

## Behind and beyond the Great Resignation: A pedagogical viewpoint

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### Abstract

The Great Resignation broke out in 2021 and now it is a worldwide phenomenon, which particularly interests the USA, but it does not leave Italy indifferent; here, it assumes a predominantly youthful identity. In short, this is a mass voluntary resignation. Likely stimulated and exacerbated by the pandemic, the phenomenon is not accompanied by analyses, which are able to identify the causes with certainty. However, some research highlights various points of a widespread work uneasiness which intercept the interest of the pedagogy of work. Therefore, this article aims at investigating what lies behind the Great Resignation and putting forward pedagogical proposals for the solution of certain critical issues. More specifically, the argument focuses on the neoliberal logic of competitive performance and the lack of care for human relationships at work such as fundamental problematic factors and, mainly prying about the theory of relational goods, it continues by indicating viable trajectories to promote a pedagogical culture of work starting from young people, focused on the network of educationally meaningful relationships.

**Keywords:** Great Resignation, pedagogy of work, performance and neoliberal rationality, relational goods, young people and pedagogical culture of work.

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### 1. The Great Resignation

Anthony Klotz, associate professor of Management at May Business School, Texas A&M University, coined the phrase “the Great Resignation”. Answering to Business Insider (Kaplan, 2021), he stated that the expression took off after he was quoted by Bloomberg Businessweek (Cohen, 2021) on

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“how to quit your job”. He also claimed he did not know exactly why he used this expression with Bloomberg. Simply, it came up to him at home, talking to his wife about an observed trend and what would happen to many workers. What then happened and what is happening is, precisely, a Great Resignation (GR), that is an economic trend in which employees voluntarily resign from their jobs en masse, beginning in early 2021, primarily in the United States. This phenomenon is also called Big Quit.

On the whole, only in 2021 about 33 million U.S. workers have quit their jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), with unprecedented monthly peaks, since April 2021 onwards. Since the beginning of the pandemic, about 5 million individuals who have resigned have not returned to the labor force yet. Impressive data, which seem to find no prepandemic precedents, even if some analysts – such as Prof. Zagorsky (2021) from Boston University – argue that this is not a record and similar peaks have already been seen in the past. The causes are still uncertain at the moment. There is no qualitative analysis which explains them. Goldman Sachs investment bank tried to give answers with a report published a few months ago (Briggs, 2021).

Firstly, Goldman Sachs points out that most of the people who have left their jobs since the beginning of the pandemic (2020) and have not returned are over 55 (3.4 million), assuming that the virus substantially affected early retirement decisions. In this sense, he hopes that the improvement of the pandemic situation, the increase in vaccinations and the new antiviral drugs can reduce health concerns and tempt older people, as well as prime-age workers (1.7 million), to return to work. Secondly, with regard to prime-age workers, the bank specifies that most of them declared at the time that they wanted to re-enter the labor force. Thirdly, with attention to the youngest people again, the bank assumes that the suspension of childcare services due to Covid-19 weighed on the choice of staying at home to take care of the children. This hypothesis would seem to be supported by the fact that, since autumn 2021, when these services were fully reactivated, there has been a faint resumption. Fourthly, Goldman Sachs assumes that the subsidies and tax supports, which were introduced to face the economic consequences of the pandemic, equally influenced, assuming for “assisted” unemployment. On this point, in the face of the summer termination of the benefits granted and their residual after-effects, Goldman Sachs predicts that family savings can last other three months at most, forcing people to back off.

However, as it can be seen from the examination of the bank: i) if it is true that the requests for early retirement actually correspond to 1.5 million people of over 55, it is equally true that the prime-age workers, who declared that they wanted to go back to work, have not done it yet, stimulating the following question: «if most prime-age workers intend to re-enter the labor force, why

haven't they done so already?»; ii) given that the fear of contracting the virus affects both over and under 55, the recent improvement in the pandemic situation is not, however, producing a substantial change regarding the resignation trend; iii) despite the presence of childcare services and the end of financial support, the return to work is hardly able to take off. And here, then, comes the last hypothesis suggested by Goldman Sachs: «A final long-run risk to labor force participation is that some worker's preferences and lifestyles may have shifted». This is the risk – as it is defined – which worries Goldman Sachs the most, even if he concludes by stating that he therefore expects that the participation rate of the labor force will increase in the short term (albeit lowering the initial forecast on the percentage of the participation rate).

