </ul>
UK	<p>White, Hill, McGovern, Mills &amp; Smeaton (2003)</p> <p>National Survey Working in Britain 1992 and Working in Britain 2000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative job to home spillover (increased)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
UK	<p>Danford, Richardson, Stewart, Tailby &amp; Upchurch (2004)</p> <p>1 in-depth case study in multinational “blue-chip” aerospace manufacturing plant (high skills, high technology)</p> <p>Qualitative interviews with 22 staff</p> <p>604 questionnaires and company responses to WERS98 data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress (increased)</li> <li>• Work place decision making (decreased)</li> <li>• Quality of working life (decreased)</li> </ul>
Australia	<p>Harley, Allen and Sargent (2007)</p> <p>Survey of two occupational groups – registered nurses and aged-care/personal care workers in Victoria</p> <p>Survey administered to 3136 members of Australian Nursing Federation (Victoria), 1318 usable responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autonomy (significant increase)</li> <li>• Affective commitment (significant increase)</li> <li>• Job satisfaction (significant increase)</li> <li>• Psychological strain (significant decrease)</li> <li>• Turnover intention (significant decrease)</li> <li>• Work effort (significant decrease)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
Finland	<p>Kalmi &amp; Kauhanen (2008)</p> <p>Quality of Work national survey</p> <p>4104 surveyed; focus of study on 493 full-time employees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job intensity (no change)</li> <li>• Job influence (significant increase)</li> <li>• Job security (significant increase)</li> <li>• Wage (significant increase)</li> <li>• Stress (significant decrease)</li> <li>• Job satisfaction (significant increase)</li> </ul>
USA	<p>Nishii, Lepak &amp; Schneider (2008)</p> <p>362 departments across 95 stores of a US supermarket chain</p> <p>Data on HPWS collected from 4,500 employees and 1100 department managers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality and employee enhancement (significant increase)</li> <li>• Cost and employee exploitation (significant decrease)</li> <li>• Union compliance (no change)</li> <li>• Impact of employee attitudes on organisational citizenship behaviours (significant increase)</li> </ul>
New Zealand	<p>Macky and Boxall (2008)</p> <p>Representative national survey</p> <p>Computer assisted telephone interview with 775 randomly selected NZ employees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job satisfaction (significant increase)</li> <li>• Stress (slight decrease)</li> <li>• Fatigue (no change)</li> <li>• Work life balance (no change)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
Japan	Liao, Toya, Lepak & Hong (2009)  Survey of branch management and employees across 92 branches of a Japanese national bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee knowledge skills and abilities (significant increase)</li> <li>• Employee motivation/psychological empowerment (significant increase)</li> <li>• Employee perceived organisational support (significant increase)</li> </ul>
USA	Butts, Vandenberg, DeJoy, Schaffer & Wilson (2009)  Annual survey of national retailer in US  Survey administered to 21 retail centres  1723 usable responses	<p>Psychological empowerment mediates relationship between HPWS and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job satisfaction (significant increase)</li> <li>• Organisational commitment (significant increase)</li> </ul>
England and Malasya	Gould-Williams & Mohamed (2010)  Survey of local government workers in England and Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation (significant increase)</li> <li>• Job satisfaction (significant increase)</li> <li>• Organisational citizenship behaviours (significant increase)</li> <li>• Stress (significant decrease)</li> <li>• Quit intentions (significant decrease)</li> </ul>

COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
UK	<p>Snap &amp; Redman (2010)</p> <p>Multi-level study of North East England</p> <p>Total of 28 workplaces and 519 employees</p>	<p>Organisational citizenship behaviour (mediated by perceived job influence)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance (significant increase)</li> <li>• Altruism (significant increase)</li> <li>• In – role behaviour (not significant)</li> </ul> <p>Organisational citizenship behaviour (mediated by perceived organisational support)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance (not significant)</li> <li>• Altruism (significant increase)</li> <li>• In-role behaviour (not significant)</li> </ul>
China	<p>Wang, Yi, Lawler &amp; Zhang (2011)</p> <p>633 employees surveyed across four organisations in China</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational commitment (significant increase)</li> <li>• Reduced work withdrawal behaviours via commitment (significant decrease)</li> <li>• Turnover intentions via commitment (significant decrease)</li> </ul>
UK	<p>Wood &amp; de Menezes (2011)</p> <p>Workplace Employment Relations Survey of 2004 (WERS2004) with a total of 22.451 employees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job satisfaction (not significant)</li> <li>• Anxiety-Contentment scale (significant decrease)</li> </ul>

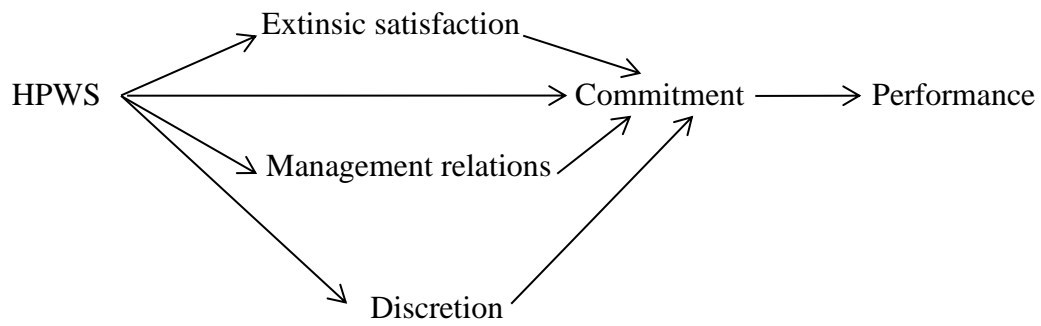
COUNTRY	STUDY	INDICATORS
Europe	Searle, Den Hartog, Weibel, Gillespie, Six, Hatzakis and Skinner (2011)  Survey of managers and professional employees working at different organisation in Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust in the employer (significant increase)</li> </ul>
Canada	Mendelson, Turner & Barling (2011)  317 employees from five public and private organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job satisfaction (significant increase)</li> <li>• Affective commitment (significant increase)</li> <li>• Continuance commitment (significant decrease)</li> </ul>

Source: Heffernan (2012)

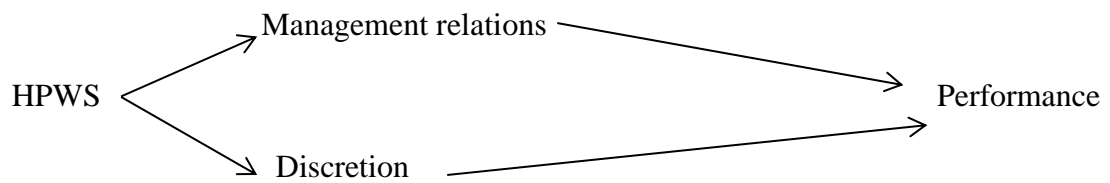
A case in point is represented by the important contribute of Ramsay et al. (2000), in which the authors test three the outcomes of the new practices on the workers and on the performance. According to the authors, the “optimistic” view on the HPWS is represented by two variations. The High Commitment Management (HCM) model stresses the effects of HPWS on the workers commitment while the High Involvement Management (HIM) model focuses on the importance of discretion.

The third explanation proposed by Ramsay et al. (2000), identified as the Labour Process Model, states that the performance is realised through a major job strain.

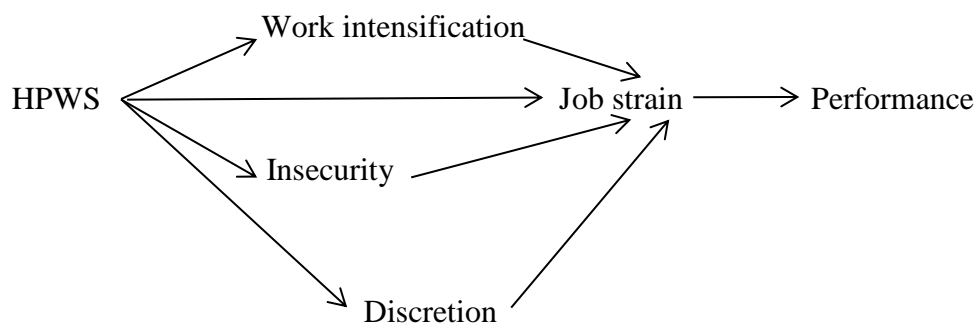
### High Commitment Management Model (HCM)



### High Involvement Management Model (HIM)



### Labour Process (LP) model



Source: Ramsay et al. (2000)

What is shared from scholars referring to the first two models is the empowerment theory of job satisfaction, that, according to Vidal (2007), is based on the stylized assumption that workers in a fordist working arrangements are unmotivated and dissatisfied while HPWS' workers are engaged by the new arrangements and therefore motivated and satisfied. However, the empirical literature on participation and satisfaction is not so supportive of this optimistic view as the advocates of HPWS suggest (Vidal 2007).

Moreover, Schneider et al. (2003) demonstrate that extrinsic satisfaction depends on performance and not on practices (and stating so the authors reverse the mainstream causality) while they do not draw a conclusion about the antecedents of intrinsic satisfaction.

What it is interesting and needs to be further investigated is the HPWS' implicit hypothesis that workers are satisfied and motivated to a large degree through so-called empowerment – the opportunity and ability to participate in problem solving and decision making.

## **1.2 Research on participation and satisfaction**

In their study Locke and Schweiger (1979) concluded that little could be said about the effects of participation from multivariate field studies because too many other variables – differences in training, reward systems, education, and so forth – could account for effects often attributed to participation.

As reported in Vidal (2007), the more recent meta analyses of Cotton and collaborators (Cotton 1993; Cotton et al. 1988) are the most often cited to support claims of positive effect of participation practices. However, Leana, Locke and Schweiger (1990) do not find support for the Cotton and his colleagues conclusions. In addition Wagner (1994) draws to the conclusion that between participation and performance or satisfaction exist statistically significant but small relationship.

Interesting is the work of Godard (2001) in which he considers the role of the level of participation. Godard draws the conclusion that the levels of involvement in various participatory practices “generally has a number of positive implications for employees up to a point, though it also result in more stressful work. Beyond that point, any positive effects of further adoption tend to decline in magnitude and in some cases may even become negative, while work become even more stressful”.

To orient my research question I draw on two important contributions. The first one has helped me to distinguish between two kinds of participation: consultative and substantive. The second one has focused on the onset of participation.

