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How Industrial Relations shape organizational Equity: The case of Automobili Lamborghini

Contents: 1. Introduction - Context and Problem Statement. 2. Equity: from abstract principle to organizational device. 3. Methodology. 4. The Industrial relations model at Automobili Lamborghini. 5. Practices for organizational equity. 5.1. Reorganization of working time. 5.2. Shared parenting and family policies. 5.3. Diversity & inclusion policies and cultural change. 6. Data analysis. 7. Discussion.

1. *Introduction - Context and Problem Statement*

In recent years, academic and managerial debate on work has increasingly engaged with the themes of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI – an acronym widely used in academic and legal contexts, as well as in HR and management). What initially appeared as a dimension of HR policies – comprising value-based initiatives, awareness projects, and voluntary programs – has progressively evolved into one of the central indicators of contemporary work quality and the sustainability of organizational models. Indeed, the introduction and subsequent implementation of these practices have converged over time into what is known as Diversity Management, an organizational approach voluntarily adopted to create value within the organization itself. The pandemic, shifting values among younger generations, the growing weight of caregiving responsibilities, and the acceleration of technological transitions have further expanded the awareness that organizations can no longer limit themselves to guaranteeing formal rights, but must adopt an organizational approach aimed at promoting more equitable and inclusive workplaces.

Despite this growing emphasis, the literature highlights a striking paradox: increased attention has not consistently translated into substantial and lasting changes in organizational outcomes[1]. DEI policies proliferating across European organizations – especially in their 'traditional' formulation – often appear voluntary, fragmented, and lacking in impact[2]. Many companies make bold commitments, publish sustainability reports, implement unconscious bias training, or strengthen ethical codes, yet these interventions rarely lead to structural changes in work organization[3]. Initiatives largely remain confined to the HR domain, lacking transformative power over organizational processes, career progression, work time distribution, or workload management[4]. Evaluation of outcomes is often partial or limited to climate indicators, while shared accountability mechanisms involving worker representatives are scarce[5].

The risk of this approach is that DEI policies, although well-communicated, fail to impact the material conditions of individuals, intervening only at the margins of inequality rather than addressing its structural causes. Yet, and this is a central point in the most recent literature, inequalities do not only emerge from individual behaviors but are embedded in the very architecture of work[6]: in schedules, shift systems, skill hierarchies, evaluation mechanisms, access to opportunities, and the ability to reconcile personal and professional responsibilities.

In this context, the concept of equity plays a fundamental role. The distinction between equality and equity, widely discussed across various strands of research, shows that equality tends to offer everyone the same formal op-

[1] Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2012; Ainscow, *Promoting inclusion and equity in education: Lessons from international experiences*, in *NJSEP*, 2020, n. 1, pp. 7-16.

[2] Ponzellini, Riva, *Work-life balance e performance aziendale nella prospettiva del Diversity Management*, in *SL*, 2014, n. 2, pp. 83-98; Gazzaroli, Diallo, Gozzoli, *A critical perspective on diversity and diversity management for a contextualised and conscious approach*, in *ER*, 2025, vol. 47, n. 9, pp. 214-233.

[3] Dobbin, Kalev, *Why Diversity Programs Fail*, in *HBR*, 2016, nn. 7-8, pp. 52-60.

[4] Ravazzani, Mazzei, Butera, Fisichella, *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. Stato dell'arte nelle aziende italiane*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2023.

[5] Telljohann, *Le nuove piste di Lamborghini e Ducati*, in Carrieri, Nerozzi, Treu (eds.), *La partecipazione incisiva*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2015, pp. 113-130.

[6] Acker, *Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations*, in *G&S*, 2006, vol. 20, n. 4, pp. 441-464; Konow, Saijo, Akai, *Equity versus equality: Spectators, stakeholders and groups*, in *JEcPsy*, 2020, vol. 77, 102171.

portunities, while equity recognizes that individuals start from profoundly different conditions. As a result, treating everyone the same may reproduce – rather than reduce – existing asymmetries. Equity, in fact, highlights the multiple structural and intergenerational inequalities that affect actual access to resources, opportunities, and possibilities for growth[7]. Similarly, the concepts of diversity and inclusion take on distinct depths: diversity goes beyond a value-based dimension, positioning itself as an intentional commitment to embrace differences – whether cultural, linguistic, gender-based, or educational[8]; inclusion, on the other hand, is configured as a critical response to exclusion and segregation, aiming for full integration. The concept seeks to go beyond diversity, acting as a critical disposition that questions dominant narratives which perpetuate exclusion and discrimination[9].

These concepts express the set of activities aimed at recognizing and valuing the multiple qualities and characteristics that shape each person's unique identity in the workplace, including demographic, social, and cognitive dimensions such as gender, age, generation, culture, values, skills, and working style[10].

Considering this conceptual evolution, it becomes increasingly relevant to ask how, within contemporary organizational models, equity can be made a concrete, stable, measurable concept capable of guiding transformative actions in the workplace. The literature[11] suggests that such a result cannot be achieved through HR policies alone. What is needed is an infrastructure that holds legitimacy, continuity, bargaining power, and the capacity to intervene on the material determinants of work: in organizations, this infrastructure is represented by the system of industrial relations.

The concept of industrial relations refers to the management of social relations between the company and workers' representatives aimed at ensuring control over the collective employment relationship in a way that

[7] Konow, Saijo, Akai, *cit*.

[8] Thomas, *Interactive session: Equity, diversity, and inclusion in open education*, paper presented at the *Oregon Statewide OER Summit*, Lane Community College, Eugene, 17 May 2019.

[9] Villegas, *Inclusion, exclusion, segregation, and integration: How are they different?*, in *Think Inclusive*, 11 July 2017; Ahmed, *cit*.

[10] Ravazzani, Mazzei, Butera, Fisichella, *cit*.