In order to consider this last hypothesis, Goldman Sachs invites to search social media, in particular the Reddit Anti-Work bulletin board, which has seen an upswing in users since last autumn. Followed by the undersigned, the sociologist Coin (2021) did it and in an article she reported various testimonies of American workers. Their stories deal with conscious choices about voluntary resignation (often carried out by several workers en bloc, at the same time), dictated by toxic work situations, burn-out, mobbing, mere exploitation, the absence of safety conditions, the intensification of work, euphemistically inadequate remuneration, the unjustified extension of working hours, an inhuman performativity, the impossibility of a disconnection from the online network, the lack of human relationships among colleagues and between managers and employees, the exasperated competition, etc. Coin argues that these biographical evidences make it possible to read the GR not so much as «an individual question, a form of work hopping or a pro-cyclical phenomenon», but as a real «political phenomenon»: «it is no coincidence that this movement has been growing in parallel with a new wave of strikes» in the last months (also to claim «the right to pee»). The GR would ultimately denote «“a seismic change in the attitudes which people have towards work”».

Agreeing with Briggs (2021), it is legitimate to think that all the causal hypotheses put forward have a foundation and interact with each other but, according to the workers' narratives, it is also legitimate to think that the option for a change of life plays a preponderant role and certainly not underestimable. What is striking about the Goldman Sachs report is, then, the use of the following comment of the workers exiting the labor force on two occasions: «[...] provided they can afford to do so». We could overturn the comment with the following questions: can they afford a vexatious job? Can they afford a job lived in physical and/or psychological suffering? Can they afford a job blackmail? Can they afford a job in which human relationships are supplanted by competitive individualism and meager power relationships? Can they afford

a job in which the “cult of performance” absorbs all the vital energy? Can they afford a humanly unworthy job?

## 2. The Great Resignation in Italy

The GR also crosses Italy. During 2021 resignations have gradually been increasing, exceeding the levels recorded in 2020 in the second half of the year, as well as positioning over the ones in 2019. The numbers relating to employment in the second quarter of 2021 show a significant increase in workers who resigned: +37% compared to the previous quarter and +85% compared to the same period in 2020. Finally, in the first 10 months of 2021, there were 777,000 voluntary terminations of permanent employment relationships, 40,000 more than in 2019. These are the data processed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, the Bank of Italy and Anpal (2021, 2022). The causal hypotheses provided now refer to the willingness of workers to escape the pre-existing conditions, in order to also avoid the risk of contagion, and now the willingness to find better employment, on account of a recent and relevant resumption in demand in various sectors. Other economic observers confirm the ministerial hypothesis and add the ones relating to the blocking of economic resignation and turn-over, basic income and the impact of smart-working on lifestyle reconsideration.

If these are only hypotheses, a survey carried out by the Italian Association for Personnel Management (Associazione Italiana per la Direzione del Personale-Aidp) on a sample of about 600 companies can help us to better understand. 60% of companies are involved in the topic in question and 75% of these say they are surprised, they did not expect it. The 26 to 35-year age bracket is the most affected one (70% of the sample), followed by the 36 to 45-year age bracket. Hence, it is a predominantly youth phenomenon. Furthermore, it concerns 79% of residents in the Northern regions and mainly includes the IT and digital sectors (32%), production (28%) and marketing and commercial sectors (27%). The reasons behind the resignation? The foreseen resumption of the labor market (48%) with corresponding mobility opportunities; the search for more favorable economic conditions (47%); the aspiration to a better balance between private and work life (41%); the pursuit of more career opportunities (38%); the search for a new sense of life (25%); a negative working climate (20%). In addition, for 59% of companies the impact of resignation was at least 15% higher than in previous years and for 32% the increase was 30%. Finally, a not insignificant figure, the phenomenon is the demonstration of how much the perception which people have about the

meaning of work is changing for 57% of personnel managers and how much the labor market is changing for 30% instead.

