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Towards Fair and Inclusive Employment Relations: Business as an Agent of Social Change Through Corporate Social Responsibility, Integrated Corporate Welfare, and Workplace Safety at Work

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1. *Corporate Social Responsibility as an operational tool to address EDI challenges*

Corporate Social Responsibility today represents an operational paradigm through which organizations can concretely address the challeng-

es of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)[1]. Historically understood as a response to external pressures or compliance with regulatory standards, CSR has gradually evolved towards a more conscious and systemic vision of corporate responsibility, where businesses are no longer considered isolated economic entities, but rather significant players within a complex social ecosystem[2]. Contemporary businesses possess the capacity and, increasingly, the conscious responsibility to become active players in combating inequality and promoting inclusive work environments. This transformation can be interpreted as a strategic choice based on the awareness that structural inequalities – gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation – represent not only a social justice issue, but also an economic inefficiency that leads to a loss of talent, reduced productivity, and weakened organizational resilience[3].

1.1. *The company as an agent of social change*

A company that deliberately invests in CSR policies transforms itself into a conscious agent of social change, capable of exerting a positive influence on the local area, the community, internal labor relations, and, more generally, society as a whole[4]. This transformation involves a profound reinterpretation of the traditional business model, where profit is no longer the sole guiding value, but rather one of how the company also pursues a social purpose.

From this perspective, CSR is a conceptual and operational framework through which organizations define their policies for promoting equality in the workplace and protecting rights[5]. These are not simply episodic actions or greenwashing communications, but rather systemic, measurable, and monitorable interventions over time, integrated into corporate governance and the organization's overall strategy[6].

[1] Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[2] Porter, Kramer, *Creating Shared Value*, in *HBR*, 2011.

[3] Aa.Vv., *Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters*, McKinsey & Company Report, 2020.

[4] Donaldson, Preston, *The Stakeholder Theory of the Corporation: Concepts, Evidence, and Implications*, in *AMR*, 1995.

[5] Ballucchi, Furlotti, *La responsabilità sociale delle imprese. Un percorso verso lo sviluppo sostenibile. Profili di governance e accountability*, Giappichelli, 2024.

[6] Visser, *The Age of Responsibility: CSR 2.0 and the New DNA of Business*, John Wiley &

1.2. *The role of the company's employee stakeholder*

A central element in the contemporary redefinition of CSR is the recognition of the employee not just as a productive resource, but as a primary stakeholder in the organization. Stakeholder Theory suggests that a company's lasting success depends on its ability to create value not only for capital owners, but for a variety of stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, customers, local communities, and the environment[7]. In this framework, employees represent a primary stakeholder not only because they are contractually obligated to receive a salary, but also because they are the custodians of fundamental rights: the right to safe and dignified working conditions, the right to non-discrimination, the right to reconcile work and personal responsibilities, the right to professional and personal development, and the right to respect for their dignity and uniqueness. Considering the employee as a central stakeholder means that company policies can be designed and implemented with the informed participation of workers themselves, through constructive dialogue.

2. *Integrated corporate welfare as a tool for equality and inclusion*

Corporate welfare can be defined as an integrated, multidimensional system of services, benefits, and policies designed to support work-life balance, promote gender equality, facilitate shared and equal parenting, and ensure the inclusion of all workers[8]. It's not just a heterogeneous collection of financial benefits (meal vouchers, supplemental insurance, vouchers), but a holistic approach to employee well-being that recognizes the different dimensions of human life and the need for integration between work and personal life.

The integrated corporate welfare system operates on multiple levels.

Sons, 2011.

[7] Mitchell, Agle, Wood, *Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of Who and What Really Counts*, in *AMR*, 1997.

[8] Treu, *Welfare aziendale. Welfare territoriale e multi-employer, post-pandemia e smart-working*, Wolters Kluwer, 2023.

First, it recognizes how workers' quality of life outside of the production environment directly influences their ability to contribute effectively to their work. It also makes organizations aware that attracting and retaining top talent depends not only on monetary compensation, but also on opportunities for personal and professional development, the quality of the work environment, trust in leadership, and the recognition of human dignity within the organization.

2.1. *Integrated welfare as a response to demographic and social challenges*

Integrated welfare represents a concrete and informed response to the contemporary demographic and social challenges facing European and Italian societies. The aging population, the structural decline in birth rates, the increasing complexity of care responsibilities (elderly care, childcare, and assistance for family members with disabilities), and the evolution of family structures (single-parent families, same-sex couples, and blended families) require companies to profoundly rethink their employee support systems[9].

In Italy, despite legislative progress in recent decades, a significant gender gap persists in terms of labor market participation, access to managerial positions, and, above all, reconciling professional and family responsibilities.

The female employment rate in Italy remains among the lowest in the European Union, standing at around 52%, while the burden of domestic and care work still falls overwhelmingly on women. In this context, tools such as paternity leave, care services, flexible working hours, structured smart working, and healthcare support are not simply corporate benefits, but strategic tools that redefine gender norms in the workplace and promote a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities.

[9] Rizza, Bonvicini, *Attori e territori del welfare. Innovazioni nel welfare aziendale e nelle politiche di contrasto all'impoverimento*, FrancoAngeli, 2014.

2.2. *Integrated welfare and gender equality*

The implementation of targeted welfare policies represents a concrete operational tool for reducing the gender gap and promoting real equal opportunities in the workplace[10]. Several significant interventions stand out:

- Shared and equal parenting: Equal leave policies (extended paternity leave, equal pay for men and women during leave) that implement traditional gender norms that assign fathers a secondary role in childcare.
- Work flexibility: Smart working, flexible hours, and the ability to temporarily reduce working hours for caregiving responsibilities allow for a more equitable distribution of work and family life, particularly benefiting women, who traditionally bear the brunt of domestic and care work.
- Care Services: Company-based daycare, eldercare, and home support services are mechanisms 'through' which companies share responsibility for ensuring their employees can effectively balance their professional and family responsibilities.
- Pay equity: Explicit pay auditing policies, transparent pay grades, and regular pay review mechanisms are essential to ensure that historical pay gaps based on gender stereotypes are not perpetuated.