Levine and Tyson (1990) distinguish consultative from substantive participation. While consultative participation differs in important ways from traditional Taylorism, it should not therefore be automatically equated with worker empowerment. Power involves not just new responsibilities but the effective authority to claim resources,

make decisions and alter routines. From this perspective, the consultative form of participation is most accurately characterized as a nominal—slight—change. Substantive empowerment, then, involves new responsibilities, including regular involvement in problem-solving and decision-making activities, along with formal authority and effective capacity. Hallmarks of substantive empowerment include decision making authority and lateral communication with team members and outside experts. Consultative participation, or nominal empowerment, involves active seeking of input from and/or the delegation of new responsibilities to workers, but without effective authority or regular engagement in decision-making and problem-solving. Hallmarks of nominal empowerment include new responsibilities without authority to alter organizational routines and ability to give input but not make decisions.

The second contribution I have drawn my research is the meta-analytic literature review of Miller and Monge (1986). They use three types of models – cognitive, affective and contingency - that differently explain the effects of participation on satisfaction and productivity.

Cognitive models of participation propose that participation leads to increases in productivity through bringing high-quality information to decisions and through increasing knowledge. According to Miller and Monge (1986) such models predict that the effects of participation on individual productivity depends on the degree of expertise while there are no direct effects on job satisfaction being productivity a mediator (and this seems to confirm Schneider's work). Differently, affective models focus on the effects of participation on job satisfaction. The supporters of "human relations" view (Likert 1967; Mc Gregor, 1960) "propose that participation will lead to greater attainment of high-order needs, such as self-expression, respect, independence, and equality, which will in turn increase morale and satisfaction (Miller and Monge 1986)."

### **1.3 Toward the definition of the research question**

Interesting for my research is the third model proposed by Miller and Monge (1986), the contingency one. Several theorists suggest that it is not possible to develop models of participative effects that will hold across a wide variety of individuals and situations. They suggest that participation will affect satisfaction “differently for different people and situation”.

Different contingency theories are based on personality, particular decision situations, relationships between superiors and subordinates, job levels, to name but a few.

The empowerment theory of job satisfaction of MacDuffie, Appelbaum et al. and others mix affective and cognitive models of the effects of participation (Vidal 2007). In contrast to the contingency model, “the standard empowerment theory yields very strong expectations: workers have stable preferences for particular types of work arrangements; motivation and satisfaction will be low under Fordist arrangements; the latter will be experienced as much less interesting, challenging and/or autonomous than work under HPWS arrangements; workers will enthusiastically embrace participative arrangements because of increased intrinsic rewards; given a choice between Fordist arrangements and HPWS they will choose the latter” (Vidal 2007).

From my practical experience as Lean consultant I believe that the personality, but not only personality, could mediate effects of participation on satisfaction.

From the informal pilot study I have conducted in order to address my research I have found other interesting elements that affect the participation.

Others elements are far more important, such as extrinsic rewards, acknowledgement of their own work, communication of the

achievements, and, most of all, good relations with colleagues and supervisors.

As the prevalent quantitative research on the subject has been contradictory and even statistically significant correlations are usually of small magnitude (Vidal 2007), I have decided to follow Vidal's move to qualitative research in order to investigate such relationship more deeply.

The cooperative at stake is a cooperative consisting of 34 partner wineries and 13.000 wine growers from throughout the leading wine regions of Italy.

The Human Resources Department has been introducing several participative arrangements referable to Lean Production Systems and High Performance Work Systems, such as qualitative circles, groups of workers engaged to find together solutions to working problems.

In the Ethic Code, with reference to the mission of the cooperative, the mutualistic scope has been made clear. In particular it states that persons, being them producers or workers, are at the centre of the production.

Therefore, two main aspects made the choice of my case study interesting:

1. The introduction of participating arrangements referable to the new practices object of this study
2. The nature of the cooperative company that makes the subject of participation and satisfaction one of vital importance for the organisation.

I believe that this working environment is a privileged one to study the effects of participation on satisfaction. Given that my goal is to demonstrate the complexity of such relationship and to question the empowerment job theory, it could be argued that if the mainstream theory fails to be verified in such a case, it should be even more questionable in other less virtuous cases.

The cooperative has 490 workers. The Wine Division, based in Forlì and focus of my study comprehends 250 employees and 140 workers. My qualitative study has involved around 100 workers (50 in the 5 focus groups and 50 individually interviewed).

# REFERENCES

Appelbaum, E., Bailey, T., Berg, P. & Kalleberg, A.L. (2000). *Manufacturing Advantage. Why High Performance Work Systems Pay Off*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

Boselie, P., Dietz, G., Boon, C. (2005). Commonalities and contradictions in HRM and performance research, *Human Resource Management Journal*, 15 (3), 67-94.

Cappelli, P., Bassi, L., Katz, H., Knoke, D., Osterman, P. & Michael Useem, M.(1997). *Change at Work*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Ichniowski, C., Shaw, K., Prennushi, G. (1997). The Effects of Human Resource Management Practices on Productivity: A Study of Steel Finishing Lines. *The American Economic Review*, 87 (3), 291-313.

Godard, J. (2001). High Performance and The Transformation of Work? The Implications of Alternative Work Practices for the Experience and Outcomes of Work, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 54, 776-805.

Handel, M.J. & Levine, D.I. (2004). Editors' Introduction: The Effect of New Work Practices on Workers, *Industrial Relations*, 43 (1), 1-43.

Herner, M. (2012). Employee Reaction to High Performance Work Systems in the Service Sector: Assessing the Role of Organisational Justice Theory, *Dissertation Thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway*.

Leana, C.R., Locke, E. A. & Schweiger, D.M. (1979). Fact and Fiction in Analyzing Research on Participative Decision Making: A Critique of Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, and Jennings. *The Academy of Management Review*, 15, 137-146.

Levine, D.I. & Tyson, L.D. A. (1990). Participation, Productivity, and the Firm's Environment'. In A.S. Blinder (Ed.), *Paying for Productivity: A Look at the Evidence*. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution.

Locke, E. A., Schweiger, D.M. (1979). Participation in Decision-Making: One More Look. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 1, 265-339.

MacDuffie, J.P. (1995). Human Resource Bundles and Manufacturing Performance: Organizational Logic and Flexible

Production Systems in the World Auto Industry. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 48, 197-221.

Miller K. I. and Monge P.R. (1986) "Participation, Satisfaction, and Productivity: A Meta-Analytic Review." *The Academy of Management Journal* vol. 29, pp. 727-753.

Ramsay, H., Scholarios, D., Harley, B. (2000). Employees and High-Performance Work Systems: Testing inside the Black Box. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38 (4), 501-531.

Schneider, B., Hanges, P.J., Smith, D.B. and Salvaggio, A.N. (2003). Which comes first: employee attitudes or organisational financial and market performance?. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88 (5), 836-851.

Taylor, F.W (1903). Shop Management. Saratoga: American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

Vidal M. (2007). Lean Production, Worker Empowerment, and Job Satisfaction: A Qualitative Analysis and Critique. *Critical Sociology*, 33, 247-278.

Wagner, J.A. (1994). Participation's Effects on Performance and Satisfaction: A Reconsideration of the Evidence. *Academy of Management Review*, 19, 312-330.

Walton, R. (1985). From Control To Commitment in the Workplace. *Harvard Business Review*, 53 (2), 77-84.

# **Chapter II**

## **Theoretical perspective and methodology. Approach and methods of research.**

### **2.1 Theoretical perspectives and methodology**

“Organisation theorists, like scientists from other disciplines, often approach their subject from a frame of reference based upon assumptions that are taken for-granted (Morgan 1980)”.

To avoid the risk of taking for granted the basis my research is built on, in this paragraph I would go through the three main theoretical perspectives according the classification of Justesen and Mik-Meyer (2012) and I would explain what theoretical lens I will use and what consequences this choice has with regard to methodology. The authors distinguish three perspectives – realism, phenomenology and constructivism and underline that the two latters could overlap. Differently Fabbri (2010), in the wake of Maggi’s studies, identifies three conceptions of organisation incompatible among themselves that are each related to a specific option of knowledge in the social science. These options are positivism, anti-positivism (both constructivism and phenomenology are ascribable to it in this view) and an option developed by Maggi on the works of Weber, Barnard, Simon, Thompson and others (Albano 2010 a) and known with the name of *Teoria dell’azione organizzativa*.

Although sometimes scholars do not explicitly acknowledge the perspective underpinning their work, it does not mean that they do not have one and, above all, that they do not need to have it consistent with the other elements of the research – research question and methodology – to name but a few.

With theoretical perspective we define “ a designation for the fundamental understanding of the world and the basic view of the knowledge upon which is theory is based (Justesen and Mik-Meyer 2012, 13).”

Scholars adopting a realistic perspective assume that there is an objective world out there independent from the researcher setting out the study. Realism comes from a realist ontology that implies the existence of a single reality. The goal of a researcher who works from such a perspective is describing phenomena being as much neutral as possible (Justesen and Mik-Meyer 2012). In such perspective, the organisation is seen as "pre-definable with reference to the organised activities and to the participating actors (Maggi in Fabbri 2010, 17, my translation)". This orthodox view in organization theory has been based predominantly on the metaphors of machine and organism (Morgan 1980). In the former variation the system (the organisation) is closed, protected from uncertainty, and there is *one best way* to coordinate all the components; in the latter the system is open to the environment and needs to adapt itself to it (Fabbri 2010). In the realistic perception, the scholars aim at generalising their study's findings and generally opt for quantitative methods or qualitative methods where the representativeness of analysed social reality is of fundamental importance (Justesen and Mik-Meyer 2012). Among the experiences of studies conducted under this perspective a relevant example is the action research of The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. It could be said, in fact, that the socio-technical approach has represented the mainstream of the studies within organisational fields (Albano 2010 b).

However, it is worth a mention one of the last work of Ghoshal (2005) relating the applying of a realistic approach to the social science. The adoption of scientific methods to discover patterns and laws in organisational live was based on a basic mistake that is to consider indifferently different academic disciplines (Ghoshal 2005). The author draws from Elster's work the definition of explanation's categories: causal, functional and intentional. The causal explanation is the only acceptable mode to interpret inorganic science, such as physic. The functional explanation, based on notions such as benefits, evolution or progress, fits with organic matters. Last but not least "the basic building block in the social sciences, the elementary unit of

explanation, is individual action guided by some intention (Ghoshal 2005, 78).”