Concluding the overview of the Italian situation, we should not forget as follows: while in the United States average annual wages have grown by 5% in the last 40 years, in Italy they have decreased by 2.9% in the last 30 years, making Italy the tail-end of OECD countries (Censis, 2021); Italy “boasts” a worker satisfaction rate which is among the lowest ones in the world (5%) (Gallup, 2021).

These data report the presence of a generalized work uneasiness, to which the significant results of the Aidp survey are added: not only the desire for a higher salary or making a career, but especially a job which does not reconcile with personal well-being, private life and the need for meaning. In this case, it would be interesting to have a platform available to collect the stories of the resigned workers, too. The above-mentioned Coin is trying it on Twitter and what we can notice so far is not very different from what happens in the U.S.A.

In 2009, a volume was published about pedagogy of work in which I highlighted various critical factors which hindered the affirmation of an anthropo-pedagogical turning point in work: decrease in wages; increase in working hours; lean production and intensification of work activity; growth in exposure to physical risk; increased use of psychotropic substances to relieve “work sickness”; accidents and deaths at work; gender discrimination and psychological violence; peculiarly Italian disinterest in training (d’Aniello, 2009). With the exception of training (the number of Italian “training companies” rose approaching the European average), it does not seem to have been changed much since then, both at the American and national level. It is impossible not to add to this the role played by neoliberal rationality (Dardot and Laval, 2013).

### 3. The Great Resignation in the rest of the world

We cannot know how the situation will evolve, but it is indubitable that we are facing a deep emerging unease, net of the other causes mentioned. An uneasiness, as defined above, which may or may not express in a political form of protest, but it certainly pushes many people to often take a leap in the dark, leaving a fixed occupation for the unknown. And this does not happen only in the U.S.A. or Italy, it is now a world trend.

According to a research project carried out by IBM-Institute for Business Value (2021) in January 2021, so before the GR exploded, 1 in 4 people were globally going to quit their job in 2021: more than 14,000 adults were interviewed in 9 countries: Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Mexico,

Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. It is interesting to note that among the reasons connected with the declared intention there was the need to find a management with a human face and a precise work ethic (41%).

According to another research project by McKinsey & Company (De Smet *et al.*, 2021), published in September 2021, 40% of workers were still globally going to leave their job within a maximum of 6 months and 36% of the 6,000 workers, who were surveyed in Australia, Canada, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the U.S.A., had already resigned without having an alternative in hand. This last aspect – comment the authors of the McKinsey study – makes the GR a completely new phenomenon, which is absolutely incomparable to similar events in the past (albeit they are quantitatively dissimilar).

#### 4. Beyond the Great Resignation: beyond the performance

Shortly after the economic crisis which began in 2007/2008, Glucksmann (2010) had associated the financial bubble and consequently the obscuring of any possible sign of failure of listed companies to the intrusive performative conception of human action. The philosopher's point of view is original. It goes beyond political and economic-financial analyses to focus on a problem, which is fundamental instead: existing today means being performative at any cost, and being performative at any cost implies not to show one's frailties, whether they are frailties of a Ltd. or an individual at work.

Regarding the latter – as Foucault (2005) observed –, the incessant optimization of the whole self in working behavior, which is required by neoliberal economic theories and translated into the paroxysmal investment in one's human capital to earn diversified income flows (wages), refers to become an enterprise-unit within a regime of unhealthy competition. And this does not include the manifestation of vulnerability. The vulnerability testifies to a weakness which could result in the loss of the job or advance the competitor-colleague. Albeit in part, here is the neoliberal rationality which has first been brought up and rightly has one of its epicenters of social expansion at work: an anthropological worldview which hinges around the unquestionable (and now undisputed) dominion of the “economic truth”, the conception of the monad to man, entrepreneur of himself, the exasperated competitiveness as a means of success, becoming “consumers of oneself” (at work but not only) and the exaltation of performance enjoyment at the expense of a generative desire of human planning (Casulli, d'Aniello and Polenta, 2019).

