Restructuring of work and union representation

A developing framework for workplace industrial relations in Britain and Italy

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This paper explores the implications of teamwork for trade unions, especially the assumption that new management strategies supporting teamwork may lead to the marginalisation of union organisation and influence. The fieldwork involves a cross-national comparison of Fiat in Italy and Rover in the British Midlands. The argument is advanced that institutional and socio-political factors rooted in the national system of industrial relations shape unions' responses to the general management drive of changing the organisation of work in the car industry.

Introduction

The organisational form of teamwork, whose main aim is both to elicit commitment and manage directly relations with workers, has important implications for trade union organisation and influence. In a period of intense organisational change arising from the increased exposure to international and national competition, which demands greater organisational and individual flexibility at the employment level, understanding these issues is

fundamental in analysing the changes in the political and economic framework, and the restructuring of work organisation.

This article examines the implications of teamwork for trade unions by analysing the unions' responses to the managerial strategy supporting the concept of teamwork in the British and the Italian system of industrial relations. Evidence is provided from the car industry and, in particular, from Rover and Fiat-auto. Although the general consequence of the organisational change has been to put in doubt inherited conceptions of the character and purpose of unions 'as collective organisations or social movements' (Hyman, 1994: 108), the implications of work reorganisation vary between countries and the pattern of responses has differed likewise.

In analysing how local unions redefine their role within the employment relationship in response to management practices at the workplace, considerable emphasis has been put on two main theoretical issues. On the one hand, it is suggested that local unions are reinforcing their co-operative dimension, becoming part of 'productivity coalitions' (Windolf, 1989) and collaborating with management in policies to enhance company performance. The new co-operative representation of interests is encapsulated in the notion of 'social partnership', which contrasts with the tradition of class struggle and social mobilisation (Hyman, 1996: 69). On the other hand, it is claimed that the marginalisation of local unions arises from the new management's approach, which emphasises 'individualism' (Guest, 1987). In this view, more emphasis is put on teamwork as a form of work reorganisation, which is strongly related to notions of corporate culture aimed at improving competitiveness and productivity by modifying the technical division of labour. This culture is likely to ensure subjective commitment to management from the workforce through the identification with the goals of the organisation. Thus, it is not difficult to envisage various situations in which unions, since they may resist corporate strategies and create an element of uncertainty through traditional expressions of collectivism, need to be eroded and marginalised (Marchington, 1990; Ackers et al., 1996).

By outlining the common teamwork rationale as a managerial tool in order to establish direct communication among workers within the team for 'problem solving' and to

manage conflict on the shop-floor, this study demonstrates that marginalisation is a complex issue and explains the differences within and between plants and countries by referring to divergences in the national industrial relations system. The main argument is that unions' responses to the introduction of teamwork have strongly differed according to the national context and the firm's location. Hence, institutional and political factors connected with different systems of industrial relations, and diverse workplace union traditions arising from geographical location, must be explored as possible explanations for the unions' reactions to the restructuring of work organisation.

Research data and method

The fieldwork research was conducted between June and August 1998 at Rover's 'brownfield' factory at Longbridge and at Fiat's 'greenfield' site at Melfi.¹ The choice of the two car plants as the field for the empirical investigation is underpinned by two main reasons. Firstly, despite the differences in the national industrial relations system the car industry presents a long tradition of trade unionism, highly unionised in both Italy and Britain. Secondly, both car plants are located in a different context, 'greenfield' for Fiat and 'brownfield' for Rover. Hence, the comparison is useful because it takes the use of teamwork in different institutional and geographical contexts and therefore it allows us to test the different social implications.

The method used for research data collection is the case study. It comprised semi-structured interviews and direct observation. The aim was to explore the current work organisation and management's policy towards teamwork; the negotiation of the implementation and the trade unions' response to teamwork; the problems that union representatives face in carrying out their tasks and developing their relationships with co-workers; workers' responses to unions, and changes in the unions' relationship with co-workers, and changes in the unions's relationship with management. A total of 39 interviews were conducted; 20 at Longbridge, and 19 at Melfi with managers, middle managers, team leaders, employees, trade union national and local officials, shop stewards, and trade unions representatives.

Teamwork: a 'lean' challenge for local unions

Teamwork is part of a larger process of industrial restructuring and production reorganisation occurring under the manufacturing lean production model, and thereby it is one of the central features of changing workplace relations.² Cross-training, multi-skilling and job rotation taking place within the team, define how workers and employers relate to each other.