3. *Case studies: the historical and contemporary system of corporate welfare*

The Italian tradition of corporate welfare has its roots in the past, characterized by enlightened entrepreneurs who, already between the 19th and 20th centuries, recognized the inseparable link between workers' well-being and that of the company. Although sometimes characterized by a paternalistic dimension, these pioneering experiences represent the foundation upon which modern awareness of corporate social responsibility is built.

3.1. *Olivetti: The Humanist Model of Corporate Welfare*

Adriano Olivetti's story represents a turning point in the modern concept of corporate welfare[11]. When Adriano Olivetti took over his father's

[10] OECD, *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, 2019.

[11] Olivetti S.p.A. is an Italian company operating in the information technology sector,

factory in Ivrea in 1932, it was not yet "corporate welfare" in the contemporary sense of the term; however, his deeply humanistic nature – despite his rigorously technical training in chemical engineering – led him to care for his employees not only as professionals, but as individuals, with a dignity that transcended the simple employment relationship. Adriano Olivetti was not just an entrepreneur, but a visionary who combined industrial skill, social sensitivity, and humanistic vision in a way that was entirely unique in the business landscape of the time. Driven by an awareness of the times and the need to combine industrial development with the affirmation of human rights, Adriano Olivetti revolutionized the business model, transforming the workplace into a place of cultural and personal enrichment[12].

The "Olivetti recipe" for a "human-scale" company was based on principles that are still extraordinarily contemporary today. Starting from his statement, "the factory cannot focus solely on profitability. It must distribute wealth, culture, services, and democracy. I think the factory is for people, not people for the factory", it can be said that his vision represented a Copernican revolution compared to the forms of capitalism of the time and a reversal of the traditional industrial paradigm. Not man at the service of the factory, but the factory at the service of man and his personal and social fulfillment[13].

Another fundamental element was the integration between work and culture, in the firm belief that work should be enriched by cultural content and that industry should contribute to the cultural elevation of society. Alongside this element is the presence of the factor of industrial democracy, through the promotion of worker participation in company decisions, the creation of a collaborative climate and the overcoming of the traditional division between capital and labor.

The welfare system provided, in an innovative way:

- Access to culture and education: Olivetti established company libraries accessible to all employees, including blue-collar workers. Cultural events and educational initiatives were not merely a marginal benefit, but a fundamental right of workers, an expression of Olivetti's belief that the elevation of humanity was the goal of industry.

which in the past was one of the most important companies in the world in the fields of typewriters, calculators and electronics.

[12] Ochetto, *Adriano Olivetti. La biografia*, Edizioni Comunità, 2013.

[13] Campanini, *Adriano Olivetti: il sogno di un capitalismo dal volto umano*, Studium, 2020.

- An integrated system of services: housing (in a logic that valued modern architecture and quality of life), nurseries, quality canteens, medical clinics, social assistance services, all elements of a system to support the well-being of workers and their families.

Furthermore, the concept of profit as a tool for integral innovation is emphasized. Olivetti's vision of profit was not as an end, but rather as a tool for creating a "virtuous chain aimed at the common good". Profit, from this perspective, was intended to fuel ongoing investments in worker well-being, technological research, and responsibility toward the local community.

Even today, the Olivetti model offers concrete inspiration to companies seeking to combine economic success with a positive social impact on employees and the local community.

3.2. *Marzotto: Paternalistic Welfare and the Construction of the "City of Harmony"*

Gaetano Marzotto represents another emblematic figure in the history of Italian corporate welfare[14]. He invested significant financial resources in the construction of an urban complex that ultimately included over a thousand housing units for various employee categories – apartments, townhouses, and single-family homes – as well as a wide range of welfare and recreational facilities. This experience culminated in the creation of the "Social City" or "City of Harmony" in Valdagno, built between 1928 and 1937. The "Social City" was created to integrate the working life of the factory with the social, recreational, and cultural life of its employees and the community.

Marzotto's welfare interventions were structured around some fundamental areas:

- Residential housing: the construction of housing for employees, organized according to a social hierarchy that reflected organizational status (stately homes for managers, middle-class homes for employees, and public housing for workers).
- Service system: Marzotto implemented a widespread system of ser-

[14] Marzotto S.p.A. is an Italian textile group headquartered in Valdagno, in the province of Vicenza. It is a leading textile company in Italy in terms of turnover, employees, and international expansion.

vices for employees, including schools (a school complex with elementary, middle, and high schools, and a technical and industrial institute), sports and recreational facilities (a swimming pool and sports facilities), social institutions (a nursery school, a kindergarten, and a retirement home), and cultural institutions (a theater, a music school, and a company afterwork club). The company also established a corporate health service, which provided medical care with a team of specialists in various areas of care, and mountain and sea summer camps for employees' children.

- Mobilizing corporate culture: after-work initiatives, community organizations, and professional groups represented channels through which the company's name was amplified throughout the community, creating a connection between the company's image and the well-being of the local community.

The Marzotto experience represents a significant contribution to the awareness that worker well-being is not a cost to be minimized, but rather a strategic investment in long-term corporate prosperity. The Social City exemplifies a model of industrial humanism, in which the entrepreneur Gaetano Marzotto sought to offer services and facilities to improve the lives of his workers and their families. The experience is part of the European industrial paternalism of the 19th and 20th centuries, taking the form of a structured set of material, ideological, and political instruments that regulated labor relations. The factory became the center of an entire community, providing services to meet a wide range of citizens' needs, and working-class neighborhoods were conceived as an integral part of the city, not as industrial appendages.