Given that this rationality permeates all the society, together with its other constituent elements (relating to an extended semantics of consumerism), as regards work and enjoyment, it is worth adding that performance in itself is a

source of *eudamonia* (Bazzicalupo, 2013). Or rather, happiness is reduced to a self-fulfilling “joy” which comes of the possible ability to emerge on the others, therefore the possible managerial recognition of a complete profusion of (material and immaterial) *bios* in constant evolution and improvement (Dardot and Laval, 2013; Lordon, 2015). Connected with competition, even the (always possible) joy does not admit basic fragility or vulnerability, while man is essentially alone within the competitive-performance circuit.

Chicchi and Simone (2017, p. 22) deal with this loneliness in the society of performance, in the light of two films *ad hoc* in which the job is differently placed at the center of the plots, *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *I, Daniel Blake*:

«Both [the protagonists] are also unaware – in Jordan’s case – and aware – in Daniel’s case – victims of a new society form which, translating all its organizational lines from the market, builds its parameters of inclusion and exclusion on the basis of a performance principle which is strongly marked by fierce competition. In both cases, the Ego seems to determine lives more than We within a social scene which only speaks about loneliness».

And still (Chicchi and Simone, 2017, p. 33):

«The orphan Ego of We appears [...] linked to the double constraint of becoming a unit of production and reproduction and, at the same time, replaces the dependence on the social bond in dependence on the market until the Ego is manufactured and built by itself within the neoliberal logics which determine the *society of performance* today».

Neoliberal individualization of work, competition and being performative at all costs as a means-goal to resist in the era of generalized precariousness, whose specter is also in the air over permanent workers. How far can man go? How much can he/she completely continue to drain away to satisfy the hunger of “anthropophagous capitalism” (d’Aniello, 2015)?

Suddenly, the pandemic, with the lockdowns and its “suspended time”, allowed thought to rest with itself, necessarily distracting it from routines, automatisms, the usual individual and social dynamisms. It allowed to reflect on human finitude, oneself and the others, starting with the loved ones, one’s place in the world, existence, even at work. Therefore, it allowed to reconsider the priorities, highlighting “all the costs” mentioned above, which are the ones indicated by the Reddit Anti-Work users and the subjects of the Aidp survey and the IBM-Institute for Business Value research. And it was able to highlight them because, in turn, it clearly highlighted human fragility and vulnerability, letting the mask drop and revealing the limit which has now been reached. Furthermore, the sharing of this connatural condition to man has probably stimulated the sharing of the common pain suffered for work, to the point of

awakening the lost dimension of the “We”: in this sense, we can also remember the resignation en bloc and the recent waves of American strikes. Moreover, taking up the opinions of workers, a “We” who is explicitly or implicitly present in the criticisms of the lack of human relationships among colleagues and between managers and employees, the unbridled competition, the negative work climate, the inhuman face of managers and their shortage of confidence in the values of a humanly sustainable job.

Burn-out, mobbing, psychological violence, lack of interest in safety, intensification of work activity, extension of hours, underpaid and exploited workers. These are all valid problems to nourish a hostile conception towards work and to refuse it. But the attention to the “We”, the work context intended as a human community of people rather than a productive aggregate (Hessen, 1954), could resolve them beforehand. Equally, it could promote the balance between private and work life, better satisfy the desire for a career and promote that need for meaning which is sought elsewhere. In my opinion, the recovery of the “We” is a central question and its celebration can advance a pedagogical culture of work, beyond the reductive performativity and the distorted anthropology which accompanies it and towards the network of educationally significant relationships.

In this perspective, also confirming what we have declared above, we agree with Chiosso and Grassi (2021) when they write that the pandemic revealed the critical issues of the neoliberal myth of performance and its negative anthropology – aimed at “isolating” people and representing them only as enemies or competitors –, not only because it exposed the aforementioned fragility and vulnerability, but also because, through their evidence, it made us rediscover the importance of human interdependence, solidarity, responsibility towards the others and need the others to get out of the emergency. Coherently, in order to get out of the work emergency, it is necessary to start from the “We”.