The impact of work restructuring upon local unions has become the subject of a global debate. One of the most significant concerns driving this debate is that the currently proposed managerial changes include technical innovations such as just-in-time and managerial innovations relating to labour flexibility, comprising organisational and social patterns of work reorganisation such as teamwork. This has to be achieved through reducing trade union regulation of labour flexibility and thereby the subordination of trade union agendas to those of management (Stewart and Wass, 1998).

Influential commentators often express the challenge for trade unions as a change from supporting 'collectivism' towards 'individualism' (Bacon and Storey, 1993a; 1996). This means that firms which have individual-centred policies are expected to emphasise employees as a resource and be concerned with encouraging each employee's capacity and role at work (Purcell, 1987). In the case of teamwork it leads to a collective dimension of working among the team members as an 'individual voice' within the team (Bacon and Storey, 1993a: 672). The primacy of direct communication with employees is based on management's attempt to seek their commitment, which becomes the cultural dimension of work reorganisation (Mueller, 1995). In accordance with this argument the individualistic pattern based on winning the 'hearts and minds' of workers becomes an ideological concept; that is 'to increase the identification of the workforce with the goals of the company or organisation' (Fisher, 1995: 7). Following this rationale, unions might lose out because new management strategies of empowerment are aimed at breaking traditional unionism. Unions might be undermined via accommodation to teamwork because 'employees buy into it' (Stewart and Wass, 1996: 22).

The principle of commitment focuses on the collective motivation for employee participation in increasing productivity and improving quality and, therefore, in fulfilling

the company's goals, rather than on the collective orientation of unionisation. Collective attitudes and identification with employees are also structured by the new work arrangements, with employees encouraged to identify with their team, rather than with the broader collective which unions represent. Thus, the 'new collectivism' can be defined in opposition to traditional collectivism and solidaristic practices (Bacon and Storey, 1996). One explanation is that management can resolve the problem of the indeterminacy of labour by reducing workers' collective action. This certainly helps capital, but the broader problem of how to deal with the consequences of collective work processes and, specifically, the typically unforeseen counter-politics and ideologies remains unresolved (Martinez Lucio and Stewart, 1997a).

The lean production account of change in the automotive sector is not alone in considering that management can use teamwork to expose union weakness by expanding relations with workers which are not mediated by unions, substituting a form of 'group pluralism' for 'union solidarity' (Wells, 1993). In brief, because management fosters commitment through controlling the workforce, union involvement in workplace restructuring is presented as being problematic (Kumar, 1995). Yet, this ideological challenge is considered as another way of seeking compliance from employees for changes by controlling workers. This control has little to do with empowering employees and more to do with reducing union influence over conditions of work and, in general, marginalising the struggles between capital and labour over production standards (Stewart, Lewchuk and Yates, 1998). Hence, the development of teamwork provides the scope for both increased management control on the shop-floor, in terms of work intensification through the improvement of employee productivity and effort at the workplace (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992; Parker and Slaughter, 1988), and the erosion of shop-floor unionism. The latter objective can be achieved via the role of team leaders as supervisors of a team, who might undermine the independence and autonomy of union workplace representatives through establishing direct communication with the employees within the team (Bacon and Storey, 1993b; Martinez Lucio and Weston, 1992a). Thus, the natural link between the worker and the local union representatives may be broken. Evidence from the car industry in Britain, for instance, indicates that one of the main consequences of the implementation of team

leaders was the parallel reduction in the number of shop stewards (IRS, 1993). Accordingly, opposition to teamwork was designed to protect the number of trade unions' representatives at the local level.

Cross-national differences in union workplace organisation in Italy and in Britain

The analysis of how the contradictory rationale of teamwork affects the traditional local trade unions' representational role requires an initial understanding of the principal differences of workplace trade unionism in Britain and in Italy. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Italy was widely believed to have some industrial relations features in common with Britain. The Italian system of industrial relations was described as one of 'voluntarist' workplace-based union representation and collective bargaining that emerged with force during the 'Hot Autumn' of the late 1960s (Terry, 1993; Regalia and Regini, 1998). Nevertheless, 'voluntarism' in Britain generally focused on the principle of abstention of the state from direct intervention in industrial relations, while in the Italian case, the low level of institutionalisation—the absence of formalised and stable rules governing relations between the actors—characterised the 'voluntarist' industrial relations tradition (Cella and Treu, 1998).