Undoubtedly, it is a matter of fact that , for the majority of organisational issues, human intentions matter. And, being human intentions mental phenomena, we cannot use a causal explanation to link a particular intention to a particular action. Ghoshal’s contribution is an important accusation towards the use of causal explanation in social studies.

He imputed the financial scandals and related lack of morality to the endeavour to make management a science as physics. Without deepening ethical and moral problems originated from this assumptions, that are not pertinent to my research, I want to underline, citing Goshal (2005), that “the ultimate goal must be to go from the pretense to the substance of knowledge”.

With constructivism we mean “a broad umbrella term covering a variety of different social science perspectives, all of which have in common the fact that they are based on the assumption that our knowledge of the world consists, in some sense or another, of construction of reality” (Justesen and Mieke-Meyer 2012, 26).

In this perspective reality does not exists as an independent entity; on the contrary it is constructed by social actors. As cited by Justesen and Mieke-Meyer (2012), the Berger and Luckmann’s book *The social construction of reality*, published in 1966, represents one of the most important text on the subject. The authors mainly see everyday social actors driving the construction processes.

According to Collin (2003), as in Justesen and Mieke-Meyer (2012) there are other two different streams in the constructivist literature, in addition to Berger and Luckmann’s position.

Some scholars focus on how the social scientists themselves help to construct the reality object of their study. The third view within constructivism takes as starting point more abstract entities, such as discourses.

Quality criteria specific to this perspective are concepts as convincing, relevant or interesting. “In other words, the argument is that if the study produces relevant and interesting knowledge in relation to a defined targeted group, or if the analysis seem convincingly and credible, than the study is of a high quality (Justesen and Mik-Meyer 2012, 46)”.

### **2.1.1 The theoretical perspective of my research. How I look to the organisational reality.**

Phenomenological perspective stems from a specific branch of philosophy developed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Besides philosophy, phenomenology has inspired social science, and in particular sociology, through the work of Alfred Schultz – *On Phenomenology and Social Relations* – published in 1970. The core of phenomenological perspective is well expressed by the following quote: “...strictly speaking there are no such thing as facts, pure and simple. All facts are from the outset facts selected from a universal context by the activities of our mind...They are therefore always interpreted facts... (Schultz and Natanson 1962, 5)”.

Considering the crucial role of subjectivity and interpretation on both the ontological and epistemological fields, it could be argue that realism’s sharp distinction between ontology and epistemology becomes in a way meaningless because “there is no access to reality outside our knowledge or interpretation of it (Justesen and Mieke Meyer 2012, 21)”.

Gioia (2010) states that the distinctive aspect of this approach, which we can call otherwise interpretational approach, is the fact that is given voice to people experiencing the phenomenon. In this perspective, the main role is given to all the informants, who live the phenomenon, while the researcher is the hermeneut, such as who brings the “divine” message.

Interestingly and significantly, the focus moves from the fact to the meaning of the fact (Gioia 2010). As above said with regard to the work of late scholar Ghoshal (2005), the claim of mainstream scholars is to apply natural sciences methods to explain sensemaking (the construction of reality through interpretation) and sensegiving processes (the interpretation given to others).

Embracing this approach has many consequences on my research.

The aim of this research is to give voice to informants. However, as Gioia (2010) states, it does not mean ignoring past academic literature, but it means to give workers the opportunity to express their own comprehension of their experience with their own words. Then the researcher could use their descriptions as a basis for the construction of an interpretive frame grounded in the informants experience.

Then the researcher consults the literature and assemble their terms of first-order (informants-level) with theoretical speculations (researcher-level) (Gioia 2010). The result, according to Gioia, is a grounded theory which comprehends two voices and that is:

1. Fitting with the informants' experience
2. Adequate to the theoretical abstraction and, potentially, transferable to a broader domain.

A piece of advice from Gioia that I keep in mind for my research is to avoid embracing “fishing expeditions”, without a clear, even though broad, research question.

## 2.2 Fieldwork, the process of ethnography

“Ethnography is an ambiguous term, representing both a process and a product (Agar 2008, 53)”. With regard to the process, the name for doing ethnography is fieldwork.

The origin of ethnography is in the field of anthropology as a way to observe the traditions of cultures different from ours, observing them within their natural territory (Bruni 2010).

With reference to the organisational field, one of the most delicate moments of doing an ethnography is negotiating the access to the field. At the beginning of my research I have met the so called gatekeepers of the organisation (Bruni 2010). She is the Responsible for Organisation within the Human Resource Management Department. Through the first informal meeting with her, I have soon understood that they were a relatively open organisation, in which there was considered enough the assurance of the three following standard requirements regarding the tutelage of the involved subjects (Silverman 1997):

1. Anonymity of the people object of the study;
2. Confidentiality with regard to all the given information;
3. Respect of the people space and open discussion of the finding with all the actors.

“Given the ethnographer’s immersion in the data, his or her main problem is that of ‘going native’ i.e completely adopting the interpretive view of the organisation members, and thus losing the dispassionate view required for a more theoretical, second-order analysis (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991)”.

‘Going native’ should be, according to the authors, the main concern of the researcher. However, it must be said that going native in a floor shop is not as simple as it could appear. Problems of security, and of course of productivity, arise.

Consequently I have thought it was more profitable beginning with soft and less “official” approaches, such as prearranged focus groups and interviews.

As participant-observations characterise ethnography research (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991), it should not be possible to completely ignore this methods. However, being it a sensitive element, I have preferred to create groundwork of trust on which building up, step by step, deeper speculations.

I could not rely on record-keeping since the workers feel uncomfortable to be recorded. It was therefore very profitable the employment of a “second researcher” who helped me with the recording of focus group. According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) this actor could be useful in watching at data with more objectivity, being him or her less exposed to the direct, subjective, inside experience.

## **2.3 From methodology to the methods.**

### **2.3.1 Focus group. The focused interview.**

Focus group are a special kind of group interview used with increasing frequency by qualitative researchers since 1980s. It is still less prevalent than individual interviews. According to Morgan focus group could be defined as “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher (Morgan 1996, 130)”.

What is significant, with regard to focus group, is the dialogue and interaction within the group, particularly the reaction and answer of participant to what their fellow participants say. The issues object of the focus group are determined in advance by the researcher, who have to control that the discussion stays focused. The role of the researcher in the focus group is alternatively labelled as chair, moderator or facilitator, where the key focal point is the interaction between participants (Morgan 1996).

The observations of interaction with this method are different from the observations of an ethnography, which are not made in a “neutral” setting.

Many scholars stress that focus group should not be considered as a group interview, but as a group discussion (Justesen and Mik-Meyer 2012). However, Merton (1987) states that it is misleading to speak of it as a group. In fact, the group is set up specifically for use in a particular research and therefore it is a temporary group. Notwithstanding, it is not a rule that the participants must not know each other in advance. In our case I have thought it could be more profitable to create mixed focus group with persons who work in different teams.

As previously cited, I was supported in my work by an observer. In order to make our work as much effective as possible, we have followed the criteria established by Merton and Kendall (1946), that are:

1. Nondirection
2. Specificity
3. Range
4. Depth and personal context

With regard to the first criteria – nondirection – I find it very consistent with the interpretive approach, because “it gives the subject the opportunity to express himself about matters of central significance to him rather than those presumed to be important by the interviewer (Merton and Kendall 1946) “. Direction is incompatible with eliciting unanticipated responses. However, nondirective techniques sometimes are ineffective in avoiding irrelevant digressions.

The second criteria, specificity, invites the interviewer to inquire into specific meaning of significant details. The authors think that their “emphasis on specificity does not express allegiance to an atomistic, as contrasted with a configurational, approach (Merton and Kendall 1946)”. They mean to orient the researcher toward a significant configuration.

Thirdly, the criterion of range refers to the necessity, for the researcher, to “uncover the range both of response and of evocative stimuli (Merton and Kendall 1946)”.

Last but not least, the criterion of depth “involves the elaboration of affective responses beyond limited reports of positive or negative, pleasant or unpleasant, reactions (Merton and Kendall 1946)”.

Dalkey (1968) differentiates the area global information into three types corresponding to the three parts of an imaginary segment. The first part of the segment is knowledge tested and confirmed by experiment; at the opposite end is speculation, based on fragile foundations. Between knowledge and speculation is a grey area, defined wisdom, intuition, or informed judgment.

The informed judgment represents the refusal to label everything not experimentally validated as simple speculation (Ziglio 1996).

The objective is to make the judgment informed and to improve the decision-making process. Therefore qualified witnesses (Del Zotto 1988) or key witnesses are used, being holders of information on relevant topics for research purposes. They are also referred to as "sociological sample" (Mongardini 1984) or "sample of experts" (Guala 1991).

The experts are considered as individuals with special knowledge on the topic of the research. Interviewing them it is possible to obtain information as meaningful as that available from a larger sample (Bezzi & Palumbo 1995).

The rationale behind the analysis is summarized as follows: "if different observers who analyze the same phenomenon describe it in the same way, it is very likely that this observation can be reliably (Bertin 1994, 64, my translation)".

In practice, the criterion for judging the quality of observation is attributable to the consent among experts. In addition, all group techniques, helps to deepen the topics thanks to the feedback on which it is based.

However, the use of focus group does not merely serves as a more soft tool compared to others more complex and expensive.

As Palumbo argues in his recent book (2001), although the difficulties of the "prediction" is more and more increased by the fact that our society is characterized by uncertainty, nevertheless we do not need to give up.

On the contrary, should rather be used for prediction the very elements that makes it so difficult and complex (Palumbo 2001, 168, my translation). In other words we need to "make reflexive considerations, incorporating mental (and communicative) processes

that the actors develop from a shared knowledge of the context data (Palumbo 2001, 168, my translation)”.

This kind of mental and communicative processes are developed through the group techniques whose value derives from the interaction created among the participants.

Moreover Corrao (2000) states that the great advantage of interaction is the reproduction of the realistic process that governs the formation of opinions. This happens more often when the interaction is personal and less structured, as in focus group.

In Italy focus groups are widely used in the market research while little used with regard to scientific goals.

The focus group takes place as a "group interview" led by a moderator who, following a more or less structured track, propose stimuli to the participants. The stimuli can be either verbal (direct questions, phrases, definitions, associations ) or visual ( photographs, drawings, cartoons , movies).

From the responses to these stimuli arises (or should arise) the discussion.