As Gabrielli suggests (2021, pp. 121-122, 125, 129 and 130-131), it is necessary «to be reborn in relationships»: i) increasing corporate welfare; ii) consolidating the practices of HR (People) Business Partner in view of the «personalization of work» and the «stand-by-side» of the workers, welcoming their realization needs in the name of a sustainable human meeting/confrontation; iii) listening to Z generation, who trusts «We-Relation» – that is, in a positive relational effect from work interactions – and hopes that working together can be a factor of personal and social well-being, as well as an «‘emerging good’» which is not purely aggregative. Everything could be summed up with the need to cultivate the so-called “relational goods”.

Starting from young people and their demands again. From those young people who are protagonists of the GR. Certainly in Italy. But also in the U.S.A. and elsewhere in hindsight, if it is true that already in 2020 1 in 5 employees

resigned and Z (33%) and millennial (25%) generations are the ones who got involved most, mainly in search of environments which supported their well-being (about 25%) (IBM-Institute for Business Value, 2021).

Starting from young people and relational goods again. As Gabrielli still observes (2021, pp. 114-115), we are faced with a bet which calls into question «new leadership styles» and «new managerial mindsets», which are asked to stimulate relational and social interaction at work with ethical conviction. The relational sphere must gain the center of organizational life and, together with it, «the ability of executive people to prove to be effective *people managers*, builders of meaning and enablers of [positive] engagement». «The pandemic experience [...] can really not be wasted and become a real source of change, capable of making clear that social capital “is the social relationship itself if and as it is seen and acted as a resource for the individual and/or society, since investments are made in it to generate and to regenerate a circuit of exchanges which is neither monetary nor monetizable”».

## 5. Beyond the Great Resignation: the relational goods

More specifically, what are relational goods? After premising that the fate of a neoliberally free-trade work strongly depends on the recovery of the “We”, the economist Bruni (2005) explains that the relational good is firstly a good and not a merchandise, it has a value but not a price, and it is that good which emerges from an exquisitely human relationship, which does not anonymously involve individual identities, it is characterized by gratuitousness and finally animated by reciprocity. The good is the relationship itself, as Nussbaum (1996) also affirms, as long as it is freely assumed, that is, nourished as a goal and not as a means. Furthermore, its matrix of reciprocity makes it a fragile and vulnerable good, which requires “commitment” precisely because people are fragile and vulnerable when they offer and expose themselves to otherness. That ethical commitment towards the others to which Sen (2001) addresses to distinguish the acting capability of a new *homo*, besides the theory of human capital. Finally, the relational good is the result of openness to the logic of giving.

According to Donati (2021, p. 23), the relational good is all this and more: in order to overcome the structure of a society who considers only “how” to do a performance, therefore objectifying it and treating it as a monetizable merchandise to be exchanged, it is rather necessary to consider «work as a social relationship, in which the objective and subjective elements relationally combine generating a truly human activity as an emerging effect. This is the job as a relational good». In order to arrive at this human activity, we need

«relational subjects [...] who act with a *relational reflexivity* oriented to the good of their relationships» (Donati, 2019, p. 69). That is, we need subjects who are aware that, in acting with the others (colleagues, bosses, subordinates), one acts *in primis* “in relationship” with the others within a determined context and a determined shared action, and the other is fundamental for the evolution of the self and responding to those symbolic, cognitive, affective, emotional and moral instances of meaning, which come from the inner side of each person and arise from the action and the context of the action: for this reason, relational activity is «agency dependent» and «context dependent» (Donati, 2021, p. 29). In other words, we need subjects who are aware that the self is the result of a relationality which allows itself to be questioned by the others and, therefore, one must answer both in the first and second person, preserving the relationship as a good in itself which transcends selfish advantage to give rise to the human development of all the people. Only in this way work can abandon the habits of functional performance and assume the ones of a social relationship which generates relational goods. Finally, this awareness is connected with the activation of a «reflective relational gaze» (Donati, 2021, p. 25), that is, a reflexivity which focuses on context, object of action, action and human relationships together, necessarily passing from a first level (self-reflection) to a meta-level (meta-reflexivity). In conclusion, there must still be the recognition of the other and the value of his/her presence behind this process.