Despite the dissimilarities of form in the 1970s, Italian and British legislation provided considerable support for union organisation. Waddeburn (1990) refers to the Italian Workers' Statute (*Statuto dei Lavoratori*) of 1970 and the British Social Contract legislation during 1974-79. In both contexts there can be found an intention to introduce, on the one hand, new employment rights for individual workers and, on the other, interventions to promote and to support trade union organisation in the workplace, and thereby collective bargaining. Nevertheless, for Italian law individual rights like the constitutional right to strike are exercised collectively and therefore they are considered at the very core of trade union activity. British law, by contrast, uses collective rights to bolster collective organisation. This provision illustrates the divergent bases on which the British law and the *Statuto* are built. In Britain, the classic foundation of 'freedom of collective bargaining' was re-confirmed whereas the *Statuto* introduced more specifically 'a series of

modifications inside the normative structure of the individual employment relationship itself' (Wadderburn, 1990: 158).

Similarly, to maintain the creation, operation and responsibilities of workplace structures the *Statuto* introduced a strict set of legal rights regulating worker representation at plant level, which by contrast represents the exception for the British system of workplace labour relations. Indeed, in British law only recent trends in the employer-union relationship (the Employment Relations Act 1999) introduce important elements concerning statutory trade union recognition.³ Earlier there had been nothing giving a unionised group the right to operate in the enterprise within the ambit of a representative union after the workers have taken the initiative to constitute it. Yet, British workplace organisations such as shop stewards committees, are the dominant form of worker representation at plant level, whereas in Italy, the Article 19 of the *Statuto* introduced the *Rsa* (*rappresentanza sindacale aziendale*), enabling unions to gain a protected basis of representation even in workplace where the level of unionisation is very low.

The Italian plant-level union structure has the dual function of representing the company's workforce as a whole and at the same time 'acting as the presence within the company of the external unions' (Cella and Treu, 1998). The 'single channel' of representation has been retained in Italy with the Tripartite Agreement of 1993 between the trade unions, employers and government, which opted for a single body of union representation in all workplaces which was called *Rsu* (*rappresentanza sindacale unitaria*).⁴ The accord may be considered as an important effort to increase the level of institutionalisation of the Italian industrial relations system together with the *Statuto dei Lavoratori* and the institutional reforms in 1977-79 and 1983-84, which both represented a strategic shift towards 'concertation' in Italy (Locke and Baccaro, 1996).

The July 1993 agreement reinforced the principle established by the *Statuto dei lavoratori* according to which workers are enabled—whether unionised or not—to take the initiative to establish workers' representatives (*Rsu*) irrespective of the views of the employer. Two thirds of *Rsu*'s members are elected by workers and one third are nominated by union organisations that are signatories to relevant national or territorial collective agreements (Carrieri, 1995). Representatives do not have to be union members; the union

presence is guaranteed through the fact that the right to establish an Rsu is only conferred on unions affiliated to the three major confederations (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* or CGIL, *Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Lavoratori* or CISL and *Unione Italiana dei Lavoratori* or UIL) plus a limited number of 'autonomous unions'. Terry (1993) argues that the nature of the linkage between national and plant-level union structure in Italy does not automatically imply that union representatives can act as autonomous bodies. By contrast, they must be formed within 'the ambit of a union affiliated to union confederations designated as having 'most representative' status at national level or other unions, not affiliated to these confederations, that are signatories to relevant national or territorial collective agreements' (Article 39 of the Italian Constitution) (Ibid., 141).

The Italian 'top-down' structure of workplace unionism is an important element of comparison. Indeed, according to the British system of workplace industrial relations shop stewards act as autonomous or independent bodies of union representation. This is due to the lack of the linkage between national and plant-level union structure, which diversely shows a 'bottom-up' structure of workplace unionism, according to which shop stewards are not simply providers of services but the active representative of membership interests. So it is claimed that 'the steward is the union' (Marsh in Terry, 1995: 209). Their main aim is to retain autonomy through the membership at the workplace. Their tasks include recruiting members, participating in workplace committees dealing with such matters as health and safety and job evaluation, representing members in disciplinary and dismissal hearings and bargaining with managers over pay and other shop conditions of employment. In negotiation at local level shop stewards are the main trade union mediators or problem-solvers of disputes, since they are lay workplace representatives elected according to the rules of the union and to custom and practice.