With regard to the mode of reaction may be requested by the moderator both in verbal and written form.

The researcher can choose to follow the classic interview where you get a series of verbal responses , or to use the “post-it method”, that relies on written opinions, then read and discussed with the moderator.

The latter can also be used only partially, for example at the beginning of focus group to start a discussion on sensitive and relevant topics. With this method a lot of advantages can be gotten. First of all, even the most timid participant can express his or her opinion. Furthermore, it is possible to avoid some of the influences that arise from group’s dynamics.

A focus has an average length of about two hours, but it depends on the participants and on the interaction among them. In fact, if the climate is very "cold" and the debate fails to start, it could happen that everyone responds individually to stimuli. On the contrary, if the interaction is well developed, especially when conflicting positions are supported by persons of equal charisma, you could have endless focus.

These two extreme situations should not actually happen if the focus is led by a skilled moderator, but it is still advisable to agree with the participants about the length. However, according to Colombo (1997), the life's length of the focus group should be respected, not imposed, in order to produce "raw material" and unit of analysis for the research.

It is never advisable to perform a single focus: the minimum recommended number is three. The first focus is meant to test the validity of the track. Often, what is considered important and salient for researchers, is not equally relevant for respondents (Bovine 1998).

It may happen that, for a particularly complex topic is programmed a series of focus with the same group, each concerning a particular stimulus. However, each group participates to a single focus group.

Usually there should be a minimum of three focus groups, but more series could be required in order to obtain comparable results.

A lot of factors can affect the course of the focus: the cold climate, the presence of dominant or provocative persons, to name but a few (Krueger 1994, 6).

The focus is composed of participants who were chosen because they meet the requirements (with regard to the objective of the research) and because they have the right characteristics to interact without conflict.

A certain degree of homogeneity is advisable; however excessive homogeneity is not recommended because in each group

there should be some difference to allow the emergence of different and even opposed positions (Krueger 1994).

Krueger (1994) points out the importance of being strangers in a group because familiarity tends to inhibit persons and the answers would be linked to past events. However sometimes it is not possible to have participants completely unrelated to each other, as in the case of small organizations.

The degree of familiarity among participants is a factor to consider during the analysis of the data. Another significant problem in this aspect is that of recruitment. Usually people, especially at work, do not have time to participate. Moreover, it is difficult to meet the needs of the whole group finding times and locations convenient for everyone.

People are usually recruited through non-neutral intermediaries. This means that the participants should be contacted by people who know both them and the organizers of the focus, in order to ensure either the commitment and the distance from the researcher.

As far as representativeness is concerned, it should be noted that it varies depending on the object and purpose of the research.

The focus should not be representative in a statistical sense, but the relevant categories should be represented.

The focus is typically composed of 6-10 people but can vary from 4 to 12 .

The number is influenced by two factors: it must be small enough to allow everyone to have opportunity to express their opinion and large enough to allow to diversify perceptions (Krueger 1994).

The authors differ with regard to the ideal number: Statera (1997) considers the ideal width of 8-10 people; Bovina (1998) speaks of 7-12 people; for Colombo (1997) the range is from 6 to 12 people, while for Templeton (1994) the minimum of participants is 10 and the maximum of 12. When the group exceeds 12 participants there is a

tendency to fragment: participants would like to talk but can not because there is not enough space of conversation.

In this situation the only resource left to participants to express their opinions is to contact the closest people. The small groups of 4-5 participants offer more opportunities to express ideas, but, on the other end, less ideas are expressed.

Depending on the level of structure of the focus group the researcher can set a track of the focus group. The questions depend on the kind of interaction the researcher wants to create (Corrao 1999).

The self-managed groups do not need a track, while for a non-directive focus the researcher could build a track for free interview and, finally, a trace of a very detailed interview with semi-structured questions could be prepared for a focus that will have a high degree of directivity (Corrao 1999).

Generally, the track must contain a programmed series of open and flexible questions. The questions are structured as little possible; sometimes the track does not even contain the real questions but the call to arguments ( this is usually called "Stimuli"). The agenda begins with more general topics and then get to more specific ones.

The more important themes, representing the core of the issue, are addressed toward the center of discussion (Colombo 1997 and Bovina 1988) .

Actually then, especially in non-directive focus groups, the discussion produces stimuli the way in which they emerge is an element of analysis.

The type of data analysis depends on the objectives of the research as well as the initial assumptions.

The data analysis can be done in two different types of approach:

- Strictly qualitative and ethnographic

- "Systematic" when you expect a coding through content analysis (Morgan 1994)

In reality the researcher can choose to use both methods because not mutually exclusive.

The analysis should contain the emerged issues, the citations (quotes) and the interpretation of data (Stewart-Shamdasani 1990).

The data of interest are related to the assumptions and therefore should emerge by interview. The moderator, in order to facilitate the comparison among different groups, should always follow the same order of questions.

The cleaning of data should be done ex post in order to save relevant information.

Moreover, the attempt of standardisation could result in losing the depth and peculiarity of each answer.

The nature of the data, the level of detail and rigor depend on the purposes for which the data have been collected.

For an exploratory research, a narrative description, enriched with the observations of the moderator and the outside observers, is enough.

The group sessions provide an opportunity to explore, through discussion among the participants, the issues of the research. Their peculiarity consists in the fact that the interaction between participants allows the emerging of certain theme. From the group's dynamics can emerge new points of view and perspectives (Statera 1997).

The group interview is not a tool to diagnose individual characteristics. It is a technical tool that leads to a cognitive interpersonal process. In this regard Spaltro (in Trentini 1980) distinguishes between an interview in group and group interview; the first type comprehends the individual interviews conducted at the same time and place and by the same interviewer.

Differently, the second one represents those interviews in which the diagnostic tool is represented by a group's situation globally conceived.

The degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity of the social group may vary depending on the research objectives.

The group can be characterized by the composition:

1) it can be built specifically for the research; the people involved have not a common history.

2 ) it can be formed naturally, without the control of the researcher.

It may also be characterized for purposes:

1 ) To study an issue or phenomenon

- a. not necessarily linked to the group;
- b. function of the group : instrumental.

2) The object of study is the group:

- a. the goal is to understand the function of the group;
- b. function of the group: central.

The ideal focus group is characterized by the combination of type of composition 1 and type of purpose 1.

The group as the unit of analysis is certainly more complex and difficult than individual.

If, on one hand, the interaction is fruitful for the deepening and enrichment of ideas, on the other hand it can trigger specific mechanisms and dynamics of power and defense.

Spaltro takes into account some of the problems that can arise in group interviews:

- *The coupling*: is the constant dialogue between two individuals in a group with the complicity of the whole group hampering the group in developing the own dynamics.

- *The displacement of the conflict*: discussions over real problems are replaced by discussions over distant and symbolic topics in order to avoid the burden of conflict management.
- *The formation of subgroups* is similar to the coupling but taking place among more people and often leading to conflict among subgroups (Spaltro in Trentini 1980).

Spaltro also analyzes the following defense's techniques:

- *The confusion of the role*: some interviewees act as interviewers assuming the management of the group and this is likely to disorient participants.
- *Refuge in virtue*: the people who participate declare themselves faithful towards the rules and questions acting with passive dependence on the interviewer.

In addition to these dynamics, it is possible that other phenomena, known as group phenomena, occur.

A case in point is the hall of mirrors (a term invented by J. Moreno). It refers to the situation in which all the members of the group "reflect themselves in the other members who serves as the control and as the frame of reference.

Another important phenomenon is known as "weness". It concerns the socialization of language and the use of "we" without a reply from other members.

The presence of scapegoats is a phenomenon often present and dangerous. In this type of phenomenon the scapegoat meets the needs of the other members of the group to express their angry with minimal risk (Spaltro in Trentini 1980).

The lack of clarity about the purpose of the group can lead to problems as confusion and wrong results (Krueger 1994).

There are two different and opposing views about the kind of role which the moderator plays.

For social psychologists, moderator should intervene as little as possible. The stimuli, determined a priori, should not be placed directly by the moderator but should arise naturally from the discussion. The moderator can only drive the discussion as it happens during an unstructured interview. For any reasons the moderator can ask persons who do not participate actively for intervening. He can only stimulate the group as a whole.

On the opposite side, we find the supporters of a strong role for the moderator with a predetermined setting of questions to ask. For this kind of approach, more sociological, the task of the moderator is to "keep the group adherent to the discussed topic, get it to move towards the chosen sub-themes facilitating intervention by all participants (Colombo 1997, 55, my translation).

The role of the moderator is key and complex. On one hand the moderator must have the sensitivity of fostering a positive climate in which the participants, even the more timid, are facilitated to participate.

At the same time, however, the moderator must have the charisma and strength to drive the argument on the key points and keep the leadership of the group, ensuring the control of dominant personalities, who will tend to monopolize interventions (Bovina 1998).

The moderator needs to be incisive if the group deviates but without influencing the group ( Krueger 1994) .

For Corrao "the role of the moderator and the degree of directivity are in close correlation with the level of structuration: more structured a focus group is, more central is the role of moderator and viceversa (Corrao 1999, 100, my translation)".

The advantage of a structured track is a better comparability of the results ex post. In fact, leaving too much room for the discussion can make the interaction difficult for some participants. Moreover sometimes it is impossible to maintain the discussion focused.

Sometimes intervening on group dynamics is indispensable. A case in point is a polemic leader who monopolizes the discussion.

Instead, the moderator should avoid consulting directly timid or reluctant people. A forced involvement can only lead to stereotypical responses or unpleasant atmosphere.

An useful piece of advice is to leave open the last part of discussion for two reasons:

- new and interesting facts could emerge
- the participants must be satisfied with the new tool and have the opportunity to express any kind of opinion

In this way you can get the comparability of data collected without losing spontaneity.

Regarding the comparability it is necessary to take into account the influence which the conduction of the moderator can exercise.

In fact, a decisive leader, who has more control over the processes and dynamics, will have his or her "style" ( Krueger 1994) that affects the performance of the focus group.

In this case, in order to make the data are comparable, it is desirable that the series focus would be conducted by the same moderator.

### **2.3.2 Interviewing as a craft.**

According to Kvale (1996), the qualitative research embodying the interpretational perspective has to follow five main principles, in particular with relation to the method of interviewing:

Principle 1: life world, that constitutes the topic of the interview;

Principle 2: meaning, which represents the goal of the researcher, such as the interpretation of what is said;

Principle 3: qualitative, the research is expressed in normal language and without an aim for quantification;

Principle 4: descriptive, the research tries to find out different aspects of the person's life;

Principle 5: specificity, the research is interested in the description of relevant situations more than in opinions.