Putting relational goods with Sen’s ethical commitment and capability approach together, we can highlight how the action-in-relationship is the result of a “respectful” meeting among interdependent acting liberties, where the human significance of oblation just gives life to educational relationships in which the resulting learning goes beyond the mere technical and performative sense to conquer a purely human sense and to facilitate the growth in humanity of people in view of their well-being and their maturation and integral realization.

Starting from the reciprocity of recognizing the common essence, the common desires for individual emancipation, expression and progress, the value/goal of each person in itself and from the attestation of the relationship as a common good, it is a question of building ethical relationships in which everyone is willing to host the other and able to respond to the other by “taking care” (from the Latin *educare*) of this other. It is therefore a question of feeding a co-educating responsibility which is able to free human potential from instrumental and asphyxiated jails. It is a question of prying about educationally significant relationships in order to contribute to the “manifestation of human potential in itself” (from the Latin *educere*), as well as to support a cognitive plasticity which is increasingly relevant. So, it is a question of implementing, with training, a virtuous circularity among the contextualized process of action,

interpersonal reflexivity, experiential-cognitive mediation and semantic negotiation in a broad sense (Costa, 2016) in which a “pedagogical” experience and an extra-economic project horizon can find nourishment and custody, but with intuitive positive effects also at an economic-production level.

How to promote all this? How to promote a culture of work for people, their dignity, their authentic development? How to promote a pedagogical culture of work starting from young people and based on the value of relational goods? Acting in the awareness that the matter is complex and it cannot be exhausted in the space of a few words, below we will therefore try to explain some viable trajectories, linked to the national context.

## 6. Promoting a pedagogical culture of work starting from young people

Firstly, we deal with the school-company metaphor and the technical relationships it is called upon to cultivate (Baldacci, 2011, 2014). In a technical relationship, neoliberalistically oriented to the primacy of the market, there is not that tension towards responsibility which characterizes an anthropology and, above all, a pedagogical teleology, as the humanly understood universe of the how-means and not the why-goal just belongs to technique. That said, within this relationship aimed at the needs of the market, there cannot be a real educational freedom connected with a precise responsibility towards one’s path of maturation, because the meaning horizon of the path itself is already pre-established upstream, relieving the student of responsibility, as well as depriving him/her of substantial freedom. Secondly, and it is the aspect which is the most interesting here, in a technical relationship there cannot be even a responsibility conceived as an ability to respond to the others in order to recognize each other as people-goals involved in the same co-educational process. Rather, there is eminently the responsibility of the teacher and the student for the learning result, index of the effectiveness of the performance, and the accumulation of a cognitive capital (part of human capital) in which to invest in order to become self-employed entrepreneurs at the service of the economic (Trincherò, 2001). So, the first step to be taken would be to re-dimension the current preponderance of the neoliberal school model and to resume with appropriate updates the school-community model, based on the creation of ethical relationships destined to increase the essence instead of just functioning, to actualize a self-educating “We” and to exercise “respons-ibility” in conjunction with the freedom to act for one’s all-round training.

Secondly, only within a school-community one could think about including cooperative manual work as an exquisitely educational means from primary school. Not for professionalization, not for employability. Or at least not

primarily for these objectives. But for the complete development of man, following the lessons of illustrious educators in the past such as Pestalozzi or Montessori for example. And to train those collaborative, emotional-affective, ethical and reflective postures which are able to nourish the “relational gaze” and to let the relationship assume as a good for interpersonal humanization. As Pestalozzi (1974) would say, a manual job for the heart, besides head and hands, and for sharpening creative industriousness in relational dialogue with objects and subjects.