In short, in Italy positive rights were established to regulate the system of workplace labour relations, while in Britain legislation took the form of a series of immunities from common law liabilities (Edwards, 1995). Yet, for most of the twentieth century, there was no legal obligation on British employers to recognise unions, and no legal redress against employers' refusal to bargain, even when the majority of the workforce was unionised. In contrast, the Italian

experience provides an example of a system of law and practice whose interaction in the workplace have combined to sustain unions' rights rather than to seek to intervene directly in recognition decisions and in members' mobilisation. Accordingly, British shop stewards have to demonstrate the ability to mobilise and recruit members by safeguarding their interests as union representatives, while in Italy the election of trade union representation allows them to perform a political or ideological role (Regalia, 1984). This is because of the strong tie between political traditions and industrial relations which has influenced Italian unionism. The ideology which has motivated the union tradition has led to a union movement which has been strongly influenced by the political guidance of national parties. This is important even at the workplace level, where unions have never secured an independent role. By contrast, British trade unions developed more or less independently from national political parties. They evolved autonomously from the workplace where shop stewards' ability to recruit members became the basis of British unions' strength.

Summing up, the analytical comparison suggests three major factors explaining the country-by-country differences in the characteristics of workplace unionism: the structure of workplace based union organisation; the presence of unions' recognition procedures; and the political and ideological tradition of trade unionism. Those factors influenced the Italian unions' attitudes to local bargaining and to the objectives to be pursued. Flexibility in the form of achieving 'job enrichment' and 'job rotation', for instance, became the main issue of local negotiation in Italy during the 1980s. This indicates that the bargaining model in Italy is not rigid, but flexible and adaptable. It provides legal parameters, which have historically encouraged a proactive union approach towards work restructuring (Regini and Sabel, 1989) as the result of the active union and workers' mobilisation concerning the processes of change.

The case of Rover

The development of teamwork

Teamwork has a long history at Rover's Longbridge site. As far back as 1979 it was one of the work practice changes

sought for the production of the Mini.⁵ The major drive to introduce teamwork, however, began in March 1992 with the implementation of the *Rover Tomorrow—The New Deal*. Formally *Rover Tomorrow* was implemented through imposition in Rover. Management insisted that the unions ‘embrace’ the deal and this was not opposed by the TGWU’s national negotiating position (Stewart and Wass, 1998). However, the joint shop stewards at Longbridge initially rejected the implementation of the *New Deal*, whilst in the other plants it was endorsed from the beginning.⁶ After lengthy discussion with the company the agreement was integrated with an appendix, which led to the positive vote of the Works Committee.

The *New Deal* agreement changed industrial relations by enabling management to adopt flexible working and industrial relations practices (teamwork, continuous improvement, job security, single-table bargaining and company councils), and production methods which were in some respects at the forefront of the introduction of the lean production techniques in Rover. Nevertheless, teamwork was introduced at Longbridge with some variations in comparison with other Rover plants.

The workforce was structured in teams of ten to fifteen workers, rotating through all the different jobs of the team. Team members in the production area also performed indirect tasks, such as cleaning and tidying their area of work. They were committed to improve the efficiency and quality of their work according to the rationale of continuous improvement. Team leaders, elected by the workforce, had the responsibility to co-ordinate the team and encourage team members to develop useful ideas in the continuous improvement meetings.

In the areas where team leaders were formally elected by team members, workers never respected them. As a line employee at Longbridge states: ‘employees rejected team leaders, considering them as hourly-paid workers who had never worked as team members, nor solved any problems for them, even if they were paid more than a normal worker’. Workers’ resistance to team leaders led stewards to have some success in redirecting management objectives, including the latter’s intention to redefine and limit the scope of collective bargaining, and significant concessions have been achieved with respect to the retention of informal regulation of the day-to-day labour practices. The opposition

brought off a significant coup in the way in which teamwork collapsed and shortly was substituted by group work, with group leaders appointed by the company. Each cell consisted of one hundred workers and it was divided into sub-cells of twelve to fifteen workers. A TGWU senior shop steward commented on workers not recognising team leaders: 'by refusing to recognise team leaders employees pushed the company to change from teamwork to group work'.