An emphasis on the crucial role of the interviewer as a person, does not imply neglect of techniques and knowledge. However, the conception of research as a craft is important in underlining the important role of the researcher, who could be seen as a craftsman (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

“Be a good craftsman: Avoid any rigid set of procedures. Above all, seek to develop and to use the sociological imagination. Avoid the fetishism of method and technique. Urge the rehabilitation of the unpretentious intellectual craftsman, and try to become a craftsman yourself. Let everyman be his own methodologist; let theory and method again become part of the practice of a craft (C.W. Mills 1959, 225)”.

With this words in mind, I have approached interviewing trying to include personal judgment about what rules and questioning techniques to use.

“Understanding research interviewing as a method or as a craft involves different logics of practices, and melding two approaches may lead to a muddled practice and broken expectancies (Kvale and . Brinkmann 2009, 88)”.

Turning from the conceptual issues of interview research to the practical steps, I have decided to follow an idealised sequence of an interview inquiry, from the original ideas to the final report, as presented by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009).

According to the authors, the journey of an interviewer is made of seven phases:

1. Thematizing, which could be described as the “what” of the interview;
2. Designing, which means planning in advance what it is intended to do along the seven phases of the interviewing process;
3. Interviewing, which is related to the “how” of conducting an interview;
4. Transcribing, which in our case, being the recording not allowed, was simultaneous to the interview;
5. Analysing, which is related to the “meaning” of what we have found;
6. Verifying, in order to ascertain the validity (the consistency) and the reliability (the effectiveness in achieving the goal)
7. Reporting, which is related to communication of the finding to the scientific community

The interview form I have chosen is the unstructured interview.

With regard to the variations of interviews, I have drawn from Kvale and Brinkmann’s classification (2009).

In particular, two forms are suitable with my research.

Firstly, I have tried to make my interviews conceptual, in order “to explore the meaning and the conceptual dimensions of central terms, as well as their positions and links within a conceptual network (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 151)”.

Secondly, I opt for narrative interviews in order to focus on the stories the subjects tell.

I think that the first kind is more effective when interviewees are more familiar with the treated theme and can use concept and imagines to convey their thoughts.

When it is more difficult for them to express through concepts it could be useful to make them say their stories.

In any case, an open phenomenological approach to learn from the interviewee should be that expressed by Spradley (1979):

“I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain thing as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (Spradley 1979)”.

The term interview is derived from the French *entrevue*, participle past tense of the verb *entrevoir*, to glimpse.

Like many other terms, such as classification, measurement, observation, science, it means either an activity, a process, either the product of that activity. Not necessarily a product correspond to a process: in anthropology, the researcher can also interview an informant without recording at all (if not mentally) his or her answers.

Conceived as a broader activity, the interview is "a form of conversation in which two people (and recently more than two) engage in verbal and non-verbal interaction in order to reach a reviously defined goal" (Matarazzo and Wiens 1972 in Trentini 1980).

This goal can be considered of general cognitive nature. Cognitive interactions, of course, are also present outside the scientific domain, in everyday life. According to the anthropologist Briggs in Western societies "the ability to play the role of the respondents influence the probability of success in education and the profession (Briggs 1986, 1)".

The interview is defined as a "form of interaction" (Benney and Hughes 1956) or "social contact" (Gostkowski, 1974) and as such constitutes a "transaction of information" (Kahn and Cannell 1968).

You can also define the interview a "communicative event" indicating that the communication is not limited only to verbal aspects (as it includes, in addition to linguistic and para-linguistic behaviours, also the kinesic and proxemic behaviours of the involved individuals).

Voluntary nature may be considered a basic requirement: the interviewer should not in any way compel the respondent to accept the interview, nor propose fees for this service (Kahn and Cannell 1968).

Whether to accept the interview depends on the willingness of the interviewee, making it happen depends on the organization which promotes the research; the exogenous source of the initiative is one of the distinctive aspect of the interview compared to a conversation.

According to the standard methodology present in the manuals of behaviourist inspiration behaviourist, interaction should be between two actors only. Indeed, the presence of other individuals would result inevitably in some sort of influence on the interviewee and, to a certain extent, also on the interviewer.

However, many psychologists consider inopportune a numerical restriction, as evidenced by the classification interviews based on the relational structure proposed by Trentini (1980).

He identifies seven different forms of interview:

- two persons involved
- tandem (with two interviewers)

- panel (in front of a board of examiners)
- public (in which the presence of other individuals is accidental)
- collective (in which some individuals are interviewed simultaneously by the same interviewer)
- in group (in which the researcher wants to detect individual opinions, but in a context that is liable to affect such opinions, such as interviewing an individual in the presence of their family members)
- focus group (topic of the previous paragraph)

The unstructured interview seeks to "reconstruct the personality and/or the cognitive framework and values of the interviewee (Pitrone 1984).

The exploration of the "living world" (Schutz, 1932) implies that the interviewer faces the arguments "as they emerge in the conversation (Becker and Geer 1957, 323, my translation)". The interviewer can make use of a list of themes, but with the power to change both the nature and the succession.

He or she needs to "follow the thread of the interviewee allowing digressions (Livolsi 1964, 64, my translation)".

The not directive situation implies that the interviewer acts as a listener "just providing the interviewee with a set of signals in order to reassure about his or her level of attention and understanding (Borsatti and Cesa –Bianchi 1980).

Indeed, this kind of interview reflects the interests , needs and moods of respondents rather than being determined a priori by the interests of the interviewer (Wittenborn 1968).

Therefore the respondent is in a position to react more to himself than to the stimuli (Pinto 1964).

The interviewer guides the discussion only in an indirect way, trying to "re-express what the respondent says with his own perceptions (Alberoni 1967, 67, my translation)"

In order to do it, the interviewer uses the eco technique, which involves repeating an interviewee's phrase (not necessarily the last one) in order to reopen the communication (Rogers 1942).

This kind of interview needs the possession of human qualities that derive more from "an existing competence than from specific training interviews (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979, 71)".

The same opinion is shared by Statera (1982, 142, my translation), who emphasizes that "the relevance or the irrelevance of the results of the interview depends on the capacity, on intuition and on the personality of the interviewer."

# REFERENCES

Agar, M.H. (2008). *The Professional Stranger* (2nd ed.). Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Albano, R. (2010 a). Lineamenti di Teoria dell'azione organizzativa. In T.M. Fabbri (Ed.), *L'organizzazione: concetti e metodi* (pp. 39-79). Rome, Italy: Carrocci.

Albano, R. (2010 b). La ricerca intervento. In T.M. Fabbri (Ed.), *L'organizzazione: concetti e metodi* (pp. 285-310). Rome, Italy: Carrocci.

Alberoni, F (1967). L'attivista di partito. Un'indagine sui militanti di base nel PCI e nella DC.

Bailey, K.D. (1995). *Metodi della ricerca sociale*. Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino.

Becker, H. & Geer B., (1957). Participant observation and interviewing: a comparison. *Human organization*, 16(3), 28-40.

Bertin, G. (1989) *Decidere nel pubblico. Tecniche di decisione e valutazione nella gestione dei servizi pubblici*. Milan, Italy: Etas.

Bezzi, C. (2001). *Il disegno della ricerca valutativa*. Milan, Italy: Franco Angeli

Bezzi, C. & Palumbo, M. (1995). *Questionario e dintorni*. Firenze, Italy: Arnaud-Gramma.

Briggs, C. L. (1986). *Learning how to ask: a sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science Research*. Caombridge, UK.

Bruni, A. (2010 b). Etnografia organizzativa. In T.M. Fabbri (Ed.), *L'organizzazione: concetti e metodi* (pp. 455-469). Rome, Italy: Carrocci.

Cipolla, C. (1998). *Il ciclo metodologico della ricerca sociale*. Milano, Italy: Franco Angeli.

Colombo, M. (1997). Il gruppo come strumento di ricerca sociale, dalla comunità al focus group. *Studi di sociologia*, 35 (2), 205-218.

Corrao, S. (1999). Il focus group: una tecnica di rilevazione da ri-scoprire. *Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale*, 20, 60, 94-106.

Corrao, S. (2000). *Il focus group*. Milan, Italy: Franco Angeli, Milano.

Dalkey, N.C. (1968). *Predicting the future*. Santa Monica, United States: The RAND Corporation.

Del Zotto, M. (1988). I testimoni qualificati in sociologia. In A. Marradi A. (Ed.), *Costruire il dato* (pp. 132-144). Milan, Italy: Franco Angeli.

Fabbri, T.M. (2010). L'organizzazione: sistema predeterminato, entita' emergente, processo di azioni e decisioni. In T. Fabbri (Ed.), *L'organizzazione: concetti e metodi* (pp. 15-35). Rome, Italy: Carrocci.

Gioia, D. (2010). L'approccio interpretazionista nella ricerca organizzativa. In T. Fabbri (Ed.), *L'organizzazione: concetti e metodi* (pp. 123-132). Rome, Italy: Carrocci.

Gioia, D.A & Chittipeddi K. (1991). Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12(6), 433-448.

Ghoshal, S. (2005). Bad Management Theories Are Destroying Good Management Practices. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4(1), 75-91.

Gostkowski, Z. (1974). Toward empirical humanization of mass surveys. *Quality and Quantity*, 8 (1), 11-26.

Guala, C. (1991). *I sentieri della ricerca sociale*. Rome, Italy: La Nuova Italia Scientifica.

Guala, C. (2000). *Metodologia della ricerca sociale. La storia, le tecniche, gli indicatori*. Rome, Italy: Carrocci.

Justesen, L. & Mik-Meyer, N. (2012). *Qualitative research methods in organisation studies*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Kahn, R. L. & Cannell, C.F (1968). Interviewing: social research. *International Encyclopedia of the Social*, 8, 149-162.

Krueger, R.A. (1994). *Focus groups. A practical Guide for Applied Research*. Thousand Oaks, United States: Sage.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews. An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, United States: Sage.

Kvale, S., Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews. Learning the craft of qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, United States: Sage.

Livolsi, M. (1964). L'intervista non direttiva. *Ricerche motivazionali*, 1, 34-49.

Marradi A. (1992). *Costruire il dato*. Milan, Italy: Angeli.