[11] Kalev, Dobbin, Kelly, *Best Practices or Best Guesses? Assessing the Efficacy of Corporate Affirmative Action and Diversity Policies*, in *ASR*, 2006, vol. 71, n. 4, pp. 589-617; Holck, *Unequal by Structure: Exploring the Structural Embeddedness of Organizational Diversity*, in *Organization*, 2018, vol. 25, n. 2, pp. 242-259.

supports business competitiveness[12]. From this perspective, industrial relations are not limited to conflict regulation but can take on a proactive role in the construction of solutions. Second-level decentralized bargaining is considered the most suitable tool for developing concrete and context-specific solutions. Among the many topics addressed are participation, welfare, work-life balance, DEI policies, training, and organizational change. However, this generative activity of practices and innovations depends on the quality of social dialogue and the ability of the parties to negotiate constructively, working to combat the emergence of inequalities[13]. Industrial relations, therefore, do not merely regulate conflict but can serve as a driver for inclusion and act as an enabler in building innovative solutions for organizational equity.

It is precisely in this regard that the experience of Automobili Lamborghini becomes particularly significant. Over the years, the company has developed an advanced participatory model of industrial relations, in which information, consultation, and second-level bargaining constitute permanent tools for the governance of work. Unlike what happens elsewhere, DEI practices are not confined to the discretionary sphere of HR but are integrated into a structured, bilateral, and continuous process. The trade union is not merely informed but plays an active role in the design of measures: it is informed, it emerges, and it engages in discussion.

Collective bargaining, in fact, acts directly on those levers that can generate inequalities in the workplace: working time, shifts, workloads, flexibility, welfare, and protections for those in vulnerable conditions or with caregiving responsibilities. Equity thus becomes a matter of work governance, also expressed through bargaining tools that include monitoring, periodic review, and shared accountability. The 'Social Innovation' Working Group, the Bilateral Technical Committees (BTC), the constant sharing of information, and experimentation processes represent spaces where diversity and inclusion are not just values but concrete objects of regulation.

This very ability to treat equity as a collective – not merely individual – issue is one of the distinctive features of the Lamborghini model. The collective lens makes it possible to integrate tools and perspectives, allowing for the

[12] Testoni, *Manuale di tecnica di relazioni industriali*, Giuffrè Editore, ADAPT University Press, Milano, 2014.

[13] Carrieri, Della Rocca (eds.), *Il lavoro dopo il Novecento. Nuove forme, nuovi conflitti*, Donzelli, Roma, 2019.

identification of needs that are not immediately visible, the representation of demands from heterogeneous groups of workers, and the construction of solutions that do not penalize those with less voice within the organization.

This perspective also highlights a significant gap in literature. While studies on DEI practices focus primarily on HR processes and managerial approaches, the systemic relationship between industrial relations and equity policies remains underexplored. Analyses showing how participatory systems can strengthen – rather than hinder – the construction of inclusive contexts are still lacking. Even rare is the observation of equity as a negotiable, regulatable, and institutionalizable object through collective bargaining. The aim of this research is to investigate whether an advanced participatory model can represent the transformative lever to make equity operational, measurable, and sustainable within a complex production context. The objective of this paper, therefore, is not to present a 'best practice' case, but to shed light on how equity can become a driver of change and, consequently, to explore how participation and bargaining – when well-structured – can serve as the foundation for a fair transformation of work.

2. *Equity: from abstract principle to organizational device*

A solid understanding of the theoretical distinction between equality and equity constitutes the conceptual foundation of this work[14]. In the international debate on rights and work organization, equality implies uniform treatment for all, offering the same resources and opportunities regardless of individual differences. For example, a company might apply identical policies to everyone – same working hours, same benefits, same rules – assuming this ensures fairness. However, mere formal equality risks ignoring differences in starting conditions and existing systemic barriers (related, for instance, to gender, socioeconomic status, or caregiving responsibilities), ultimately perpetuating or even exacerbating existing disparities. In contrast, the concept of equity shifts the focus from equal treatment to substantive justice[15]: it recognizes that different starting points require dif-

[14] Konow, Saijo, Akai, *cit.*

[15] Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, Verso, London-New York, 2003.

ferentiated measures to ensure genuine access for all. In other words, equity favors the correction of inequalities through tailored solutions, calibrated to specific needs, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. Thus, equality guarantees equal inputs (the same resources for everyone), while equity aims for equal outcomes (ensuring everyone has the conditions to succeed) through differentiated support mechanisms. This distinction is crucial: identical treatment is not automatically fair, especially in the presence of heterogeneous personal circumstances.

In organizational contexts, the shift from equality to equity translates into moving beyond uniform solutions in favor of targeted interventions. An equity-oriented organization does not apply the same rules to everyone indiscriminately but instead seeks, where possible, to tailor policies and practices to the characteristics of groups and individuals, with the goal of ensuring equivalent opportunities for all. This means, for example, adapting working hours, benefits, leave policies, and career paths to employees' needs, thereby embedding a concrete approach to equity within the organization rather than treating it as a merely theoretical construct. Such an orientation requires a deep analysis of how the organization functions in order to identify where structural asymmetries – implicit or explicit – are embedded and to develop organizational or regulatory tools to correct them. These asymmetries are not only attributable to individual differences but are often built into the very structures of work. For instance, they may manifest through uniform regulations that produce unequal effects: rigid standard work schedules, limited access to flexible work or remote work, unequal ability to use leave and reconciliation measures for those with caregiving responsibilities, unbalanced distribution of (including cognitive) workloads, disparities in career paths, access to training, or opportunities for professional mobility. In all these areas, equity acts as a redistributive and reorganizational principle, requiring the reshaping of processes and practices to compensate for disadvantages and remove obstacles faced by certain groups. From this perspective, equity becomes an element of organizational justice, influencing how the company allocates resources, opportunities, and working time among employees. Ensuring equity is therefore not only a matter of ethics but also of organizational effectiveness: a workplace perceived as fair and inclusive is associated with higher levels of productivity, innovation, and employee engagement.

