**ADAPT FEEDBACK ON SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW AND PILOT WORKSHOP**

*Our unit of analysis*

We conducted the pilot workshop on December 20, 2017, with and employers' representative of agricultural companies (male, 32 years old) and a trade unionist from CGIL-General Confederation of Italian Workers (female, 30 years old). The workshop was also participated by a post doc researcher with an expertise on managing workers affected by chronical disease (female, 29 years old) and Ph.D. student (male, 25 years old).

We also conducted 4 semi-structured interviews with the following persons:

* 2 trade unions officials from one on the main trade unions federations in the metalworking industry in Italy. The first one (female, 43 years old) is responsible for companies based in Lazio region. The second one (female, 30 years old) works at collective bargaining department of the Lombardy region.
* 1 official from the lead employers’ association for the Modern Retail sector in Italy, working at the national department for labour policies and welfare (male, 35 years old).
* 1 official from the main employers' association of agricultural companies (male, 32 years old).

The following information reflect both the contents of the background interview and the pilot workshop.

*Common views and positions*

All people interviewed and involved in the workshop looked generally enthusiastic about active ageing in general and the project in particular. The general impression was that, although the promotion of active ageing is not among the priorities of social partners in Italy, the issue is starting to be considered following some pressures from their members. This is in line with the traditional Italian logic of collective action according to which trade unions and employers’ associations strategies are shaped and influenced from problems emerging at the shop floor. Therefore, social partners tend to recognise that active aging is an issue of considerable concern, but it needs time to go on top of their agendas. This is also why active ageing measures in collective agreements are still scarce.

(Some) interviewees and participants to the workshop tried to elaborate their own definition of what active ageing is. They are not aware of technical definitions or of the debate in literature. They generally have in mind the idea that the working population is ageing, workers will stay longer at work, and these trends necessitate specific responses to manage the related challenges and take the opportunities. They generally agree that “sustainability” is the keyword to approach the issue: this means to keep older workers productive and to allow them to respond to the increasing work-life balance demands. In this connection, the industrial relations approach is generally perceived as a better way to reconcile sustainability with productivity.

Particularly in the workshop, participants stressed the importance to contextualize active ageing within a wider conceptual framework to understand and manage changes in society, economy and the labour market as a whole. The discussion involved the theoretical foundations of contemporary society and capitalism. Problems linked to active ageing must be addressed in a broader discourse of a new social contract that fits for all. They also highlighted the importance to understand active ageing as a life-long learning process as well the centrality of occupational welfare and related measures. Personally, I think that this discussion was very much fuelled by the educational level and sensibility of the two representatives involved in the workshop and it didn’t reflect at all the general understanding and perception of the problem by social partners.

Finally, apart from one case, social partners seem to be generally unaware of technical aspects related to statutory legislation (e.g. some contractual schemes, incentives etc.) potentially useful to support active ageing policies.

*The position of employers’ associations*

Employers’ associations tend to take a bottom-up approach to active ageing. They mainly act in response to companies’ requests. Therefore, they mainly play a consultancy role for their members. Their labour law and industrial relations departments – which normally carry out consultancy activities toward their members – is competent on active ageing. Active ageing is a priority for the federation to the extent that it is a priority for their members. An interviewee state that: “We believe this is a critical issue for our members and its relevance will increase in the next few years. Skills shortages coupled with ageing workforce put pressure on our members, thus retaining older workers, ensuring their sustainability, and allowing them to transfer value to new generation of workers become priorities”.

Employers’ associations argue that there is a divide between bigger and smaller companies. Big companies tend to address the problem of an ageing workforce as a priority. SMEs are less attentive on this issue. On the other hand, big companies are also those where more structured MRM departments exist: they tend to involve the federation in case of very technical issues, mainly concerned with the interpretation of normative provisions, or when there is a specific need to be addressed to public institutions. Moreover, MNEs are those where HRM takes place in a cultural environment most favourable to concentrate on active ageing. An interviewee referred to German companies operating in Italy as a good example in this respect.

In general, the approach of employers’ associations to active ageing tends to strike a balance between sustainability and productivity of an ageing workforce. According to an interviewee, the policy rationale is “to combine the needs of older workers, in terms of work-life-balance, health and safety and motivation, with the need of the companies to keep workers productive”. These aspects are seen as two sides of a same coin in principle. However, in some contexts is much more difficult to combine them, because short-termism tends to prevail in HRM. Workers wellbeing in general, is considered as a cost: the return in terms of productivity is not immediate. Active ageing, in contrast, necessitates investment and a long-term perspective: this is the high-road to productivity.