Marradi, A. & Gasperoni, G. (1992). *Costruire il dato 2. Vizi e virtù di alcune tecniche di raccolta delle informazioni*. Milan, Italy: Angeli.

Matarazzo, G. D. and A.N. Wiens (1972). *The interview: research on its anatomy and structure*. Chicago, United States.

Merton, R.K. & Kendall, P.L. (1946). The focused interview. *American Journal of Sociology*, 51(6), 541-557.

Mills, C.W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. New York, United States, Oxford University Press.

Morgan, D. (1996). Focus group. *Annual review of sociology*, 22, 129-152.

Morgan, G. (1980). Metaphors and Puzzle Solving in Organization Theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 25(4), 605-622.

Palumbo, M. (1992). Concetti dell'uomo della strada e concetti del ricercatore. In A. Marradi and G. Gasperoni (Eds.), *Costruire il dato. 2. Vizi e virtù di alcune tecniche di raccolta delle informazioni*. Milan, Italy: Angeli.

Palumbo, M. (2001). *Il processo di valutazione. Decidere, programmare, valutare*. Milan, Italy: Franco Angeli.

Pinto, R. *Méthodes des sciences sociales*. Paris, France.

Schultz, A. (1970). *On phenomenology and Social Relations*. Chicago, United States: University of Chicago Press.

Schultz, A. & Natanson, M. (1962). *Collected Papers: The problem of social reality*. The Hague, The Netherlands: M. Nijhoff.

Sgritta, G. (1988). Conoscenza e intervento. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 39(4), 537-562.

Silverman, D. (1997). *Qualitative Research*. London, United Kingdom: Sage.

Spaltro, E. (1980). L'intervista di gruppo. In G. Trentini G. (Ed.), *Manuale del colloquio e dell'intervista*. Milan, Italy: Mondadori.

Spradley, J.P. (1979). *The ethnography interview*. Belmont, United States: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Statera, G. (1997). *La ricerca sociale. Logica, strategie, tecniche*. Rome, Italy: SEAM.

Statera, G. (1982). *Metodologia della ricerca sociale*. Palermo, Italy.

Stewart, D.W. & Shamdasani, P.N. (1990). *Focus groups. Theory and practice*. Newbury Park, United States: Sage Publications.

Templeton, J.F. (1994). *The focus group*. Chicago, United States: Probus Publishing company.

Trentini, G. (1980). *Manuale del colloquio e dell'intervista*. Milano, Italy: Mondadori.

Witterbon, J.R. (1968). Interviewing: personality appraisal. *International encyclopedia of the social sciences*, 8, 161-71.

Ziglio, E. (1996). The Delphi Method and its Contribution to Decision Making. In M. Adler M. and E.Ziglio (Eds.), *Gazing into the Oracle: The Applications of the Delphi Method to Public Policy*. London, UK: Jessica.

# **Chapter III**

## **The output of the fieldwork.**

### **First-order and second-order analysis.**

“The results of ethnographic study are thus mediated several times over – first, by the fieldworker’s own standard of relevance as to what is and what is not worthy of observation; second, by the historically situated questions that are put to the people in the setting; third by the self-reflection demanded of an informant; and fourth by the intentional and unintentional ways the produced data are misleading (Van Maanen 1979, 549)”.

Although I cannot help but agreeing with this statement, nevertheless I think that the effort to dig into the data scrupulously is rewarding. The “irreducible dilemma” of the scholars is also the trigger for a continuous search for understanding.

In this chapter all the findings will be reported according to the two different points of view. A strict and rigid separation between informants first order conception of what is going on and researcher’s second order conception of what is going on is maintained.

Therefore, all the discussed findings will be presented first through the lens of the informants and then through the researcher’s speculations.

As well expressed by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, 435) “ethnographic, interpretive research often appear ‘inverted’ while compared to the more traditional style of [strategy] research; rather than the theory driving the data gathering, the theoretical perspective is grounded in, and emerge from the first-hand data”.

Before presenting the findings and the theoretical speculations, I would like to present the main challenge I have met during my research.

From the very beginning of my qualitative work, I became aware of the difficulties to find a common language with the informants.

In fact, as already described in the introduction, participation is a very ambiguous term.

Moreover, it was soon clear that for workers participation is an inescapable element of their work.

At the focus group they shared the belief they cannot work without participating.

*“We always have to participate, we always need other in order to collaborate and work properly.”*

They did not link the term participation with some particular practices nor they seem to distinguish between Levine and Tyson (1990) distinction from consultative and substantive participation.

According to the authors, while consultative participation differs in important ways from traditional Taylorism, it should not therefore be automatically equated with worker empowerment. Power involves not just new responsibilities but the effective authority to claim resources, make decisions and alter routines. From this perspective, the consultative form of participation is most accurately characterized as a nominal—slight—change.

On the other hand, substantive empowerment, involves new responsibilities, including regular involvement in problem-solving and decision-making activities, along with formal authority and effective capacity. Hallmarks of substantive empowerment include decision making authority and lateral communication with team members and outside experts. Consultative participation, or nominal empowerment, involves active seeking of input from and/or the delegation of new responsibilities to workers, but without effective authority or regular

engagement in decision-making and problem-solving. Hallmarks of nominal empowerment include new responsibilities without authority to alter organizational routines and ability to give input but not make decisions.

From my interaction with workers I have discovered that for workers this distinction does not have any relevance.

I think that this observation is aligned with Anthony Giddens's theory of the "Duality of the Structure".

The author states that: "Structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity. Human agents always know what they are doing on the level of discursive consciousness under some description. However, what they do may be quite unfamiliar under other descriptions, and they may know little of the ramified consequences of the activities in which they engage (Giddens 1984, 26)".

In this regard, the author should be deeply aware that the informant language is not the same of the academic literature, and should be attentive to create a common ground of language, and, therefore, of reasoning.

### **3.1 The role of individual attitudes versus the role of job characteristics**

Most of the interviewed workers state that the degree of importance given to participation depends on the persons. They seem to observe and judge or comprehend their colleagues even more than themselves and they quite constantly note the variety of different personalities present at work. One worker, for example, underlines the importance of taking into account the differences among different personalities:

*“It is important to understand who can be stimulated in such a way. There are people ready, others are less ready”.*

Another firmly affirms that:

*“The 90% of workers come to work for being paid”.*

A worker talks about inevitability of participation for many workers, irrespective of the real wishes or desires to be satisfied by it:

*“There are persons who participate because they have to”.*

From my perspective, I think that it is possible to split the first-order findings in three main sub-groups. The first group of interviewees think that participation has some relative importance, but not an “absolute” importance. It is not necessary, it could be argued, to be satisfied, but it gives a contribution to it. The second cluster of interviewees is composed by people eager to be involved while the third group’s workers do not express wish to be involved, for different reasons, and even present some drawbacks.

Firstly, some workers express cautious satisfaction in the introduction of new practices of participation. This group seems to be the most representative.

*“When you are involved you are pleased, although it is not enough to get satisfied at workplace”*,

a worker says, hinting that there are other equally, or maybe, more, important aspects. Similarly others say:

*“It is obvious that if you are involved you are content, but without being paid there is no way to coming to work”*;

*“The participation is good because from it improvement arouses...however, the wages are too low”*;

*“If they ask your opinion it means that they trust you, but if they do not involve me but give me 2.000 euros, they compensate”*;

*“You could be unsatisfied for many reasons. You are unsatisfied if you do not like what you do, if they do not involve you, if the relationships with colleagues are not good”*.

Someone also introduces a thought-provoking aspect, such as the possibility that participation could bring satisfaction and more effort and work intensification at the same time:

*“It is demanding because you have to write the data down. It intensifies the work, but in the end it is worthwhile”.*

Secondly, someone goes beyond, showing that the value of participation is important in itself, without constraints.

*“From my point of view participation is fundamental”.*

Another worker adds:

*“When you are listened to, it is very gratifying. When our maintenance group meets in order to find the solution to a problem and then the problem is solved, for me it is capital”.*

Among the interviewees there are also some who do not care about being involved, for many reasons. For example, one worker says that her or his anxiety makes her/him prefer a routine task:

*“I am an anxious kind of person. I will become panic-stricken”.*

Another worker imputes to family problems his low propensity towards participation:

*“The evening I hurried because I need to help my mum going to bed... This was another motive to avoid being involved”.*

Similarly, a worker says:

*“I have not participated to participating initiatives, I have recently become granny”.*

The mainstream view suggests that satisfaction is a function of job design, and, with regard to our research question, it is a function of participative arrangements. However, the quotes above express a common belief that workers “feel” participation according to their personal, different, attitudes. As Vidal (2007, 257) has pointed out in his qualitative research, “some people are somewhere in the middle, cautious and reserved, with a few naysayers and a few enthusiasts in the tails”.

Moreover, the variability shown by the different reactions toward the opportunity to participate, questions the role of participative arrangements on workers satisfaction (Vidal 2007).

While such data question the standard (empowerment) theory on job satisfaction, they are supportive of Kalleberg’s model (1977) of job satisfaction in which individual work orientations play an important role. Through a social action frame of reference and a quantitative approach, the author states that the “variation in job satisfaction implies that two types of factors are operative: perceived job characteristics, which represent the amount of satisfaction available from particular dimensions of work, and work values, which represent the meaning that individuals attach to these perceived job characteristics (Kalleberg 1977, 127)”. Furthermore the author demonstrates that work values have independent and significant effects on job satisfaction.

Hodson (1991) interestingly adds the “behavioural” component to Kalleberg’s reasoning. Not only is the importance that workers place on aspects of their works relevant, as in Kalleberg model, but behaviours also matter as consequence of the attitudinal states. In a metaphorically way the author draws the sketches of workers typologies contrasting “smooth operators”, interested to their own

personal goal and likely satisfied versus “good soldiers”, committed to organisation goals but not necessarily satisfied.

It is noteworthy saying that Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) even suggest that the workers can construct their own satisfaction through selective perception and interpretation of their world, without relying on an externally imposed task environment.

## 3.2 What is really important for workers

Interestingly, there is a common belief that participation improves the “quality of work”. With the term “quality of work” the workers convey an idea of a work with less wastes in terms of time and effort.