3.3. *Pirelli: The institutionalization of welfare as a tool for corporate cohesion*

The history of welfare at Pirelli represents a particularly significant example of the progressive evolution from simple welfare to a more informed and institutionalized welfare system[15]. Giovanni Battista Pirelli, founder of the company in 1872, had an extraordinary vision of the role of business in promoting worker well-being. Pirelli expressed a profound awareness of the need to create bonds of belonging and a sense of community that

[15] Pirelli & C. S.p.A. (Pirelli) is a multinational corporation headquartered in Italy, operating in the automotive sector as a manufacturer of tires for cars, motorcycles, and bicycles.

transcended mere work performance. Throughout its long history, Pirelli[16] has developed an integrated welfare model that has progressively evolved through the following phases:

- Initial phase (1872-1900) – Mutualism and welfare: two important recognitions, namely the foundation of the Mutual Aid Fund in 1877 for sick workers and the Concordat between the company and the Workers' Commission in 1902 aimed at guaranteeing better working conditions, which represent the first formal instruments through which Pirelli recognizes the need to guarantee social protection to workers in the event of illness and economic difficulty.
- Intermediate phase (1900-1970) – Institutionalization and integration: the creation of the Dopolavoro Aziendale Pirelli (Pirelli Company after-work club), the founding of the Pirelli Foundation, and the transformation of welfare institutions into autonomous structures represent a process of progressive welfare institutionalization. The company established permanent structures, managed independently from the production organization, through which it ensured systematic coverage of employees' well-being needs.
- Contemporary phase (1970-present) – Integrated welfare and inclusiveness: in recent times, Pirelli has consolidated its integrated welfare model which is based on three strategic pillars that represent best practice in the Italian industrial landscape.

The first pillar focuses on individual well-being ("For You"), offering inclusive work environments, work-life integration support with up to eight days of remote work per month, supplementary healthcare plans, and supplementary pension plans. The second pillar focuses on family support ("For Your Family"), with specific initiatives for shared parenting, caregiver support, and educational programs for employees' children. The in-house clinic and supplementary health fund provide advanced healthcare, while courses for new parents and psychological counseling support family transitions. The third pillar extends to the community ("For the Community"), through corporate volunteering programs and educational, environmental, and cultural projects. These programs also involved 100% of raw material suppliers in business and human rights training, extending ethical commitments along the entire value chain.

[16] Https://corporate.pirelli.com.

3.4. *Contemporary Case Studies: Strategic Integration of Welfare and Gender Equality. Barilla: From equal pay to systemic inclusion*[17]

The Barilla Group[18] represents a contemporary example of how the strategic integration of corporate welfare and commitment to gender equality can generate significant corporate cultural transformation. Some points worth highlighting[19]:

- Gender Pay Equality (2020): in 2020, the Group achieved gender pay equality for all employees worldwide, eliminating all unjustified pay gaps. This represents an ambitious goal that requires a multi-year programmatic commitment to salary auditing, transparent pay grades, and regular pay reviews.
- Gender Equality in Leadership: 38% of Barilla executives and managers worldwide are women, while 47% of female employees report directly to the Global Leadership Team.
- Global equal leave policy: in 2023, Barilla introduced a new global paternity and maternity leave policy that guarantees all parents a minimum of 12 weeks of fully paid leave, regardless of gender, marital status, or sexual orientation.
- Partnerships with advocacy organizations: in March 2024, Barilla partnered with LEAD Network (Leading Executives Advancing Diversity), extending its commitment to gender equality beyond company boundaries to suppliers and supply chain partners.
- International recognition: in 2021, Barilla was the first Italian company to win the Catalyst Award for initiatives accelerating the advancement of women in the workplace. In 2022, it ranked third among food companies in the European Diversity Leaders survey promoted by the Financial Times.

On the topic of Diversity and Inclusion, Barilla has established the Global Diversity and Inclusion Board with the appointment of a Chief Diversity Officer. Barilla has developed relationships with external organizations and the third sector to promote awareness and inclusion processes.

Interventions have been developed for suppliers, positive actions have

[17] Barilla G. e R. Fratelli S.p.A., known as Barilla, is an Italian multinational food company, operating in the markets of dry pasta, ready-made sauces, baked goods, flour, and bread.

[18] Barilla G. e R. Fratelli S.p.A., known as Barilla, is an Italian multinational food company, operating in the markets of dry pasta, ready-made sauces, baked goods, flour, and bread.

[19] Https://www.barillagroup.com.

been promoted towards refugees, disabled people, and the LGBTQ+ community, representation and inclusion initiatives for people of different ethnic origins have been promoted to combat inequalities, and significant interventions for gender equality have been implemented.

3.5. *Lavazza: welfare as community building*

The Lavazza Group[20] (Luigi Lavazza S.p.A.) has developed an approach to corporate welfare that particularly emphasizes building a sense of community and promoting shared parenting.

The recent supplementary agreements (four-year period 2020-2023, renewed in 2024) highlight:

- Innovative flexible work: the "Short Friday" system (reducing the Friday workday to 4 hours compensated with increased performance on other days) represents a creative approach to reconciling the needs of organizational flexibility and work-life balance.
- Inclusive parenting: extension of paternity leave (5 additional paid days in addition to the 10 required by law), recognition of leave for de facto couples and same-sex couples, and baby bonuses for births or adoptions represent an inclusive approach to parenting that recognizes the plurality of contemporary family configurations.
- Caregiving and family leave: granting 8 hours of paid leave per year to accompany family members to medical appointments, extension to pet care (4 hours per year), in recognition of the multiplicity of care responsibilities that characterize contemporary life. Lavazza has also implemented several development programs connected to the employee well-being system and social inclusion policies: Lavazza has adopted a Gap Free program (launched in 2020) of cultural transformation to promote equal opportunities and enhance diversity. A structured, medium- to long-term process to eliminate all barriers and grow an organization free of any form of discrimination.

Some examples of interventions:

- Global D&I Week;
- Employee Resource Groups;

[20] Lavazza – officially Luigi Lavazza S.p.A. – is an Italian roasted coffee company founded in 1895 in Turin by Luigi Lavazza.

- Inclusive Leadership Training per management;
- Social inclusion programs.

Through its Welfare & Wellbeing strategy, Lavazza has developed a comprehensive framework for assessing employee well-being in Italy. Employee well-being is the result of a combination of different, closely related factors. The following factors have been highlighted: physical well-being, emotional well-being, social well-being, and financial well-being.