It is important to emphasize that the equity-based approach shifts the center of gravity of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives toward a

structural paradigm. As highlighted by literature[16], many traditional corporate diversity interventions focus on the individual (e.g., anti-bias training, awareness or sensitization programs) but fail to sufficiently impact actual outcomes in terms of equity and inclusion. This occurs because such programs, although well-intentioned, often merely promote awareness or attempt to change personal attitudes, without modifying the organizational mechanisms through which inequalities are reproduced. Equity, by contrast, requires intervention on processes and the rules of the game[17]: as research in behavioral economics applied to the workplace suggests[18], it is "by changing systems – especially at key moments in organizational operations where bias tends to emerge – that we can make workplaces more equitable, cohesive, and productive". In practice, this means, for example, revising personnel management criteria (from hiring to evaluation to career paths) to "build fairness into existing processes" and remove hidden obstacles that lead to unequal treatment[19]. 'Data-driven design' approaches[20] – based on the analysis of internal data to identify gaps and pain points – are emerging as effective tools for designing targeted interventions that address equity gaps within companies and allow for scientific testing of their impact. In short, treating equity as an institutional objective means integrating it into the formal mechanisms of the organization (HR policies, contracts, decision-making processes, evaluation metrics), rather than relegating it to statements of intent or ad hoc initiatives. Not coincidentally, some companies have begun to explicitly declare equity and inclusion as structural values to be pursued through dedicated policies and internal standards.

A crucial aspect, which lays the groundwork for the following sections, is the translation of equity into an organizational and bargaining device. To move from an abstract principle to concrete implementation, equity must be institutionalized through shared rules and practices. In this sense, the role of industrial relations is essential: collective bargaining and participatory

[16] Bohnet, Chilazi, *Make Work Fair: Data-Driven Design for Diversity and Inclusion*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2025.

[17] Bohnet, *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2016.

[18] Bohnet, Chilazi, *cit.*

[19] Kalev, Dobbin, Kelly, *cit.*

[20] Williams, Dolkas, *Data-Driven Diversity*, in *HBR*, 2022, vol. 100, n. 2; Pinkett, *Data-Driven DEI: The Tools and Metrics You Need to Measure, Analyze, and Improve Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, Wiley, Hoboken, 2023.

models serve as the infrastructure supporting organizational justice, as they allow for the codification of differentiated treatments into binding rules that make the organization more equitable. Numerous studies[21] in the field of labor relations have emphasized that the free market and unilateral corporate policies alone often do not guarantee equity; to balance economic efficiency with social justice, it is necessary to establish rules and institutions capable of governing the system and ensuring broadly shared prosperity. In other words, equity becomes a negotiable object: it can (and must) be included in trade union agendas and collective agreements, made measurable, and subjected to periodic review through shared indicators and accountability systems[22]. This shift from the individual to the collective level is decisive, as it allows the principle of equity to be anchored in enforceable rights and formal procedures.

Ultimately, to generate real change, equity must permeate the organizational structure through shared policies, processes, and tools. In certain contexts, as demonstrated by the case analyzed in the following sections, this transition from ideal to action has been made possible thanks to an advanced system of industrial relations, capable of translating differentiated needs into concrete negotiated solutions. It is precisely through the analysis of these dynamics – and in particular the role of collective bargaining and participation – that this paper will explore how equity can become a true regulatory and organizational device.

3. *Methodology*

The choice of Automobili Lamborghini S.p.A. as the case study[23] for this research does not stem from a merely descriptive intent, but from the analytical need to observe a mature participatory model in action, within a highly specialized manufacturing context. In the scope of this work, the company's participatory framework is not a mere preliminary consultation,

[21] Carrieri, Della Rocca, *cit.*; Freeman, Medoff, *What Do Unions Do?*, Basic Books, New York, 1984; Polanyi, *La grande trasformazione*, Einaudi, Torino, 2004.

[22] Telljohann, *cit.*; Pillinger, Wintour, *Collective Bargaining and Gender Equality*, Agenda Publishing, London, 2018.

[23] Gillham, *Case Study Research Methods*, in *Real World Research*, Continuum, London-New York, 2000, pp. 1-106.

but a structured process that has enabled the introduction of innovations and the achievement of joint results.

The case study methodology was deliberately chosen, as it is effective not only in describing the output of a research project, but also the context in which it took place, highlighting its specific features. The aim of the investigation was to assess whether it was possible, within the organization under study, to adopt targeted policies and interventions to bridge equity gaps, and whether industrial relations have served as an infrastructure for organizational equity.

Over time, the company has developed a particularly advanced participatory system that has enabled the introduction – through collective bargaining – of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion practices.

Methodological triangulation is at the core of the research design, combining qualitative and quantitative sources to ensure the robustness and validity of the results. First, a systematic document analysis was conducted on company-level bargaining (integrative agreements and participatory protocols from recent years). This made it possible to reconstruct the evolution of Lamborghini's participatory model and to identify the main innovations in terms of equity and inclusion. The contractual texts – with particular attention to the new Integrative and Participation Agreement signed on January 24, 2024 – were coded by key themes, distinguishing the areas of DEI intervention.

In parallel, extensive field observation was carried out. Thanks to the internal role of the author, it was possible to directly participate in numerous meetings, bargaining sessions, and daily activities related to the case. This prolonged participant observation[24] made it possible to capture relational nuances and mechanisms of collaboration between the social partners that would be difficult to detect from the outside. The observation was also made possible by conducting semi-structured interviews with a targeted and diverse sample (company executives, HR representatives, and internal trade union delegates - RSU)[25].