So, for instance, a worker says:

*“The reporting of machine times is time-consuming, but at the end, when you see that the problem is resolved and that there is less wasted time, yes, you are satisfied”.*

Another explains the concept as follows:

*“Regulating a machine become much easier...and you work better”.*

Similarly another says:

*“If the machines do not stop you work really better, with less fatigue”.*

However, there are workers that prefer to find the solution to a problem autonomously, without following the participative initiatives, that are perceived as rigid, and they find satisfaction out of it. Here some enlightening examples:

*“I like to do work on my way, without being told what to do...and if they give me my space I go beyond my task”.*

*“I came from a craft environment , I am used to autonomous work.”*

The craft pride resonates in some interviews as something more satisfying than participation, and, in a way, incompatible with it. No matter how management decides to organise the work, a craft pride survives.

When the interviews go a little beyond the boundaries of participation, and the workers think about when they feel satisfied, becomes clear that other values matter for workers.

The workers I have talked with want to have good interpersonal relations, both with co-workers and with managers, experience fairness, be treated with dignity, be listened to and experience good communicative processes. Here some quotes:

*“For me satisfaction is achieving the goal and getting on well with anyone”;*

*“The fact that your opinion matters, means a lot for me”;*

*“Sometimes you need to consult with a supervisor but he is in a meeting ...if there was more communication between them and us, there would be more satisfaction”.*

*“Dissatisfaction is seeing people avoiding effort. They are not punished and it is unfair towards us”.*

During a focus group an interesting debate started on the relative importance of intrinsic satisfaction toward extrinsic satisfaction:

*Worker 1(temporary): Without extrinsic satisfaction there could not be intrinsic satisfaction. I can do my duty, but without money I would not have self-esteem and I would stop being committed”.*

*Worker 2 (permanent): “But what if I ask you to shovel for 8 hours a day for 2 thousands euro a month [nearly double their wage] ?You would not be satisfied neither in that case”.*

*Worker 1: “Yes...but it is necessary the extrinsic satisfaction to have the intrinsic one”.*

*Worker 3 (permanent): “We need both for all the working life. The economic factor is not the only one, but there are other elements...”.*

Although this research is exclusively based on qualitative methods, it is important to distinguish between the terms “moderator” and “mediator” when defining the variables involved in the research.

A moderator is “a qualitative or quantitative variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable (Baron and Kelly 1986, 1174)” while a variable acts as a mediator when three conditions occur (Baron and Kelly 1986):

1. Variations in the levels of independent variable (X) cause variations in the mediator;
2. Variations in the mediator cause variations in the dependent variable (Y);
3. When the above paths are controlled, a previous relevant relation between X and Y is no longer significant.

From Baron and Kelly (1986) we withdraw the conceptual distinction between the two kinds of variable.

Moderator variables, according to the authors, are used in social science when there is an unexpectedly weak relation between a

predictor and a criterion variable (for example if the relation holds in one setting but not in another or for one subpopulation but not for another). With regard to mediating variables, for research where the individual is the relevant unit of analysis, they represent properties of the person that transform the predictor or input variables in some way.

The former goal recalls the role of the “quality of work”, expressed by the above workers quotes, between participation and satisfaction. Quality of work, as a potential result of participation, contributes to elicit satisfaction because work is smoother, more fluid. Workers seem not to see a direct and straightforward link between participation and satisfaction. In fact, when asked about if and how participation affects satisfaction they pause before answering. Then, they talk about one evident effect of participation, the improvement of the way of working, which I have previously called “quality of work”. Consequently, they are more satisfied.

However, the quality of work, is also an effect of the craft, autonomous work. This observation is very consistent with Hodson’s findings (1996).

The 1964’s book of Robert Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom*, considered as a benchmark in the sociology of work, illustrates the historical sequence of technological systems claiming a U-shaped curve for freedom and meaning passing from craft production to continuous-process technology (Hodson, 1996). However, the “driving force behind productivity increases” (Hodson 1996) shifts from being related to technologies to being determined by organisational design, in particular with reference to participative patterns (Hodson 1996). According to Hodson (1996), Edwards provides the most articulate and influential version of the labor-process control model, which describes the workplace experiences not only determined by technology, but often by the struggle over control between owners and workers.

Very stimulating, to this regard, is the combination of elements of Blauner's and Edward's models in the Hodson's new model of workplace organisation. (Hodson 1996).

WORPLACE ORGANISATION	CHARACTERISTICS
Craft	High level of formal and informal training give workers controls over daily decisions.
Direct Supervision	Daily operating decisions are made by a supervisor.
Assembly Line	Power driven conveyors are used to bring parts to the workers.
Bureaucratic	Daily decisions are made on the basis of codified rules.
Worker participation	Formal solicitation of worker inputs occur on a regular basis

Hodson (1996, 772)

Furthemore, following Hodson reasoning, it would be useful to divide workers' experiences in two realms: a task-related realm in which workers interface with technology and management – job satisfaction, pride, insider knowledge, level of effort expanded - and a co-worker-related realm in which workers interface with their peers – solidarity, peer training, social friendships.

According to Hodson “the highest levels of freedom and self-actualization are achieved under a craft organisation of production. Levels of freedom and self-actualization decline in subsequent forms

of production, but partially recover under participative organisations of productive (1996, 734)".

Rather than Blauner's U-shaped curve of falling then rising freedom and self-actualization, the pattern is similar to a reverse J-shape in which, under participative arrangements, there is no a complete recovery. In particular Hodson underlines that "the incomplete nature of the recovery is especially evident for co-worker related aspects of work: solidarity, peer training and social friendships (1996, 734)".

In addition we can understand why, while some workers fully expressed their craft pride, other are more adaptable, through the words of March and Simon in Vidal (2007): "Repeated failure to discover acceptable alternatives leads generally to a redefinition of acceptable (March and Simon 1993, 136 in Vidal 2007, 275)."

The interviewed workers clearly expressed that what really matter are good interpersonal relations, both with co-workers and with managers, experiencing fairness, being treated with dignity, being listened to and experiencing good communicative processes.

Also the extrinsic aspect of wages matters, although it is difficult to give a relative weight to it.

Our findings of what really matters for workers fit in some way with the definition that Vidal gives of "good jobs". "Good jobs are those that offer some autonomy with relatively high wages and security or have low autonomy but offer relatively high wages, security and opportunity for training and promotion (Vidal 2013, 600)".

# REFERENCES

Baron, R., & Kenny D.A. 1986. The Moderator-Mediator Variable Distinction in Social Psychological Research: Conceptual, Strategic, and Statistical Consideration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(6), 1173-1182.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Gioia, D.A & Chittipeddi K. (1991). Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12(6), 433-448.

Hodson, R. (1991). Workplace behaviors: good soldier, smooth operators, and saboteurs. *Work and Occupation*, 18(3), 271-290.

Hodson, R. (1996). Dignity in the workplace under participative management: alienation and freedom revisited. *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), 719-738.

Kalleberg, A.L (1977). Work values and job rewards: a theory of job satisfaction. *American Sociological Review*, 42(1), 124-133.

Kelly, J. (1992). Does job re-design theory explain job re-design outcomes? *Human Relations*, 45(8), 753-774.

Levine, D.I. & Tyson, L.D. A. (1990). Participation, Productivity, and the Firm's Environment'. In A.S. Blinder (Ed.), *Paying for Productivity: A Look at the Evidence*. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution.

Salancik, G.R & Pfeffer, J. (1978). A social information processing approach to job attitudes and task design. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 23(2), 224-253.

Van Maanen, J. (1979). The fact of fiction in organisational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24 (4), 539-550.

Vidal, M. (2007). Lean production, worker empowerment and job satisfaction: a qualitative analysis and critique. *Critical Sociology*, 33, 247-278.

Vidal, M. (2013). Low-autonomy work and bad jobs in postfordist capitalism. *Human Relations*, 66(4), 587-612.

Walton, R. (1985). From Control To Commitment in the Workplace. *Harvard Business Review*, 53 (2), 77-84.

# CONCLUSION

The debate on the effects of the new work model – the so called High Performance Work Systems – in terms of improvement of the economic and productive performance shows a substantial convergence in stating that the effects are positive.

Although the origins of this study can be placed in the second half of the eighties (see Walton 1985), the focus on the new models has increased significantly since the mid-nineties, when the evidence about the existence of a positive link between the introduction of “high commitment” practices and performance has become more solid (McDuffie 1995, Ichniowski et al. 1997; for Italy see Cristini et al. 2003).

However, a part of the literature questions the adoption of HPWS as a sort of panacea capable of generating benefits for both the company and the workers all the times.

In fact, if the advantages for companies are generally not challenged, there is a fertile debate about the effects on workers.

In the dominant view, emerging models of organization and management of work rely heavily on the enhancement of the contribution that workers can provide with their knowledge, skills and experiences as a means to raise (or maintain high) levels of competitiveness of the enterprise.

The analytical model underlying these approaches shows that, in these contexts, the competitive advantage does not arise from the mere application of a set of practices defined a priori. In fact it can be reached only when the application of these practices gives rise to an increase of the degree of commitment towards the organization.

This concept is well illustrated by Appelbaum et al . (2000 ) in their important research on the new organization of work. According to this approach , new working practices appear to be more able to get the "discretionary effort" of workers to the extent that they provide the

opportunity for the workers to participate, the presence of policies to ensure adequate skills and the adoption of incentive compensation's mechanisms.

Modern enterprises have a great new challenge that is to increase the degree of commitment of employees, aligning their goals with those of the company.

The role of mediation between the introduction of new forms of work organization and organizational performance is then entrusted to the worker. Moreover, the required discretionary effort is not a purely quantitative commitment, but it is rather qualitative, linked to the idea (popular since the early thirties) that the workers are very familiar with the ways to improve their work (Handel and Levine 2004).

Appelbaum et al. (2000), in their study on more than 4 thousand workers of three American manufacturing sectors (iron and steel, clothing, medicine and electronics), suggest that the (positive) effects of HPWS on the welfare of workers are mediated by the increased trust that is established between them and the managers, as well as the intrinsic rewards that HPWP offer to those who are involved in their adoption.

According to this view (Handel and Levine 2004), the HPWS allow to reach win-win solutions between companies and workers, with workers providing ideas and in return receiving higher wages, having greater security of keeping one's place of work and getting an intangible reward which increases their level of satisfaction and motivation.

However, what is questioned, in particular, is whether the positive effects on company performance result from the degree of satisfaction and commitment of employees or rather from an intensification of the required efforts.

Analysing studies in the last fifteen years, there are two main schools of thought, each with various internal nuances.