With respect to welfare policies, the following services are highlighted:

- Smart working and flexible hours;
- Wellness and health & safety programs;
- Company nursery and family services.

Furthermore, Lavazza has implemented compliance programs that protect the corporate community and business partners and strengthen stakeholders' trust in the operational and managerial correctness of the organization. In pursuing regulatory and ethical compliance objectives, promoting the culture of legality and proper conduct highlights:

- Code of Ethics;
- Anti-Harassment Policy;
- Anti-corruption, Policy zero tolerance;
- Supplier Code of Conduct for the entire supply chain;
- Protected and confidential Whistleblowing System.

3.6. *EssilorLuxottica: toward a multidimensional inclusive culture - The Employee Welfare System*

EssilorLuxottica has developed an integrated welfare system that goes well beyond the minimum wages, positioning itself as the employer of choice in the global industrial sector[21].

Luxottica's welfare system in Italy is a comprehensive corporate model, established in 2009 and managed in collaboration with the trade unions. It includes various initiatives to support employees and their families. A key element in the welfare implementation strategy is the territorial differen-

[21] EssilorLuxottica S.A. is an Italian-French multinational, founded in 2018 following the merger of the Italian company Luxottica and the French company Essilor. It is among the world's leading groups in the design, manufacture, and marketing of ophthalmic lenses, optical devices, and eyeglasses and sunglasses.

tiation of initiatives, designed based on the needs of the different sites, and which stems from the company's tradition of strong local roots.

Healthcare and Wellness

- Health Insurance: Coverage of supplemental healthcare costs.
- OneClick Wellness: Digital platform for prevention, health campaigns, and discounted rates.
- Counseling Services: Psychological and relationship support for employees and families.
- Financial Support Programs: Assistance with medical, educational, or elderly care expenses.

Financial Support and Purchasing

- "Shopping Basket": A package of non-monetary benefits to increase purchasing power.
- Textbook Vouchers/Reimbursements and Scholarships: Financial support for employees' children.

Flexibility and Working Hours

- Hour Bank: Greater flexibility in managing working hours.
- Paid Paternity Leave: Additional paid leave.
- Family Job Sharing: A family member can temporarily replace an employee to ensure financial continuity for the family unit.

Pension and Future

- Life Bonus: A €30,000.00 contribution to be paid to heirs in the event of the employee's death, even outside the workplace.
- Generational Pact: Agreement with INPS for the payment of voluntary contributions for participating employees.

Mobility and Local Support

- Collective Transportation Service: Experimental home-work transportation service to reduce worker inconvenience.
- Local Initiatives: Collaboration with local authorities to support services such as daycare centers and senior centers, extending the value of welfare to the local community.

The company, in relation to effective worker participation, has also implemented shareholding and ownership programs. In 2021, 67,000 employees in 85 countries became company shareholders through employee shareholding plans. In 2023, the number of employee shareholders grew to nearly 80,000, creating a strong sense of ownership and alignment of interests with corporate strategies.

In July 2021, EssilorLuxottica launched "Eyes on the Planet," the most ambitious corporate sustainability program in the optical industry, structured around five strategic pillars that encompass various areas and widespread interests.

1. Eyes on Carbon: Towards Carbon Neutrality, with the aim of combating climate change and achieving carbon neutrality.

2. Eyes on Circularity: Circular Economy, by applying the logic of the circular economy and transforming the linear "take-make-dispose" model into a circular "reduce-reuse-recycle" system, the primary objective is to develop sustainable innovation to improve materials, processes, products, and services.

3. Eyes on World Sight: Universal Right to Sight, this plan has the mission of eliminating, through the OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation, uncorrected vision by 2050. This is because sight is considered a fundamental human right.

4. Eyes on Ethics: Integrity Without Compromise, by adopting and adhering to ethical behavior (Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct for Business Partners, Human Rights Due Diligence) and applying the most rigorous ethical standards (Supply Chain 360°) along the entire value chain, with a focus on local impact, stakeholder engagement, and value creation.

5. Eyes on Inclusion: Diversity and Belonging, the inclusion pillar focuses on promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

The global DE&I function has launched a series of global and local initiatives aimed at raising broad awareness, with a commitment to ensuring a fair, safe, and inclusive environment for individuals and communities. The company actively promotes respect for diversity and protects against any form of discrimination, intimidation, or harassment.

Specifically, with regard to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Policy, some key elements stand out:

Multidimensionality of inclusion: the policy explicitly recognizes and addresses multiple dimensions of diversity: gender, sexual orientation and

gender identity, disability, age, ethnicity, religion, with specific actions for each dimension.

Gender equality and female leadership: adoption of fair hiring practices, equitable pay, equal career opportunities, support for work-life balance, and parental leave for all genders.

LGBTQIA+ Inclusion: recognizing the need to create a supportive environment for LGBTQIA+ employees, with explicit non-discrimination policies, extension of benefits to same-sex partners, and parental leave for LGBTQIA+ families.

Caregiving and parenthood: a shared family responsibility model that recognizes both traditional and alternative families, with concrete support for life transitions (parenthood, eldercare, gender transitions).

Accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities: implementation of concrete measures to remove architectural and technological barriers, creation of fully accessible work environments.

Global Inclusion Committee: establish a permanent DE&I governance structure to act as a cultural change agent, review strategy, and ensure that inclusion programs are maintained over time as the foundation of organizational culture.

4. *Regulatory standards as a strategic framework: UNI/PdR 125:2022 and SA 8000. UNI/PdR 125:2022: Gender Equality Certification*

UNI/PdR 125:2022 represents a detailed operational standard that allows companies of all sizes – from SMEs to large enterprises – to define, measure, and certify their commitment to reducing gender inequalities[22].