Finally, the research integrated both qualitative and quantitative components through the 'Inclusion Survey'[26], addressed to the entire company

[24] Corbetta, *Metodologie e tecniche della ricerca sociale*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1999.

[25] Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 1996; Albaret, Deas, *Semistructured Interviews*, in *Qualitative Research Methods for International Organizations*, JSTOR, 2023, pp. 81-93.

[26] Creswell, Rafferty, Carr, *Longitudinal Surveys*, in *Social Science Research Methods*,

population and focused on perceptions of inclusion and diversity within the organization.

The adopted methodological design – a single in-depth case study using multiple sources – is consistent with the objective of exploring equity as an organizational and bargaining process. The triangulation of different techniques (qualitative and quantitative) strengthened the internal validity of the results, allowing for the comparison and validation of information across different levels. This approach made it possible to detect not only what has been done at Lamborghini in terms of DEI, but also how such innovations were made possible, shedding light on the causal relationships between participation, collective bargaining, and the promotion of organizational equity. In summary, the methodology employed offers a holistic and empirically grounded view of the "Lamborghini case", laying the foundation for discussing – in the following sections – the theoretical and practical lessons emerging from this experience.

4. *The Industrial relations model at Automobili Lamborghini*

Since the late 1980s, Automobili Lamborghini S.p.A. has progressively developed an advanced model of industrial relations, in which the participation of workers and their trade union representatives has become an integral part of corporate governance. In parallel, the company has developed its own policies and initiatives on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), which have been progressively integrated into its integrative agreements – evolving from general references to concrete and measurable measures embedded in collective bargaining.

Even before the acquisition by Audi Volkswagen in 1998, the company was no stranger to negotiation. From its early years, there was space for dialogue between the social partners, with significant dynamics of exchange, even in a context marked by alternating phases of growth and crisis. It was during this period that the distinctive features of a system of industrial relations began to take shape – one based on constructive exchange and rooted in a territorial culture where trade unions were already strongly present. For this reason, Lamborghini

is often described as a company with 'fertile ground,' ready to embrace the evolution that would come with its entry into the Audi-VW Group.

The pre-acquisition phase was marked not only by the signing of union agreements but also by the conclusion of Integrative Company Agreements. In 1988, one of the first such agreements was signed[27], in which management recognized the role of the Factory Council and introduced important procedures for information sharing and prior consultation with worker representatives – including the commitment to inform the union about industrial plans and organizational changes before their implementation. This was a significant step, as it introduced elements that went beyond mere *ex-post* communication, valuing *ex-ante* dialogue and laying the foundation for a more structured exchange.

The subsequent agreement, signed in 1991[28] came at a time of serious production crisis for the company, and industrial relations became one of the tools used to manage the situation. Elements of joint crisis management were introduced, including procedures for informing the Factory Council before activating measures such as the Wage Guarantee Fund (Cassa Integrazione Guadagni), along with employment guarantees. It was during this phase that it became clear that company-level bargaining was not only a tool for distributing economic bonuses – already in place since 1968[29] – but also a means to involve the union in developing plans to avoid redundancies and safeguard production continuity.

Finally, in 1995[30], the first experiments in direct participation and group-based work organization were launched: the parties agreed to implement the creation of Working Groups composed of management, trade union representatives (RSU), and non-delegated workers, tasked with contributing to the identification and improvement of operational processes and working conditions. Another crucial innovation was the introduction of a 'cooling-off clause,' under which the company and unions agreed not to take unilateral action in the event of disputes for at least seven days, dedicating that time to meetings aimed at finding shared solutions. This laid the foundation for a climate of participatory and non-confrontational

[27] *Contratto Integrativo Aziendale*, 18 May 1988.
[28] *Contratto Integrativo Aziendale* 16 December 1991.
[29] *Accordo sindacale* 5 July 1968.
[30] *Contratto Integrativo Aziendale* 27 July 1995.

industrial relations, oriented toward dialogue and problem-solving through negotiation.

In the post-acquisition phase, the industrial relations model began to be influenced by that of the parent company, gradually evolving into a unique integration of the Italian participatory tradition and the German codetermination system – generating a form of negotiated cooperation that has few parallels in the national landscape[31]. The arrival of the VW Group in 1998 brought resources and a reference model – as a manager from that period stated, "the Audi acquisition provided a multi-level consultation structure and strengthened transparency and openness; an antagonistic approach – in which information is withheld from the union – would not have worked," emphasizing that "industrial relations and organizational performance must collaborate… they must grow together" (Management Interview, 2023). At the documentary level, the 1999 integrative agreement[32] represents a historic turning point, introducing a fully structured model of corporate participation inspired by the German model but adapted to the Italian context: industrial relations began to take on a permanent structure with the introduction of a calendar of meetings between company management and the union. The agreement also included significant improvements in working hours and individual rights for employees, effectively laying the groundwork for many internal equity measures: experimental flexible working time mechanisms were introduced, and leave entitlements were extended beyond those provided by the national collective agreement (CCNL).

In the following years, the system was consolidated and prepared for the mature participatory model that exists today. A key milestone was the signing of the Volkswagen Group's 'Charta of Labor Relations' in 2009, which promotes principles of cooperation and participation and encourages company-level bargaining to adopt them. The company, through the RSU and local unions, formally adhered to the Charta in 2011, and the 2012 Integrative Agreement[33] marked the consolidation of these principles within the organization. It was at this point that the Bilateral Technical Committees (BTCs) were formally established – joint bodies composed of company and union representatives with consultative and proactive functions on specific

[31] Carreri, Gosetti, Mattei, *Il "caso" Lamborghini: contrattazione continua e tempi di lavoro*, in *LD*, 2024, n. 4.

[32] *Contratto Integrativo Aziendale* 12 November 1999.