Concerning industriousness (from Pestalozzi’s pedagogy of industry), thirdly, we should rethink about entrepreneurship education in terms of enterprise education (Morselli and Costa, 2015; Costa, 2016; Costa and Strano, 2016). While the first one is often interpreted at a European and national level in a technical and economic-productive sense and, therefore, understood as a driving force behind mere business ideation, organization and creation, the second one (Jones and Iredale, 2010, 2014) is instead represented as a real pedagogical model addressed to the creation of socio-collaborative teams – to quote Sen (2001) – devoted to the expansion of information, knowledge, evaluation and value heritage, which is useful to strengthen the freedom to act together for a human and, at the same time, professional development. More in detail, enterprise education aims at removing ideational obstacles, finding new effective possibilities to translate ideas into action and broadening the same opportunities for choice, decision and action according to a perspective of continuous and mutual learning, cognitive, reflective and cultural enrichment which goes well beyond training for the business. Its dense collaborative and collegially reflective matrix especially refers to the exercise of critical and creative potential, as well as an active citizenship and a “freely” community-oriented conviviality. Furthermore, it refers to the significance of the human meeting/recognition as a “respons-ible” starting point again in order to expand the essence beyond the know-how and to identify a horizon of consensual meaning within which to legitimize the action and its preparatory elements and the learning *in itinere* which structure and revisit it. It could be said that its goal is a «wisdom knowledge» at the service of the human rather than the economic (Donati, 2021, p. 23). For this reason, in line with a democratic management of learning (Draycott, Rae and Vause, 2011), active teaching methods are used and stimulate the exercise of doubt, speech and full dialogue participation to engage in critical-reflective debates on the data which emerge from settled practice and experience and to also arrange answers to extra-performative questions asked by acting. Ultimately, enterprise education is a training ground for a “reflective relational gaze” and an engine of personal change, which can be started with the search for an “operating autonomy” within the unavoidable presence of a prevailing ethical-educational interconnection.

Fourthly, today's attention paid on *non-cognitive skills* or *character skills* could play an equally important role, in continuity with the matter set up so far. Indeed, the interest in the topic is moving the focus of the education system from "skill" – a tangible and measurable result of the practical mastery of knowledge –, and the mere enhancement of the cognitive, towards a scenario capable of adequately and more widely enhancing human experience, enriching the notion of skill. It is undisputed that the evocation of *character skills* responds to a criterion of utility: for the future of the market, the technological work changes and its new needs. However, if taken and promoted with a sincere pedagogical perspective, their integration will be only able to indicate a more binding criterion for educational choices, that is «the integral training of the person, in the double polarity which animates his/her reason to seek a *meaning* to existence and to find the means and the solutions in order to live and to defend against threats and dangers in this world», including the ones which live in the world of work. Therefore, no longer and only the training of the producer and the training-professional concern, but «the revival of an ethical perspective in training», which is able to take care of the internal and external dynamics of people thanks to a «'personalized' educational sensitivity». And, as regards us more closely, able to bet on the socio-emotional-affective sphere, the «ability to interact with the others in an [...] ethically appropriate way», relational reflexivity and the promotion of habits dedicated to the «exercise of 'good will'» having as its objectives the satisfaction of the «right to personal well-being», «the ability to be-together» and «good and well doing» for oneself and the others. Those others with whom you can mediate and attribute a meaning to being there, besides performance and profit (Chiosso and Grassi, 2021, pp. 30, 34-35 and 38-39). In a word, what is required is a falling back on *character skills* on the basis of their «value *in themselves*» and not only their «value *for*»; that is, their educational value, in support of the reconstruction of the "We", and not just their value in relation to the evolution of work. The risk, in fact, is that the above-mentioned criterion of utility prevails and «values of humanity, sociality and citizenship», together with the «centrality of the person», are banally the «functional flagship to social legitimacy, without prejudice to the invincible supremacy of production apart from human costs» (Cegolon, 2019, p. 144).