Introduced by Law No. 162/2021, the certification represents not only an attestation tool, but also a structured framework through which companies can gradually evolve towards conscious gender equality. UNI/PdR 125:2022 is based on four key assessment areas, each of which represents a pillar of organizational gender equality:

- Organizational culture and strategies: assessment of widespread awareness of the importance of gender equality, the presence of explicit

[22] UNI, *UNI/PdR 125:2022 - Parità di Genere. Prassi di Riferimento*, Ente Italiano di Normazione, 2022.

strategies, internal communication on gender issues, and the organization's ability to prevent stereotypes and discrimination.

- Corporate governance: analysis of gender representation in decision-making positions, the composition of strategic committees, female participation in decision-making processes, and the presence of figures dedicated to managing gender equality.
- Human Resources Management: evaluation of recruitment, selection, and professional development policies, with particular attention to the presence of bias in performance evaluations, equal professional growth opportunities, and equal access to training and career paths.
- Pay equity: systematic salary auditing to ensure there are no unjustified pay gaps, analysis of the distribution of performance bonuses and incentives, and monitoring of pay trends over time.

By implementing specific and measurable key performance indicators (KPIs), companies can monitor their organization's level of maturity across all dimensions, identify areas for improvement, and plan systematic evolutionary interventions.

To obtain certification, an organization must achieve at least 60% of the expected score, demonstrating it has undertaken a structured and monitorable path towards gender equality. Certification is valid for two years, after which a renewal process with a full audit is required to confirm progress made.

It is important to emphasize that UNI/PdR 125:2022 explicitly incorporates dimensions such as equal access to career paths, reducing pay inequalities, equal management of parental responsibilities, and workplace inclusion. This multidimensionality reflects the scientific understanding that gender equality cannot be reduced to a single policy but requires systemic intervention that touches every aspect of organizational life.

4.1. *SA 8000: The international standard on social responsibility*

SA 8000 (Social Accountability 8000) is the international voluntary certification standard developed by Social Accountability International (SAI) and accredited by Social Accountability Accreditation Services (SAAS)[23]. Unlike UNI/PdR which focuses on gender equality, SA 8000

[23] SAI, *SA8000:2014 - Standard*, Social Accountability International, 2014.

adopts a broader perspective of social responsibility that embraces the integral protection of human rights in the workplace.

The standard is explicitly based on the principles of the United Nations Conventions on Human Rights, the Rights of the Child, and the Conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO)[24]. Thus, SA 8000 represents a framework that directly integrates internationally recognized human rights principles into the company's operational context.

The standard defines stringent requirements in multiple areas:

- Prohibition of Forced and Child Labor: SA 8000 explicitly prohibits all forms of forced, compulsory, and slave labor, as well as any form of child exploitation. This is particularly relevant for organizations operating in international contexts or with complex supply chains.
- Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining: the standard recognizes and promotes the right of workers to freely associate, form trade unions, and collectively negotiate their working conditions. This is a fundamental element of dignity at work.
- Non-discrimination: SA 8000 explicitly prohibits discrimination based on race, caste, national origin, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, trade union membership, or political affiliation. The prohibition of discrimination is a cornerstone of human rights protection in the workplace.
- Health and Safety: the standard requires organizations to ensure safe and healthy working conditions, with particular attention to industry-specific risks.
- Fair and Decent Wages: SA 8000 requires all workers to be paid a "living wage," which is sufficient to meet basic needs and provide disposable income.
- Reasonable Working Hours: the standard places limitations on excessive working hours, recognizing workers' right to rest and leisure.
- Prohibition of Abusive Disciplinary Practices: SA 8000 prohibits any form of corporal punishment, physical coercion, verbal threats, sexual abuse, or other forms of intimidation as a means of discipline in the workplace.

A particularly relevant element of SA 8000 for inclusion concerns the governance of social responsibility. The standard requires organizations to

[24] ILO, *Conventions and Recommendations on Core Labour Standards*, International Labour Organization, 2023.

establish collegial bodies that include a balanced representation of management and workers, including a health and safety committee and a social performance team[25]. This requirement recognizes that true change towards more equitable labour relations requires genuine worker participation and a voice in decision-making processes.

4.2. *Regulatory framework integration as a long-term strategic vision*

The integrated implementation of regulatory tools such as UNI/PdR 125:2022 and SA 8000 offers companies the opportunity to build a coherent, long-term strategic vision that combines Corporate Social Responsibility, corporate welfare, and a commitment to equality and inclusion.

These tools should not be interpreted as bureaucratic obligations to be formally fulfilled, but rather as concrete opportunities for organizational transformation and the creation of lasting value. Companies that consciously invest in certification and systematically align their commitments to social responsibility and gender equality demonstrate a profound awareness, resulting in the benefits of these choices manifesting over long horizons. The tangible benefits of this commitment include:

- Reduced turnover: inclusive and humane work environments generate greater engagement and a sense of belonging, significantly reducing voluntary turnover rates and saving on recruitment and onboarding costs.
- Talent Attraction: organizations with strong inclusion and EDI policies are viewed by younger generations as preferred employers, making it easier to attract talent.
- Improved reputation: certification and transparent communication of corporate social responsibility commitment significantly improve reputation perception among multiple stakeholders: customers, investors, the local community, and institutions.
- Organizational Resilience: diverse and inclusive organizations demonstrate greater adaptability, innovation, and creative response to complex challenges, generating significant competitive advantage.
- Ability to meet stakeholder expectations: contemporary stakeholders – from new generations of workers to institutional investors integrating

[25] SAI, *SA8000 Implementation Guide - Stakeholder Participation and Governance*, Social Accountability International, 2024.

ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) considerations into their investment criteria – increasingly demand that organizations demonstrate a genuine commitment to social sustainability.

5. *Safety at work as a system of measures for overcoming inequalities between workers: an historical overlook in Italy*

The economic history of Italy since the Industrial Revolution is a field of study which gives the chance to reflect upon social inequalities and political-institutional attempts at limiting differences[26]. This fact emerges with strength not only when it comes to social interactions about contracts, salary, work time length, but it also finds its accomplishment by looking at safety at work and, in general, at work conditions for the workforce. Workers' capacity to contribute to society's development passes through the put at disposal to employers of their own main characteristically trait, being in the workforce. Historical evolution can be read as history of economic and social relationships development.