[33] *Contratto Integrativo Aziendale* 4 July 2012.

topics. The introduction of the BTCs, as stable bodies within the participatory architecture, reflects both the German *Bestimmung* system and the working groups already piloted by Automobili Lamborghini in the 1990s.

The company's inclusive capacity has grown in parallel with the evolution of these participatory mechanisms. In fact, the historical trajectory shows that Lamborghini's union activity initially focused on traditional issues (wages, working hours, job classifications, training), with no explicit references to Diversity & Inclusion – except in compliance with legal obligations on disability or equal opportunities. However, over time, negotiated participation has progressively incorporated the dimensions of equity and inclusion: since the early 2000s, topics such as work-life balance, organizational well-being, and equal opportunities have entered company agreements, becoming subjects of negotiation between the parties. The Integrative Agreement signed in 2015[34] definitively consolidated the participatory model and fully introduced DEI topics into bargaining: in particular, welfare and parental support measures were introduced or strengthened, including additional parental leave beyond what is provided by the CCNL, the establishment of agreements to support parenting, and a commitment to positively consider part-time requests for family needs. Measures supporting flexible working hours were expanded, and a commitment was signed to pilot agile work arrangements (so-called smart working) for white-collar employees by 2018.

Today, the Lamborghini model integrates DEI measures formalized in the integrative agreements of 2015[35], 2019[36] e 2024[37], which are now firmly embedded in the organizational system. The pillars of participation – information, consultation, and bargaining – have tangibly enabled a transformation in the company's inclusive capacity: initially, DEI topics were not part of the dialogue between the parties, but the constant sharing of information made the needs of different groups visible, active consultation allowed for the inclusion of diverse and alternative perspectives, and ultimately, bargaining made the resulting solutions enforceable and stable. The net effect of these innovations is a more inclusive organization, in which workers rec-

[34] *Contratto Integrativo Aziendale* 8 June 2015.
[35] *Contratto Integrativo Aziendale* 8 June 2015.
[36] *Contratto Integrativo Aziendale* 26 July 2019.
[37] *Contratto Integrativo Aziendale* 24 January 2024.

ognize that the company's attention to equity and equal opportunities has grown compared to the past.

Continuous bargaining has thus ensured that the three pillars of participation did not remain mere theoretical principles but were translated into stable procedures. This ongoing structured dialogue has enabled a shift from traditionally adversarial bargaining to a true system of corporate co-governance, in which workers have a voice in strategic decisions and – within the procedures established by company agreements – can influence their own working reality, with positive effects on the internal climate and perceived organizational justice.

To fully understand the model, it is important to recognize that the social partners have been a crucial success factor, having anticipated innovation. Both parties – management and unions – have invested in participation and embraced the structured model introduced with the Group's arrival. As a manager from that period stated, "the Audi acquisition provided a multi-level consultation structure and strengthened transparency and openness, showing that an antagonistic approach – in which information is withheld from the union – would not have worked," emphasizing that "industrial relations and organizational performance must collaborate… they must grow together" (Management Interview, 2023). But the real innovation came from the people at Lamborghini, who translated those principles into daily practice. The union seized the opportunity to expand its role beyond economic demands, becoming a co-architect of organizational and inclusive policies. The company's management, for its part, invested in joint training and the creation of mutual trust, recognizing the value of worker involvement as a source of perspective enrichment, thereby enabling the development of innovative solutions and real competitive advantages. A trade union representative recalls the post-acquisition transition phase: "Our RSU went through a period of waiting and learning; we even visited German factories to understand metrics, bargaining methods, and how to achieve goals together" (RSU Interview, 2023). This attitude of mutual learning and openness made it possible to adapt the VW model to local specificities, rather than imposing it rigidly.

The geographical context, characterized by a strong social fabric, also contributed to the system's consolidation: Sant'Agata Bolognese is located in the heart of Emilia, a region known for its strong union presence, culture of dialogue, and pragmatic approach to problem-solving. From the documen-

tary analysis presented above, it is clear that when Automobili Lamborghini was acquired, it already had a well-established system of industrial relations. This facilitated the local translation of the German participation model: as researchers have noted, the VW framework merged with a tradition of labor relations rooted in years of territorial practices[38]. Additional factors also stimulated the development of the industrial relations system: on the one hand, the company's single production site allowed for the system to evolve through direct and frequent interactions between the social partners; on the other hand, the parties themselves engaged in joint training projects on the principles of the Charta and the broader participation system.

5. *Practices for organizational equity*

Having outlined the evolution of the company's participation system, the following sections will analyze different areas of intervention through which industrial relations at Lamborghini have translated organizational equity into concrete measures: the reorganization of working time, policies supporting parenting and family life, and more broadly, Diversity & Inclusion initiatives. In each of these areas, structured participation has made it possible to identify innovative solutions that combine improvements for workers with organizational needs, promoting greater internal justice and equity.

5.1. *Reorganization of working time*

In recent years, Lamborghini has implemented a radical reorganization of shifts and working hours, with the stated goal of improving the work-life balance of all employees – not merely increasing production flexibility. This initiative is at the heart of the 2024 Integrative and Participation Agreement and represents a practice of equity, as it aims to rebalance reconciliation opportunities between white-collar and blue-collar workers. In the past, office staff already benefited from flexible hours and the possibility of working remotely (agile work or smart working), thus managing both time and place of work with greater autonomy. Conversely, production workers, bound to

[38] Carreri, Gosetti, Mattei, *cit.*

physical presence on the shop floor, were almost always excluded from these reconciliation measures due to their shift-based work schedules. Making the organizational structure more equitable and inclusive allowed the parties to rethink the entire system, ensuring work-life balance tools that take into account the specificities of different roles. To this end, a Bilateral Technical Committee (BTC) composed of engineers and technical experts was established. This committee conducted an in-depth analysis of the existing organization, identifying solutions capable of supporting the company's growth path and updating a shift system that no longer met current needs. The technical approach made it possible to avoid political solutions, focusing instead on developing an organizational model that could restructure working hours while safeguarding both company productivity levels and pay equity. For production workers, the agreement introduced a new weekly schedule alternating between five-day and four-day workweeks: departments operating on two shifts or a central shift benefit from one Friday off every two weeks, while departments on three shifts receive two Fridays off every three weeks. This measure was accompanied by a reduction in Paid Annual Leave (PAR), ergonomic improvements, and enhanced organizational efficiency, ensuring the overall sustainability of the new system. In parallel, the already extensive flexibility system for white-collar staff was further strengthened, confirming and expanding the hybrid work model. Employees retained the option to work remotely up to twelve days per month, and a flat-rate time bank mechanism was introduced, allowing up to twelve days per year to be used for the recovery of mental and physical energy.