The work-groups at Longbridge are not self-managing groups. This means that group members do not decide autonomously the solution of problems, and they rarely discuss these problems without the presence of management. Group leaders are considered by the workforce as 'mini-managers' retaining disciplinary power and responsibility for the budget in terms of quality, people, volume and costs inside each group. Most of the interviews with group leaders showed that management's intention was to allow group leaders to become the workers' direct reference point in the case of grievances. Yet, the institution of group work sounds significantly new in respect to traditional work organisation at Rover and thereby it has clear implications for the deregulation of employment relations at the point of production. The analysis will examine the impact of diverse work reorganisation practices on the shop stewards' role.

The implications of work reorganisation for local unions

The initial introduction of teamwork at Longbridge led to two major problems for local unions. First, the implementation of teamwork meant that shop stewards needed to obtain management's authorisation in order to move from one team to another. The *Rover Tomorrow* programme focused on the reduction of shop stewards' influence at the workplace by restricting their mobility between teams in response to workers' requests. A senior shop steward commented:

When teamwork was introduced there were areas in the plant where we had no shop stewards. The situation is still the same. Indeed, although teamwork was replaced by cells and sub-cells we need a steward moving from one sub-cell to another in order to deal with employees' problems. However, a shop steward needs the group

leader's permission to move. This limits local unions because the authorisation to move is not always given
(*AEEU senior shop steward—Longbridge—June, 1998*)

Also there was a reduction in the number of shop stewards within each team and in the geographical area they represented. The TGWU National Automotive Secretary argued that the company's aim was to remove trade unions influence at the workplace by reducing the number of shop stewards and replace them with team leaders and by diminishing the number of workers under each team leader's supervision. This concern became even stronger when the teamwork system was superseded and group work had been created. Accordingly the company has proposed to the unions to split the Works Committee at Longbridge into two branches—one for body assembly and the other for the engine production area—without planning any increase in the number of shop stewards. Local unions rejected the proposal which could have undermined their position in the entire plant. Yet, given the incompatibility between the position of the shop steward and that of the team leader and the group leader, there was the possibility that shop stewards would be attracted by the leaders' higher salary and consequently might apply for the job, which was considered as a further step in their career.

The institution of team leaders represented the second, and no less important, problem for local unions. However, this proved to be temporary due to the workers and union success in preventing team leaders' imposition at Longbridge. Nevertheless, findings show that management's willingness to introduce forms of work restructuring to undermine trade union organisation by directing members away from shop stewards has shifted away from team leaders to group leaders since teamwork has been suddenly replaced by work-group organisation. Indeed, although the group leader is appointed by the company rather than being elected by the members, like team leaders the new work reorganisation practice creates a situation where the leader attempts to work out all the problems related to workers, so that workers end up thinking that those are solved individually by that person rather than by their union representative. Hence, local unions' concern is about the role of the leader, which by establishing direct communication with them could displace and, therefore, threaten traditional forms of

workplace communication and representation held by union representatives.

A senior shop steward claimed for instance that the intention of management at the time of the implementation of the *New Deal* at Longbridge was to encourage workers to go to the team leaders in order to undermine steward credibility:

I wasn't shop steward when teamwork was implemented at Longbridge, but I could understand that team leaders were taking away the traditional role of shop stewards because they were feeding information back to the members. Stewards saw team leaders as undermining their responsibility; stewards were concerned that team leaders discouraged workers from joining unions.

(TGWU plant shop steward—Final Assembly Body (Cab1)—Longbridge—June, 1998)

This practice operates within the group-work as well. As a group leader noted:

I would like to see my workers solve most of the problems with me before referring to shop stewards; my effort is to let them know that I am ready to listen to their problems: job related and personal problems.

(Group leader—Body Shop (BIW)—Longbridge—July 1998)

Union's response

As the previous section showed, the rationale of restructuring practices was to reduce the potential for collective oppositional activity by encouraging problem-solving among the members and without the traditional role of shop stewards. In this sense, the individual negotiation of workers' needs is entitled to take place within the team or the group, where communication between workers and the leader is direct in order to gain mutual security and success for working together for the enterprise. Thus, what makes the new forms of work reorganisation successful is not the absence of conflict but the process by which the members work out their differences and seek common solutions for their individual problems. Hence, teamwork and group work as units of collective performance, designed to capture the company's goals,

threaten union collectivity at the workplace represented by shop stewards' organisation.