A specific interest in the way in which safety at work was discussed (if) throughout centuries has raised only in contemporary history, since the end of Nineteenth century. Before this period, references to safety at work in terms of injuries and professional illnesses as byproducts of work relationships had been truly sporadic[27]. Despite the attempts by some physicians to step inside the subject and explore the nexus between work and health, the topic did not develop in a structured and constant way throughout centuries. Professionals such as Bernardino Ramazzini (1633-1714) have favored the rise of a climate of acculturation around professional illnesses but this awareness did not represent the foundation for a social and economic

[26] Crepax, *Storia dell'industria in Italia. Uomini, imprese e prodotti*, il Mulino, 2002.

[27] Among the first references to this topic, it is possible to mention a workpiece from the Renaissance, *De Re Metallica* by Georgius Agricola, published in 1556. The Author focused on workers' conditions in the mining sector, which became a modern theme even more after the discovery of the New World in the Americas and the spoliation of the territories by the involvement of immigrant workers introduced as slaves, in addition to local people. Perrone, *La Leyenda del Indio Dorado. Per la dignità e la salute dei lavoratori: alla carica in cinque secoli di storia*, INAIL, 2010, pp. 27-34.

movement that could lead to systematic introduction of new interactions between the parties[28].

At the rise of Industrialism, enterprises hardly looked in their work organization at factors such as genre or age of workers and at work environment conditions. The Age of Liberalism spread around the most developed countries of the world was accompanied mostly by key concepts such as economic freedom, free trade, reconciliation between private and universal interest in the name of neo-classical economic models, according to which the "natural" trend of market was directed to the reach of the most widespread welfare of people. In parallel to the spread of big corporations and capitalistic forms of market, though, also the need for association and coordination between groups of interests arose, leading to the first form of legal protection of workers, from the Factory Act in Great Britain in 1833 to the German law of 1844, which originated the insurance against accidents at work.

In this sense, economic development brought with it wide inequalities in the income distribution and forms of aggregations between social groups characterized by similar ways of living emerged. In this framework, a "domain of battle" was represented by the organization of work in the name of rationalization. Among others, Friedrich Winslow Taylor overcame, associating his name to process engineering and in a sense "massification" of workforce for efficient forms of employment. Science, production, human factor: all these words underly the denomination of "Taylorism", which can be considered as a masterpiece moment in the history of work organization and in the study of work as the "momentum" to reflect upon workers, equality vs. inequality in terms of employment and even safety at work. His dissection of work moments, tailored distribution of tasks and chronological measurement of workers' efficiency paved the ground to concepts like rhythm, pauses, work time and task analysis, which would lead in the Twentieth century and would establish the studies for "industrial psychotechnics"[29].

[28] In his *De morbis artificum diatriba*, Ramazzini focused on 50 professional illnesses from the study of clinical cases that he studies from his points of observations at the Universities of Modena and Padova. Carnevale, *Prefazione*, in Carnevale, Ramazzini, *Le malattie dei lavoratori*, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1982, pp. 9-37.

[29] Friedmann, *Problemi umani del macchinismo industriale. Il progresso tecnico e l'uomo contemporaneo*, Einaudi, 1946.

The need for insurance for workers in case of injuries at work developed together with the evolution of the legal qualification of injuries themselves. In fact, at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, compensation for workers was a residual condition, attributed if and only if workers were able to demonstrate the etiological link between the injury and the responsibility of the employer at causing it. In the second half of Nineteenth century, the burden of proof reversed, and it became the task of the employer to demonstrate that the enterprise did not have caused the injury. Injuries became a subject connected with contractual responsibility of the employer and they related to professional risk. Given the fact that the employees sell their workforce in exchange for a salary, the employers which take advantage of this factor of production began to have an objective responsibility for the workers' conditions in case of damage to their safety at work[30]. Concepts such as traumatic events and occasion of work entered the lexicon of the discipline.

The Civil Code, then, in 1942, developed the concept of safety from the physical integrity of workers to moral protection. In the following years, law developed from safety at work towards health protection as well. The Italian Constitution of 1948, in fact, affirmed health as a fundamental right of people (Article 32), therefore not as a "good" in the availability of employers, conceptually limiting their potential interactions with workers considering the idea of responsible forms of economic initiative (Article 41). Despite the corpus of norms, though, the trend of injuries at work did not sign concrete improvements. Technical norms had been, until then, slower in their evolution than the broad legal framework and the status of machinery and equipment in factories inadequate or highly variable in any context. For this reason, in the 1950s, laws focused on technicalities through a series of presidential decrees: DPR 547/1955 on injury prevention, 164/1956 on civil works and 303/1956 on industrial hygiene went in the direction. Progressively, the subject of prevention became more connected to legal obligations for employers and less accepted as a social condition that may occur, given the need for poor people to provide their income and accept existing conditions of the workplace. So, to say, the iconography of work began to

[30] Morello, *Alle origini della tutela degli infortuni sul lavoro*, in *DSL*, 2016, 2, https://journals.uniurb.it/index.php/dsl/article/view/742/690.

change, and symbols of safety could start to evolve from a status of acceptance and hope in spiritual faith into a material request for safe conditions[31].

In parallel, the need was the consolidation of employers' participation in the destiny of workers when accidents took place, so that DPR 1124/1965 defined their obligation to enroll at the national insurance institution, giving birth to the modern entity named INAIL ("Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro")[32].

The development of such institution has always been twofold: on the one hand, providing economic stability to workers who become unfitting for work and their families; on the other hand, introducing good praxes and controls on economic subjects, to foster measures of safety at work which go beyond the mere compliance to law or, in other cases, checking on minimum legal standard implementation. The deep differences between economic subjects are sources for unequal treatment for workers, depending on higher or lower safety standards implementation by their employer; therefore, the role of an institution which oversees their operations becomes crucial. INAIL represents a point of balance by its inner nature, being the place of encounter for employers and social parties.