On one hand, the most optimistic visions emphasize the magnitude of the transformative changes taking place with respect to a Tayloristic view.

In this view, the management should attribute greater powers to workers (empowerment), make work more satisfactory; and create a more challenging environment.

In short, there is a turning point from the "management of control" to the "management of commitment" (Walton 1985), a sort of revolution of work which should align the interests of employees with those of their managers and improve productivity (Smith 1997).

Differently, a deep criticism can be found in the theoretical approach of the Labour Process Theory, with regard to socio-economic discipline, and in the Critical Management Studies for the management literature.

These visions challenge the innovative scope of the changes and believe that nothing has changed regarding to traditional forms of hierarchical control and authority in labour relations.

On the contrary, these controls have been enhanced through the strategic use of language participatory.

Ramsay et al. (2000), in an important contribution, identify and empirically test three theories that explain the results of the new practices on the welfare of workers and, therefore, on the company. One explanation is the conventional one of HPWS, according to which the new practices increase the commitment improving the business performance. This explanation is characterized by two variants. The variant High Commitment Management (HCM) puts pressure on the effects of HPWS on the commitment of workers, while the variant High Involvement Management (HIM) highlights the importance of discretion. The third explanation, identified as the critical Labour Process (LP), argues that capitalist systems are characterized by a systematic trend towards the intensification of

work. The managers are constantly trying to make workers work more to get the maximum possible contribution from labour.

While all the positions bind the managerial techniques to a higher performance and in the same way see a positive association between HPWS and the discretion of the workers, for LP theories this leads directly or indirectly to labour intensification and, consequently, more stress.

I was interested in studying the dynamics of these variable within a particular context: a cooperative of wine producers.

In the definition of my research problem, I have found inspiring the work of Vidal (2007), who questions the HPWS's scholars optimistic assumption of the positive association between participatory practices and HRM positive attitudes (such as job satisfaction). Participating in the Advanced Manufacturing Project research consortium, Vidal interviewed 55 people throughout nine firms which declared to have implemented practices associated with HPWS.

Vidal demonstrates that workers can be unmotivated and unsatisfied under participatory arrangements while they can perceive traditionally organised jobs as challenging; furthermore, motivation appears to be unrelated to satisfaction.

The choice to implement qualitative methods gave him the opportunity to overcome the limits of the quantitative analyses (predominant in the studies of HPWS).

“First, by definition dispositions, orientations...and perceptions vary across individuals. Second, configurations of dispositions, orientations are not static and stable but potentially subject to more or less reflective based on the degree to which work situations, among other experiences, diverge from or conflict with expectations and other aspects of the worker orientation or disposition (Vidal 2007)”.

On the basis of my practical experience as Lean consultant, I believe that the personality, but not only personality, could mediate effects of participation on satisfaction.

In the informal pilot study I have conducted in order to address my research, I have found other interesting elements that affect the participation.

Moreover, others elements are far more important, such as extrinsic rewards, acknowledgement of one's own work, communication of the achievements, and, most of all, good relations with colleagues and supervisors.

As the prevalent quantitative research on the subject has been contradictory and even statistically significant correlations are usually of small magnitude (Vidal 2007), I have decided to follow Vidal's move to qualitative research in order to investigate such relationship more deeply.

The cooperative at stake is a cooperative consisting of 34 partner wineries and 13.000 wine growers from throughout the leading wine regions of Italy.

The Human Resources Department has been introducing several participative arrangements referable to Lean Production Systems and High Performance Work Systems, such as qualitative circles, groups of workers committed to identify solutions to working problems together.

In the Ethic Code, the mutualistic scope has been made clear in relation to the mission of the cooperative. In particular it states that persons, being them producers or workers, are at the centre of the production.

Therefore, two main aspects made the choice of my case study interesting:

- the introduction of participating arrangements referable to the new practices object of this study;

- the nature of the cooperative company that makes the subject of participation and satisfaction one of vital importance for the organisation.

I believe that this working environment is a privileged one to study the effects of participation on satisfaction. Given that my goal is to demonstrate the complexity of such relationship and to question the empowerment job theory, it could be argued that if the mainstream theory fails to be verified in such a case, it should be even more questionable in other less virtuous cases.

The cooperative object of study has 490 workers. The Wine Division, based in Forlì and focus of my study, has 250 employees and 140 workers. Around 100 workers (50 in the 5 focus groups and 50 individually interviewed) were involved in my qualitative study.

The orientation of the researcher towards a specific conception of organisation implies deciding, interpretative and practical choices with regard to any knowledge problem (Fabbri 2010). Since theoretical perspectives are, to a certain extent, analytical constructs, it is possible to encounter research work that is difficult to place with a single, unambiguous perspective (Justesen and Mik-Meyer 2012).

However, I can say without ambiguity that I feel more commonalities with the phenomenology perspective than with realist or constructivist perspectives. I firmly believe that it is important to give a voice to who is experiencing the phenomenon (Gioia 2010).

Adopting a phenomenological perspective has a number of methodological consequences: the researcher, not neutral, as in the realist perspective, is able to empathize with others' world and focuses on the unique experience instead of looking for generalisation. (Justesen and Mik-Meyer 2012). With regard to the qualitative methods I adopt, I opt for not-structured interviews that "aimed at extracting examples from the interviewee's everyday life" and for focus-group to investigate the intersubjective aspect of the phenomenon.

From the very beginning of my field work I have discovered that workers have their own personal idea of the meaning of participation and they, for example, do not distinguish among consultative and substantive participation.

I think that this observation is aligned with Anthony Giddens's theory of the "Duality of the Structure".

The author states that: "Structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity. Human agents always know what they are doing on the level of discursive consciousness under some description. However, what they do may be quite unfamiliar under other descriptions, and they may know little of the ramified consequences of the activities in which they engage (Giddens 1984, 26)".

In this regard, the author should be aware that the informant's language is not the same of the academic literature, and should be attentive to create a common ground of language, and, therefore, of reasoning.

After several months of fieldwork, I have collected some findings.

The mainstream view suggests that satisfaction is a function of job design, and, with regard to my research question, it is a function of participative arrangements. However, the collected workers' quotes express a common belief that workers "feel" participation according to their personal, different, attitudes. As Vidal (2007, 257) has pointed out in his qualitative research, "some people are somewhere in the middle, cautious and reserved, with a few naysayers and a few enthusiasts in the tails".

Moreover, the variability shown by the different reactions toward the opportunity to participate questions the role of participative arrangements on workers satisfaction (Vidal 2007).

While such data question the standard (empowerment) theory on job satisfaction, they are supportive of Kalleberg's model (1977) of

job satisfaction in which individual work orientations play an important role. Through a social action frame of reference and a quantitative approach, the author states that the “variation in job satisfaction implies that two types of factors are operative: perceived job characteristics, which represent the amount of satisfaction available from particular dimensions of work, and work values, which represent the meaning that individuals attach to these perceived job characteristics (Kalleberg 1977, 127)”. Furthermore the author demonstrates that work values have independent and significant effects on job satisfaction.

A second finding of my research was the role of the variable “quality of work” between participation and satisfaction. Quality of work, as a potential result of participation, contributes to elicit satisfaction because work is smoother, more fluid. Workers appear not to see a direct and straightforward link between participation and satisfaction. In fact, when asked about if and how participation affects satisfaction, they pause before answering. Then, they talk about one evident effect of participation, the improvement of the way of working, which I have previously called “quality of work”. Consequently, they are more satisfied.

With this qualitative research, not only is the term participation redimensioned, but it is also clear that what really matters for workers is good interpersonal relations, both with co-workers and with managers, experiencing fairness, being treated with dignity, being listened to and experiencing good communicative processes.

Also the extrinsic aspect of wages matters, although it is difficult to give a relative weight to it.

Our findings of what really matters for workers fit in some way with the definition that Vidal gives of “good jobs”: “good jobs are those that offer some autonomy with relatively high wages and security or have low autonomy but offer relatively high wages, security and opportunity for training and promotion (Vidal 2007)”.

# REFERENCES

Appelbaum, E., Bailey, T., Berg, P. & Kalleberg, A.L. (2000). *Manufacturing Advantage. Why High Performance Work Systems Pay Off*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

Baron, R., & Kenny D.A. 1986. The Moderator-Mediator Variable Distinction in Social Psychological Research: Conceptual, Strategic, and Statistical Consideration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(6), 1173-1182.

Cristini, A., Gaj, A., Labory S. and Leoni R. (2003). Flat Hierarchical Structure, Bundles of New Work Practices and Firm Performance. *Rivista Italiana degli Economisti*, 2, 313-341.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Gioia, D.A & Chittipeddi K. (1991). Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12(6), 433-448.

Hodson, R. (1991). Workplace behaviors: good soldier, smooth operators, and saboteurs. *Work and Occupation*, 18(3), 271-290.

Hodson, R. (1996). Dignity in the workplace under participative management: alienation and freedom revisited. *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), 719-738.

Ichniowski, C., Shaw, K., Prennushi, G. (1997). The Effects of Human Resource Management Practices on Productivity: A Study of Steel Finishing Lines. *The American Economic Review*, 87 (3), 291-313.

Kalleberg, A.L (1977). Work values and job rewards: a theory of job satisfaction. *American Sociological Review*, 42(1), 124-133.

Kelly, J. (1992). Does job re-design theory explain job re-design outcomes? *Human Relations*, 45(8), 753-774.

Levine, D.I. & Tyson, L.D. A. (1990). Participation, Productivity, and the Firm's Environment'. In A.S. Blinder (Ed.), *Paying for Productivity: A Look at the Evidence*. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution.

MacDuffie, J.P. (1995). Human Resource Bundles and Manufacturing Performance: Organizational Logic and Flexible Production Systems in the World Auto Industry. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 48, 197-221.

Salancik, G.R & Pfeffer, J. (1978). A social information processing approach to job attitudes and task design. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 23(2), 224-253.

Smith, V. (1997). New Forms of Work Organizations. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23(3), 315-339.

Van Maanen, J. (1979). The fact of fiction in organisational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24 (4), 539-550.

Vidal, M. (2007). Lean production, worker empowerment and job satisfaction: a qualitative analysis and critique. *Critical Sociology*, 33, 247-278.

Vidal, M. (2013). Low-autonomy work and bad jobs in postfordist capitalism. *Human Relations*, 66(4), 587-612.

Walton, R. (1985). From Control To Commitment in the Workplace. *Harvard Business Review*, 53 (2), 77-84.