The implementation of the *New Deal* at Longbridge shows that unions accepted the main elements of change contained in its package, which was intended to cement together the key industrial relations factors of the lean production approach. The major danger perceived by the union leaders was the marginalisation of unions through the figure of team leaders. Thus, the unions' response was to reduce the company's control of team leaders and to change the mentality of the workers in the team by getting the team leader elected by the team members. This would lead to the perception of the team leader as acting as a representative of team members' interests rather than as a representative of the interests of the company. Instead of threatening the position of the union on the shop-floor, it was a way of increasing workers' rights there. The TGWU convenor at Longbridge highlighted the reasons for the unions' new willingness to support the election system of team leaders:

Rover at Longbridge wanted to appoint team leaders like in Solihull. At Longbridge team leaders were elected by the team members; from a union point of view the election of team leaders led us to choose the team leader by retaining a certain amount of control that the management wanted to take away; management wanted team leaders appointed by the company so that they become people on the company's side.

(TGWU convenor—Longbridge—June, 1998)

The local unions' approach to teamwork reflected its potentially damaging effects on unions at the plant level. Their concern was understandable in that it emphasised the British collective tradition of shop stewards organisation. All unions leaders were aware of the dangers behind teamwork practice. Even so, their attitudes towards teamwork at the workplace cannot be compared with the national policy of the unions, which demonstrated a partially positive approach towards the implementation of the new human resource management techniques. It sought to develop a positive approach; that is, seeking to influence the ways in which lean production techniques were adopted, whilst also working to safeguard union organisation by resisting the management objective to limit the scope of collective

bargaining. As an internal document stated, the TGWU's policy was designed to face unions marginalisation by acting in a positive way.⁷ British trade unions are certainly concerned with the implications of teamwork and believe that there is a need to help its members to understand the terminology of new management practices by retaining a strong union presence at the workplace.

The new 'positive agenda' shows that local unions have maintained an independent base and union culture though they have not rejected completely a joint management policy on the introduction of new management practices. Nevertheless, stewards have had some success in redirecting management objectives and significant concessions have been achieved with respect to the retention of informal regulation of many day-to-day labour practices. Whereas local unions might appear much weaker in front of the management reforms, stewards have secured the retention of joint regulation and manifested together with workers an adversarial behaviour for the adoption of the new managerial practices of work organisation.⁸

The case of Fiat

The introduction of teamwork: the UTE

The key element of the *Integrated Factory* project (*Fabbrica Integrata* or IF) in Fiat is a new system of production and work organisation which is based on an integration of 'cells' ('Basic Technological Unit' or UTE).⁹ Each cell represents the level at which teamwork organisation takes place according to Fiat's work restructuring project.¹⁰ From a theoretical point of view, 'integration' is the key word to understand what happened in Fiat with the implementation of the new organisational model on the shop-floor; more integration means full workers' commitment to the logic of production. UTE organisation can be read as a comprehensive attempt to realise these objectives by making the plant's organisation more transparent, facilitating information exchange, and encouraging shared experience and knowledge. Teams assure the degree of horizontal communication necessary to solve problems as and where they emerge. In order to pursue this aim jobs and skilled workers in the IF model are very innovative. Each UTE is composed of blue collar workers and highly skilled workers: that is, UTE leader

(*Capo Ute*) integrated process co-ordinators (CPI), integrated process operators (OPI), product/process technologists (*tecnologo prodotto/processo*), UTE logistic operator (*rifornitore di UTE*).

The UTE leader is appointed by the company from skilled, not hourly-paid, workers. The tasks consist of retaining UTE's leadership and, therefore, in managing both human and technical capital within the UTE by taking decisions to achieve the company's goals. The UTE leader is the 'mini-manager' of the team whose managerial activity is crucial in mobilising competencies and in building commitment among workers through training, communication, performance appraisal, compensation, conflict resolution, leadership in quality circles and so forth. A particular new role is the CPI (for every 15/20 workers) who is formally appointed as a worker. Within each UTE, the CPI's tasks are those of supporting the UTE leader in personnel training, control and information on quality, workers' involvement in the company's goals, and the distribution of jobs within the team at the beginning of each shift. In other words, CPI achieves time and cost targets through monitoring activities in the team. The figure of CPI is most distinct in the final assembly body shop, while in the other plant areas characterised by high technology, such as press, welding and painting shops, the integrated process operator (OPI) has almost the same tasks as CPI. In the welding area there are both CPIs and OPIS because of the presence of manual and technical jobs. In the case of process problems, they involve the product/process technologist whose task is that of continuous improvement and enhancing process reliability. Within the just-in-time system, a key role within the team is played by the UTE logistic operator who has the task of ensuring material supply. The UTE logistic operator ensures the communication with supplier firms located in the 'industrial condominium' close to the car manufacturer. In the IF system, teamwork has the innovative and major objective of enhancing flexibility and reducing costs by increasing workers' polyvalence and the reduction in idle times. In particular, workers are committed to continuous improvement through problem solving activities within the team. The team is not semi-autonomous and its size varies according to the technological area: in components and engine manufacturing, the average size is 25/30 workers, whilst in the body assembly and welding shops, they have 90 or 100 members.