Technical norms may have introduced forms of protection for workers based on the reality of the company or public institution where workers are employed, generating greater opportunities of protection depending on their scale. The scale of the employer's structure is not the only determining criteria that favors or put obstacles to the level of protection of workers from health and safety points of view. The geographic location of the employer represents indeed another fundamental factor for employee's destiny. Economic and geographic spaces like the European Communities and then the European Union, given the emphasis put on social law, were key for protecting European workers, in relation to their colleagues located almost everywhere else in the world. The keyword for levelling differences and increasing levels of protection regardless of the (European) country in which people are employed was at the basis of principles underlying the European Single Act of 1987. This Act changed rights to vote for decision making processes of laws from unanimity into

[31] Aa.Vv., *Breve viaggio nella prevenzione. Tra iconografia votive e simbologia di sicurezza*, INAIL, 1995.

[32] Aa.Vv., *Storia della prevenzione*, INAIL, 2014, https://fad.gruppopls.com/public/allegati/210/16_108_Quattordicesimo-Allegato_storia-INAIL.pdf.

majority and this modification determined the necessity to accept more easily influences of leading countries that were more apt to push for social improvements in workers conditions.

Not by chance, the European Single Act included the improvement of workplace among its objectives to be pursued under majority votes. In the following phase, Directive 89/391/CEE emanated, determining a turning point for national legal systems in terms of prevention and protection of health and safety. Harmonizing legal systems became crucial, accomplishing a process that the European Communities had initiated in the mids-1970s. Directives took into consideration various aspects of safety at work: methos of identification, measurement and assessments of hazards and risks for workers exposed to chemical, physical, mechanical, biological risks, as well as prohibitions to pursue economic activities under certain conditions of uneven exposition to risk for the workforce. Directive 89/391/CEE introduced a fundamental principle, such as that of reasonable practicability. According to such principle, the limit for work organization is twofold and it is given by the capacity of assessing risks, in line with updated knowledge, and the technological state of progress. Under such conditions, work organizations in European states cannot maximize profits by flattening at the minimum level costs determined by health and safety: employers must be adequate to the status of current knowledge ("culture of safety" in a broad sense) and adapt their equipment and machineries to the latest technological discoveries[33].

This European framework paved the ground for the national horizon in which Italian workers operate, considering the "Single Act" for health and safety, contained in Decrees 626/1994 and 81/2008. Conceptual, organizational and legal developments have led in Italy to the affirmation of principles that were unimaginable a few decades before: not only physical risks of workers have then to be assumed to "goods" to be protected, but socio-psychological ones as well. Once more, structured organizations have now the possibility and the need to offer their workers forms of governance that have to do with aspects such as breaks, flexibility of shifts or the distance between home and workplace, conjugating private and professional life. New models of management entered the field of work organization,

[33] Angelini, *La sicurezza del lavoro nell'ordinamento europeo*, in *WP Olympus*, 2013, 29, https://journals.uniurb.it/index.php/WP-olympus/article/view/270/262.

and health and safety has progressively stepped into the main domains of social relations[34].

5.1. *Adjusting inequalities at work through the standardization of models of management of safety at work: the voluntary norms ISO 45001:2018 and the role of the International Labor Organization*

Given as a fact that work conditions are generally inequal, vary from region to region and depend on economic sector and company dimension and overall organization structure, an attempt to reduce variety and introduce standardization is pursued in the name of models of management implementation. Starting from the voluntary norm named Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series (OHSAS) 18001:2007, complemented by OHSAS 18002, which contains guideline for the implementation of such norm, the push for larger companies, in particular, to follow rational systems of coordination of safety aspects and potential impacts on workers' safety is continuing and has led to the introduction of the successive norm ISO 45001: 2018. The goals followed by such norms are fundamentally common and include provision for a structured approach for managing occupational health and safety, establishment and maintenance of commitment with that regard, demonstration of commitment to safety excellence, organizational structures in place with clear roles and responsibilities, existence of a continuous improvement culture, consolidate levels of trust and communication, reduction in incident levels with increased measures of performance and contribution to business performance by reducing cost and liabilities.

The underlying principle from the management viewpoint is determined by the "PLAN-DO-CHECK-ACT" (P-D-C-A) system, also known as the Deming Cycle or Shewhart cycle, the Deming wheel of continuous improvement spiral[35]. The introduction of forms of controls for eliminating hazards which workers are exposed to can be started through a planning phase, consisting of setting goals and processes to achieve specific results. Following planning, "do" represents the phase of action and execution of

[34] Tiraboschi, *Nuovi modelli della organizzazione del lavoro e nuovi rischi*, in *DSL*, 2022, 1.

[35] Patel, Deshpande, *Application of Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle for Quality and Productivity Improvement – A Review*, in *IJRASET*, 2017, 5, 1, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vivek-Deshpande/publication/318743952_Application_Of_Plan-Do-Check-Act_Cycle_For_Quality_And_Productivity_Improvement-A_Review.

the measures of prevention. Once the system is in place and executive in its day-by-day implementation, then "check" requires monitoring and evaluation of results, according to certain specifications. Last, "act" is the phase post-review and has to do with results reached and corrective action. This system allows a reflection on inequality between industries and employment conditions, given the fact that it is frequently implemented in the manufacturing industry, where it is mainly originated as source to reduce waste (waiting time, idle, failure, defects).

The steps that contributed from the logics of the P-D-C-A method of conceiving organizational system of management towards ISO 45001 omni-comprehensive approach to the management of safety at work has had a push in the last two decades. During such period, safety culture has evolved to a new conception of preventive safety culture, leaving behind the original approach which aimed at the mere implementation of safety regulations and moving towards a broader emphasis on forms of direct participation of the workforce into the life of the organization[36]. If the former approach was directly centered on the management and its own engagement, skill, knowledge about safety rules and obligations, the latter moves the focus from "legal compliance" into constructive interactions between all stakeholders, inside and outside the organization.