Fifthly, school-work alternation. While we are writing, in Italy the student protest against this modality is flaring up, also due to the recent death of an eighteen-year-old boy in the province of Udine, who was crushed by a steel beam during his last day of alternation. Beyond the horrific event, the latter is just the last straw which has broken an already full back of a camel. For example, some Tuscan students, who were interviewed by the newspaper *La Nazione* (on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022), tell their experiences of alternation as

experiences of substantial legalized exploitation, without connection with school institutions and any educational inspiration. They find to work for free in various companies, who are often incoherent with their study course, without protective equipment (helmets, gloves, masks, coats, safety shoes, etc.), reimbursement of travel expenses and any purely training tutoring. They are asked to work like any other employee and to contribute to productivity. Therefore, they are crying out to review the study-work alternation, starting with a real and fruitful dialogue between schools and companies which also involves students as protagonists. With this in mind, the pedagogy of work does not only appeal to the responsibility of the schools and the host entities and calls for compliance with safety measures, but it also urges the activation of «boundary crossing» workshops (Engeström, Engeström and Kärkkäinen, 1995) which, acting as neutral spaces for systematic meeting and confrontation mediated by academic researchers, allow school tutors, business tutors and students to critically reflect on foreseen and ongoing practices together in view of their constant adjustment both from the point of view of learning and training repercussions and the repercussions on possible work and organizational improvements (Fedeli and Tino, 2017). The same goes for university internships: it is necessary to make the territory and the reflective dialogue among different systems of activity in the territory a “place” of relational learning, which is inclined to celebrate human dignity at work and to innovate study and work processes for the human, social and economic development. Once again, it is a question of adopting a “reflective relational gaze”, prying about the creation of authentic educational relationships.

## 7. Not to conclude

We have tried to answer how to promote a pedagogical culture of work starting from young people and based on relational goods. This, in the awareness that cultural changes take a long time and, therefore, it is appropriate to start from young people – future workers, managers and entrepreneurs –, their grievances and aspirations and their education again. But what to do for the present? There is a need for pedagogical sensitivity to be extended, to the advantage of people at work and the companies: it is easy to understand that workers render more, they are more motivated and they contribute better to process and product innovation if they feel welcomed and recognized in their desires for consideration and human growth. So, it is time to “pedagogize businesses”, moving to a vision of adult training, which is also calibrated on the answers to the internal needs of people and the need to increase the possibilities of being and doing together to act with co-educational freedom

together. Coherently, it is urgent to trigger off that virtuous circularity among the process of action, interpersonal reflexivity, experiential-cognitive mediation and semantic negotiation described above. In order to make it concrete, one must pedagogically invest in the use of determined biographical-reflective devices and, complementarily, one must invest in emotional-affective training in workplaces: the “We” cannot be given without knowing how “to feel” oneself and the others and preparing “to expose oneself” to the others.

At the same time, taking up Gabrielli’s proposal in a pedagogical key, it is urgent to extend the pedagogical training of those welfare managers who are gradually gaining ground within companies. When we deal with corporate welfare, only the fiscal, legal, economic or management-related aspects are emphasized. As Dato and Cardone (2018) observe in the face of empirical research, the pedagogically trained welfare manager goes further and engages to configure the work context as a context of inclusion, participation and citizenship capable of enhancing subjectivities, diversities and individual and organizational well-being, especially by cultivating relational capital. By keeping together the economic and social value of work and the economic purposes with the ethical, social and educational ones, the pedagogically trained welfare manager focuses on the humanistic management of human resources, their mutual ontological-value recognition and the creation of a climate of mutual trust and understanding between management and employees to change the company into a relational system based on listening and caring for people. By mediating conflicts and promoting communication among the members of the organization, as well as recreational and reflective activities which facilitate the establishment of educationally meaningful ties, he/she aims at creating a «‘care community’» (Dato and Cardone, 2018, p. 29).

Community. Etymologically, the word refers to three terms which have substantiated the whole argument: (ethical) commitment, gift (of oneself to the others and vice versa) and unity. Becoming a community would be a remarkable achievement. Becoming a “care community” would be the optimal achievement.

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