This reorganization represents an emblematic case in which operational flexibility is combined with equity among workers. The main 'constraint' to overcome was the very nature of the roles: many traditional reconciliation measures (adaptable hours, telework) were not applicable to production line workers for obvious practical reasons. The challenge, therefore, was to find a formula that would also return free time to this category. The most innovative contribution of the technical committee was to bring expertise to the bargaining table, shifting the discussion from a purely 'political' level to an objective and design-oriented one, restructuring working hours in a differentiated way for each department. Although it is not yet possible to report the final outcomes of the pilot project – still ongoing and expected to conclude at the end of March 2026 – this research presents some of the data that emerged from the 2024 internal WellBeing Survey. Most of employees

who participated in the survey reported that they perceived a positive impact on their work-life balance thanks to the new work time reorganization. Once the pilot data becomes available and the 2024 and 2025 results can be compared, it will be possible to assess whether the reorganization also had an impact on production workers' perception of organizational justice, reducing the treatment gap between them and white-collar employees.

5.2. *Shared parenting and family policies*

A second area of participatory practices aimed at equity concerns support for parenting and family life. At Lamborghini, the union and the company have used integrative agreements to build an advanced system of family welfare and work-life balance, often anticipating national legislation. The most innovative element of these negotiated measures lies in giving back time to workers to balance professional and private commitments, accompanied by appropriate financial support. For example, as early as the 2015-2017 integrative agreement, three days of paid paternity leave were introduced – in addition to what is required by law – and five unpaid days per year for child illness up to the age of 12. Subsequently, the parties further extended these provisions: today, Lamborghini significantly supplements the parental leave allowance provided by INPS, ensuring new parents greater financial support than the legal minimum. These measures directly address structural inequalities such as the 'motherhood penalty' and gender stereotypes: on the one hand, by encouraging co-parenting (fathers are supported in sharing childcare responsibilities through increased paid leave), and on the other, by offering working mothers' conditions that allow them to return to work without career penalties. The joint attention of the company and the union to these issues is also reflected in their commitment to raising internal awareness, promoting parenting as a valued component of professional development within the company. Another crucial aspect is the inclusion of vulnerable groups, which adds a dimension of real equity: the most recent agreements provide more favorable conditions for employees with particularly demanding family situations – for example, additional leave for single parents or those with children with disabilities, extended leave and part-time options for those caring for non-self-sufficient relatives, financial support for family care, and more. By recognizing the specific needs of these groups and designing tailored protections, the social partners have pursued

the goal of enabling all employees to reconcile work and private life more equitably. These innovations negotiated years ahead of the national debate – demonstrate how an equity-based approach in industrial relations can effectively address initial inequalities, rebalancing opportunities for those in disadvantaged positions.

5.3. *Diversity & inclusion policies and cultural change*

Finally, a broader reflection is proposed on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) policies as they intersect with collective bargaining. Perhaps the most significant feature is precisely this integration: the issue of inclusion is not confined to unilateral initiatives by the Human Resources department but is shared at the bargaining table, discussed, and codified in agreements. This approach prevents DEI from remaining rhetorical and instead ensures concrete resources and accountability. A clear example is the reorganization of shifts, which was conceived with an inclusion-oriented perspective. On a broader level, the Social Innovation Working Group has served as a participatory governance tool for inclusion. In this shared laboratory – composed of HR professionals, RSU representatives, and specialists – inclusion projects are discussed and monitored, survey results are shared, and new initiatives are co-designed. The group has functioned as a driver of social innovation, aligning DEI projects with the real needs of the workforce. Among the implemented projects, some have had a particularly transformative impact on corporate culture – for example, the introduction of Italian Sign Language (LIS) training within the company, aimed at raising awareness among colleagues about communication with deaf individuals, breaking down communication barriers, and tangibly demonstrating a commitment to disability inclusion. Company-wide training on unconscious bias has also played a key role in fostering broader cultural change: by encouraging more inclusive practices, the training has helped employees become aware of how biases can influence their work, relationships with colleagues, and everyday dynamics. Overall, these DEI projects – some of which were planned and implemented with union involvement – have had visible and positive effects: increased awareness, the creation of internal support networks (e.g., employee communities), and a clear signal that inclusion is a shared value. The very fact that these initiatives are enshrined in agreements with the RSU elevates D&I to a

'serious' and collective issue, making it an integral part of the company's governance system.

6. *Data analysis*

To assess how the DEI policies adopted by the company are perceived, reference can be made to the Inclusion Survey, which is administered annually to all employees. The results show positive trends in parallel with the implementation of the measures described above.

The surveys conducted in 2025 and 2024 (after the signing of the new integrative agreement at the beginning of the year) were taken into consideration. The first notable finding concerns the participation rate, which increased between 2024 and 2025. In addition, the inclusion index – i.e., the overall score reflecting the perception of inclusion within the company – also rose in percentage terms. This increase in both engagement and overall perception of inclusion is a significant indicator, suggesting that the actions implemented during the intervening period – including those introduced by the agreements (e.g., reorganization of working hours, enhanced reconciliation policies, and DEI projects) – were positively received and contributed to improving the internal climate.