This is the reason why the International Labor Organization (ILO), the specialized institution of the United Nations which deals with labor and labor parties, founded with the specific dual objective of posing basic standardized conditions for decent work at the benefit of workers and generating more harmonious international market contexts[37]. ILO recognizes

[36] Neag, Ivascu, Draghici, *A debate on issues regarding the new ISO 45001:2018 standard adoption*, in *MATEC*, 2020, 305, 00002, https://www.matec-conferences.org/articles/matecconf/pdf/2020/01/matecconf_sesam20_00002.pdf.

[37] Dinman, *Impact of the International Labour Organization on Occupational Health and Safety Laws and Practice*, in *JOM*, 1987, 29, 4, https://www.jstor.org/stable/45013811. In the Author's words, "the roots of the ILO extend back to the late 19th century, when several economists foresaw a need for international economic agreement to alleviate hardships to workers arising from industrialization and international competition. In their views, such deleterious conditions would ultimately pose potential dangers to peace and international harmony. By 1900, the International Organization for Labour Legislation had been formed, and 6 years later it formulated and adopted two conventions, i.e., international treaties. One of these initial efforts in international legislation concerned a subject of interest to occupational health: prohibition of the use of yellow phosphorus in match manufacture". Today 187 Member States have ratified their adherence to this International Organization.

the ISO 45001 as key norm for guiding employers towards the goal of levelling disparities of treatment and offering valid models of work organization. Leadership and workers participation, jointly, assumes thus the fundamental meaning in the system[38]. So, to say, the fostering of models of extensive forms of management of safety at work, particularly for large enterprises, enters the field of human rights protection in a globalized world, which constituted the epicenter of international debates since the late nineteenth of the past century[39]. ILO develops international standards related to labor and work, exerting considerable influence on laws and regulations of member States through international Conventions and Recommendations on different fields of work condition[40].

Among others, two fundamental documents are represented by No. 155, Occupational Safety and Health Convention, and No. 187, Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention. Countries which voluntarily decide to ratify a Convention have then one year as span of time to finalize national debate and internal ratification, before the norms of the text should come into force. For both Convention, nowadays less than 50% of the International Community of Member States (data updated at 2023, extrapolated from the group of countries adhering to the ILO) have successfully completing the iter of ratification of those texts[41]. When we con-

[38] The system of interactions between management and workforce does not imply that there is minor accountability for the managers on the effectiveness of the implementation of measures of prevention. Top management must take overall responsibility and protect workers by introducing a system of management that will include, not limited to such processes, incidents and near misses reporting and corrective actions on the basis of occurrences, supporting the establishment joint committees that analyze safety trends, clearly defining roles and responsibilities of all actors, defining an Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) policy. Policy must include a commitment to consultation and participation of workers. The organization must also provide training and resources necessary to ensure consultation and participation and must provide all relevant information about the management system.

[39] Mayer, Gostin, *Human Rights in Global Health. Rights-Based Governance for a Globalizing World*, Oxford University Press, 2018.

[40] As an example, we can mention the Convention and the Recommendation relevant to protection of workers against ergonomic risk factors at the workplace, Convention No. 127 and Recommendation No. 128, which specify the international requirements concerning the manual transport of a load. As well known, dual standards from State to State with this regard may represent at once forms of disparities in terms of workers' health protection and economic market disruptions, creating forms of dumping based on safety at work.

[41] Trivedi, Lai, *Ratification Status of International Labour Organization (ILO). Fundamental Conventions on Occupational Safety and Health*, in *OEMJI*, 2024, 2, 2, https://www.researchgate.

sider that national ratification is nothing more than the formal prelude to the substantial possibility of the effective implementation of requisites and then disparities between economic subjects are enormous and effectiveness of public controls on rules implementation has a great variety from state to state, we have the clear picture of the long way to go to reach forms of equality in worldwide economy facing workers and their health and safety.

6. *Conclusions*

This research aims to contribute to the interdisciplinary debate on how contemporary companies can transform themselves into conscious agents of social change, promoting fair and inclusive working relationships through the strategic integration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), integrated corporate welfare, and workplace safety.

The paper highlighted that promoting fair and inclusive working relationships is not only an ethical and social imperative, but also a conscious strategic choice capable of generating lasting value for the company, its workers, the local area, and the community as a whole.

Through the analysis of historical cases (Olivetti, Marzotto, Pirelli) it has shown that this awareness is rooted in Italian entrepreneurial thought, although often characterized by a tension between paternalism and autonomy, between social control and human dignity. In contemporary cases (Barilla, Lavazza, EssilorLuxottica), the integration of corporate welfare and an explicit commitment to gender equality and inclusion represents the response to workers' needs and is adapted to contemporary ethical demands and awareness.

The adoption of regulatory standards such as UNI/PdR 125:2022 and SA 8000 represents a formalization of this vision, allowing companies to structure their commitment within recognized, measurable, and certifiable frameworks.

In the same way, international standards such as those dictated by the ISO for managing and integrating models of management contribute to

net/profile/Ashish_Trivedi4/publication/382825950_Ratification_Status_of_International_Labour_Organization_ILO_Fundamental_Conventions_on_Occupational_Safety_and_Health.

shift from a mere orientation of legal compliance towards a broader a system in which all stakeholders interact and search for common ways to improve standards of safety and health prevention.

Therefore, the contemporary company, which aspires to become an agent of social change, can consciously assume the role of promoter of fair and inclusive working relationships, through the systemic integration of CSR policies, integrated corporate welfare, and a commitment to equality and inclusion for all stakeholders, not only through means of contractual interactions with the workforce but by the increase of the offering of service and higher standard setting for workers.

Abstract

This research paper addresses the issue of corporations as conscious agents of social change in the context of contemporary challenges related to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), through the combination of two different segments of organizational management.

On the one hand, the study analyzes how the strategic integration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and integrated corporate welfare represents a concrete operational tool through which organizations can address structural inequalities in the workplace and promote fair and inclusive working relationships.

On the other hand, the study takes into consideration another focal aspect of organization as key engine for workers' condition upgrading and levelling: health and safety at work.

Keywords

Corporate Social Responsibility, Integrated Corporate Welfare, Gender Equality, Inclusion and Equity, Stakeholder Theory, Organizational Change, Health and Safety at Work.