In this connection, the industrial relations approach is perceived as a better way to reconcile sustainability with productivity: “The important is that trade unions have a collaborative and proactive approach to this topic and not a conflictual one. If trade unions are keen to collaborate on active ageing policies their support becomes fundamental, as they better know the needs of the workforce”. A company’s firm-level agreement, which was agreed by management and workers’ representatives, establishes a so-called positive action committee which is tasked with proposing initiatives and solutions for promoting diversity and inclusion, also through a company project called ‘inclusion and diversity’, and monitoring the actions of the company’s active ageing project designed to support the activities and the potential of employees over the age of 55. This was reported as a good example of how cooperative industrial relations can result in good measures to promote active ageing at company level.

Collective bargaining is also fundamental when it comes to implement some normative provisions to promote active ageing or intergenerational relay schemes. However, both companies and workers’ representatives are rather sceptical on this issue, as that kind of measures implicates an added cost for companies or a reduced net income for workers.

Beyond collective bargaining, bilateral bodies are also mentioned as a source of regulation and financing of active ageing policies. Training, income support in case of working time reduction or any kind of welfare measure directed to older workers can be potentially covered by bilateral bodies. However, in most cases such opportunities are unknown.

*The position of trade unions*

Trade unions are clear that active ageing should be addressed bilaterally. This is because active ageing is an issue of common concern for both employers and workers. Sustainability is the keyword to approach the issue: this means to keep older workers productive and to allow them to respond to the increasing work-life balance demands.

Nonetheless, trade unions are also clear that active ageing is not a priority for trade unions so far. They are vocal against the Government when it comes to pension reforms; but active ageing policies are hardly settled and implemented. Instead, what emerge is that companies, especially the big ones, tend to address this issue unilaterally. This is unfortunate because managing the issue at company level, or without trade unions coordination, risks create dualism in the labour market. Indeed, just the most profitable and structured companies are keen to invest on active ageing, while on average firms are too much concerned on labour cost and short-term management of older workers’ problems.

This problem is likely to intensify in the metalworking industry because of technological change. The opinion on this aspect is twofold: on the one hand, automatization makes production more sustainable for workers as workers, including older workers, are less and less requested to carry out heavy activities; on the other hand, job polarisation and skill changes risk to penalise older workers. Risks seems to prevail over opportunities. Thus trade unions should act in order to ameliorate and mitigate the technological effect on the older workforce.

In terms of levels of collective action, an interviewee argued that multi-employer bargaining is essential to give universality to the agreed measures. It is important to guarantee a combination of bargaining levels: resources and institutions should be agreed at a national level; then the local level of negotiation should implement and modulate them. In this connection, the trade unions’ representative gave a positive evaluation of some economic incentives that the law recognises in favour of work-life balance measures agreed in firm-level collective agreements. These measures should be spent also to fund programmes focused on older workers. Training programmes, mentoring actions and working-time organisation are key elements that should be negotiated by social partners.

A final comment was given on the wage structure and its rigidity. A provocative question was asked about the fairness of a wage system where older workers produce less and earn more while young workers produce more and earn less. The trade unions’ representative said that this is largely a false problem: it is not necessarily true that older workers produce less and earn more. However, the interviewee also recognises the importance that wages should be based more on competences than on seniority.

*Structure of the workshops*

In terms of structure of the workshop and possible improvements, we and the participants noticed the following:

* Repetitive questions/answers: in most cases different questions lead to same answers, or the persons involved in the workshop tend to digress beyond the limit of a specific question, covering also other issues which make inappropriate other questions afterward.
* How to prepare toolkit and dissemination: the internet must be complemented with face-to-face relationships as social partners are generally unprepared to use IT instruments.
* Importance to involve trade unions federations of retired workers: they are a good channel of dissemination and lobbying, also towards sectoral federations internal to the same confederations which are generally more preoccupied with contingencies.
* Workshops should last no more than 1 and 1/2 hour.
* Better to involve both sides of industry.
* Better to circulate preliminary information or even questions among the participants.