Specifically, the survey investigates three different dimensions: the first relates to the individual dimension of the employee, assessing whether they feel they can be authentic at work and whether they experience a sense of belonging to the company. The second dimension concerns the team, focusing on psychological safety in expressing oneself and the inclusive behaviors adopted by colleagues. Finally, the third dimension pertains to the organization, asking whether company processes are perceived as fair by employees and whether an inclusive culture is truly present within the company. Although all dimensions showed positive and growing results compared to the previous year, it is particularly interesting to note that the dimension with the most significant percentage increase was the one related to the organization and its processes[39]. This leap likely reflects the tangible

[39] Inclusion Survey Automobili Lamborghini, 2024-2025: The survey on the topic investigated the organization and business processes in a general way, without asking a specific question about the elements of work organization introduced with the 2024 Company Bargain.

benefits of the initiatives described (more equitable schedules, new welfare policies, etc.), suggesting that these measures have helped make internal processes appear fairer in the eyes of employees.

Analyzing differences in perception among various employee groups, the most relevant findings concern gender and job classification, which offer interpretive insights. In general, men and women report very similar levels of inclusion, indicating that equal opportunity policies are perceived as equitable across genders. The situation is different, however, for blue-collar production workers, who show a slightly lower inclusion index compared to their white-collar colleagues. This suggests that, although they benefit from the new measures, production workers perceive a comparatively smaller improvement in their autonomy and influence. Overall, these variations indicate that, while there is broad cross-sectional support for the model (no group reports low inclusion scores), there are still areas where efforts should be focused to close the perceived gap.

It is important to note that these climate data also have inherent limitations. First, since the surveys are voluntary, the results may be affected by participation bias: for example, more engaged or satisfied employees are generally more likely to respond to the questionnaire, while more critical voices may go unrepresented. Moreover, because the survey is voluntary, the response rate does not cover 100% of the company population. Second, surveys measure subjective perceptions, which do not necessarily correspond to 'objective' changes in phenomena, whether positive or negative. For this reason, the data should be interpreted alongside other organizational indicators. These limitations do not diminish the value of the evidence collected but rather suggest a degree of caution in interpretation.

7. *Discussion*

The Lamborghini case allows for broad theoretical and practical implications. On an academic level, the findings confirm – and at the same time enrich – what has been highlighted in the literature regarding the positive role of industrial relations in the field of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI). Numerous studies suggest that the active involvement of workers in decision-making processes improves the organizational climate and perceived well-being; the Lamborghini experience provides a concrete

example of this dynamic: structured participation, supported by inclusive bargaining, has translated into measures that have effectively reduced inequalities and increased satisfaction. In particular, Lamborghini demonstrates the complementarity between business performance and collaborative industrial relations, in line with the views of authors such as Hirschman and Gallie on the link between organizational voice and worker engagement/motivation. At the same time, the case pushes beyond some traditional positions: in the typical Italian framework, DEI initiatives have often been considered the exclusive domain of HR functions, while collective bargaining was expected to focus primarily on wages and standard protections. The case study presented here breaks out of this dichotomy, showing that industrial relations can be the driving force behind inclusion and sustainability policies, expanding company bargaining to encompass the individual and their needs, rather than limiting it to the management of the employment relationship. In this sense, the case shifts to the classical paradigm: DEI policies are no longer external to social dialogue but are integrated into negotiations oriented toward worker well-being.

The original contribution of this study lies in documenting how the concept of equity can be made concrete, stable, and measurable within an organizational model. Through in-depth document analysis combined with the examination of employee perceptions, the study illustrates a real case in which equity – understood as attention to diverse needs and the reduction of inequalities – has become a guiding principle codified in corporate governance. This enriches the theory of participatory industrial relations by highlighting the importance of considering not only economic outcomes but also socio-organizational ones. In particular, the analysis shows how typical industrial relations tools (assemblies, bilateral committees, integrative bargaining) can be used to promote inclusion and reconciliation, expanding the traditional function of bargaining. This provides the literature with a concrete case of impactful 'negotiated participation,' a concept that had been theorized but rarely observed in practice in Italy. Furthermore, the paper's integrated approach – which combines historical analysis of contractual texts with internal qualitative and quantitative data – constitutes a relevant methodological contribution, offering the opportunity to study from within how social partners experience and perceive the participatory process.

The Lamborghini experience shows how an industrial relations system based on a participatory model can become a strategic resource for

both the company and its workers, provided it is built over time, adapted to the context, and nurtured daily. It is not a 'pure' or mechanically replicable model: it is a hybrid system, born from fertile ground but one that has required – and continues to require – a constant investment in culture, trust, and shared responsibility. For HR departments, strategic collaboration with trade unions can become a competitive advantage: involving workers in the design of organizational solutions and welfare policies improves both the acceptance and effectiveness of these measures. Such an approach implies a significant cultural shift: management must recognize the union as a partner in value creation, sharing information transparently and respecting the rules of engagement. As stated in a management interview: "For dialogue to be effective, it must be on equal footing: without information sharing, it is impossible to build a shared synthesis" (Manager Interview). This does not mean relinquishing corporate leadership but rather exercising it inclusively: decisions must be aligned with values and respectful of people, because only by involving people can the best performance be achieved.

From the union's perspective, the participatory system has represented a path of collective growth. As one RSU delegate emphasized, "participation has been a structured process, a compromise that does not exclude conflict but channels it into constructive forms." In a context like Italy, where union culture has historically been rooted in confrontation, participation has required a shift in mindset: "in the past, we would go on strike; today, we sit down and talk." This does not mean that conflict has disappeared, but rather that it has been transformed into ongoing dialogue, where differences in interest are addressed through negotiation rather than rupture.

The system has also strengthened the role of the union delegate, who "is no longer just a representative, but a respected interlocutor, recognized by both workers and the company." This evolution was preceded by necessary specialized training to acquire technical and managerial skills (including sessions with the German union). Participation has helped build an image of the union as a constructive actor, capable of proposing solutions and not merely making demands. As some delegates have noted, "the participatory system alone is not enough: we need a strong, rooted union, capable of speaking to workers and renewing itself in language and methods." The model and the construction of a stronger union are not without limitations. Some delegates point out that "there is no such thing as 100% trust between

the parties, and perhaps there never will be: it's right that a balance of power remains." Others warn of the risk that participation may be misunderstood or exploited, or that it may lose touch with the everyday reality of work. But all agree on one point: the system has brought widespread well-being, a more relaxed atmosphere, and greater accountability.

From the company's side, the system has brought tangible benefits. Union involvement has made it possible to build decisions that are more robust, shared, and sustainable over time. As one manager put it, "participation simplifies difficult things, but it can also make simple things more complex." It is a system that requires time, dialogue, and experimentation. But it is precisely this gradual approach that allows for testing solutions, gathering feedback, and adjusting courses. The introduction of experimentation as a bargaining practice – for example, in flexible working hours for blue-collar workers – has been one of the most significant innovations: "you don't just sign an agreement and stop there; you test it, measure it, and refine it".

Another distinctive element has been the investment in joint training. Workshops, shared learning paths, and moments of dialogue outside the bargaining table have helped build a common culture and overcome mutual prejudices. "Participation is demanding," noted an HR manager, "but it's also a system that creates value. It's not just about dividing a pie, but about baking a bigger one together." Training has helped build trust between the parties. "Participation can start at the top, but it must be embraced by everyone. Middle management has enormous responsibility. The union must be willing to take risks and, when it holds the upper hand, not exploit it: we prefer to involve and listen, initiating a dialogue based on trust. Daily experiences, over time, consolidate this trust" (RSU Interview, 2023). In other words, mutual credibility is built through consistent behavior over time: the union uses new participatory tools responsibly (without abuse or extremism), and the company honors its commitments, avoiding punitive or delaying tactics.

What makes the Lamborghini model particularly interesting for future participation policies is its ability to structurally integrate inclusion. Participation is not an end in itself but has become, over time, a vehicle for promoting equity, well-being, and the recognition of diversity. As one union delegate observed, "participation is a form of enrichment in everyone's life, because it allows us to achieve results that truly improve the quality of working life."

In this context, inclusion is not just a stated goal but a daily practice. Measures supporting parenting, disability, generational and cultural diversity, as well as reconciliation policies and awareness projects, are the result of ongoing dialogue between the parties. The union has become a spokesperson for new demands, while the company has confirmed that "decisions must be aligned with values, respectful of people, and, above all, effective".

This synergy has generated an environment in which workers feel actively involved in change. "Employees don't feel like numbers, but part of a project," said one delegate. "The well-being experienced in the company is perceived as something we helped build." Participation, therefore, not only improves productivity but also strengthens the sense of belonging, trust, and internal cohesion.

For HR departments, this implies a paradigm shift: it is no longer just about managing personnel, but about co-designing with them. For unions, it means taking responsibility for contributing to decisions, moving beyond a purely adversarial logic. For public policy, finally, the Lamborghini case demonstrates that a participatory and inclusive system is possible even in the absence of national legislation, provided that the cultural and relational conditions allow it.

As one union representative put it: "Participation means blending together; it's not about one person in one place making the difference. It can start at the top, but it must be embraced by everyone." And as a manager reminded us: "Industrial relations and organizational performance must collaborate. They are not two separate worlds, but two dimensions that must grow together."

The Lamborghini model is not easy to replicate, but it shows that participation and inclusion can coexist and reinforce one another. The case study suggests that a participation system is achievable even without dedicated legislation[40], if the parties are willing: this confirms what scholars such as Treu and Caruso have theorized about the need for greater willingness to converge on the part of companies and unions to implement Article 46 of the Constitution on cooperation in management. Secondly, the integration of inclusion and well-being objectives into bargaining can become a model of participatory sustainability governance elsewhere as well: institutions and

[40] L. 15 maggio 2025 n. 125.

social partners should consider company-level bargaining not only as a tool for conflict, but also as a platform for social innovation.

In conclusion, the central theoretical insight guiding this study is that organizational equity arises from a virtuous cycle of dialogue and action: first, the company listens to the needs and concerns of workers, collecting data (e.g., internal surveys) and giving voice to employee representatives (employee voice); second, it discusses these needs in participatory and bargaining forums, involving both the union and relevant technical experts (e.g., bilateral committees on topics such as working hours, welfare, training); third, it jointly decides on interventions and solutions, which are then implemented and monitored over time. This process shows how well-designed and sustained participation can transform the workplace into a complex inclusive system that generates well-being, equity, and competitiveness.

Abstract

This paper examines how industrial relations can function as a structural driver of organizational equity, through an in-depth case study of Automobili Lamborghini. Drawing on document analysis, participant observation and semi-structured interviews, the study shows how a mature participatory model, characterized by continuous information-sharing, consultation, and second-level collective bargaining, enables the translation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) principles into concrete, measurable organizational practices. The findings illustrate that equity emerges not from voluntary HR initiatives alone, but from negotiated processes capable of reshaping working time, supporting shared parenting and incorporating inclusion into corporate governance. The Lamborghini model demonstrates how collective bargaining can institutionalize equity as a regulative device, reducing structural inequalities and enhancing organizational justice. The study contributes to the literature by showing that participatory industrial relations can act as an infrastructure for fair organizational transformation.

Keywords

Industrial relations, Participation, Organizational equity, Collective bargaining, Work-life balance.