The implications of UTE for union representatives

A theoretical understanding of the new rationale of teamwork at Melfi is important in analysing its impact on local unions. The essence of teamwork's rationale is to enable individual workers to intervene directly in the resolution of their 'personal' difficulties by establishing a continuous exchange of information with the other members of the team and taking responsibility for conflict resolution at plant level. In particular, three skill profiles play a key role in this process: the UTE leader; the CPI and, finally, the Shop Personnel Manager (REPO) who is in charge of human resource management (HRM) policies co-ordination and HRM information system, responding hierarchically to the plant HRM manager and functionally to the operational unit leader.

The UTE leader is the first person team members refer to in order to find a solution to their problems within the team. In most of the cases the UTE leader appears as a figure who helps workers deal with difficulties. They also revealed how UTE leaders perceive their role and how workers within the teamwork respond to them:

The main UTE leader's tasks are to manage people and plants in order to achieve the best results in terms of quality and productivity. Formally, I see myself as a mini-manager within the mini-factory that is the UTE. However, in my team I have never behaved like a chief and I think team members have never perceived me like that; on the contrary I have always tried to understand their problems—like a good dad used to do with his kids—and together we have worked out every difficulty. Workers come to see me if they have problems such as personal or job related problems; for the production problems they use to go first to the CPI and in the case of unresolved difficulties they come to see me; they consider me as a friend
(*UTE leader, UTE 14—Final Assembly Body—Melfi—July, 1998*)

The UTE leader is someone you can ask for advice. They are always able to listen to you and help you; personally I've got a good relationship with my leader
(*Employee, UTE 17—Final Assembly Body—Melfi—July, 1998*)

Two important findings arose from the interviews. Firstly, the co-operative and participative atmosphere which characterises each UTE, where the UTE leader shows a 'paternalistic' image to the team members. The UTE leader is the first point of contact for workers in solving their personal problems, including complaints and grievances. Secondly, the CPI appears as another important skill profile in the inter-personal communication process within the team. Since CPI has no hierarchical authority over workers his main task is to manage informally by reducing the possibility that disputes arise. In other words, he informally neutralises any emerging micro-conflict within the team by minimising misunderstandings between UTE leaders and employees:

CPI is the point of connection between UTE leaders and team members; in each team CPI helps the UTE leader because he is the 'filter'. This means that, by working at the assembly line every day he feels the mood of the employees; he knows the workers' needs and, therefore, he filters those to me; he neutralises every kind of tension [either among workers or between me and workers] which might lead to a dispute at the plant level; for this reason I think having a good CPI within the UTE leads to a good mood in teamworking as well
(UTE leader, UTE 8—Final Assembly Body—Melfi—July, 1998)

Every problem between UTE leaders and employees which has not been worked out leads to the intervention of the REPO who represents the personnel management's point of contact at the workplace. Even if he is not formally involved in teamwork practices, he is responsible for the correct application of the national collective agreement (contractual and disciplinary labour aspects) in the operational unit where he works.

The new work organisation model recognises conflict as a part of its structure, but it considers it as an operational problem attributed to the production process which might be resolved, rather than examining it as the traditional expression of the collective workers' resistance at the workplace. In this picture, within each UTE collective, oppositional activity is reduced to the minimum by establishing a continuous process of inter-personal communications among workers, UTE leaders, CPIS and REPOS.

In other words, by planning the relations among UTE members as 'face-to-face' interrelations (Commisso, 1999), management seeks to avoid or reduce the collective space for conflict, and, thereby to limit the power held by union representatives at the workplace. Indeed, the work re-organisation in teamwork leads to the 'cellularisation' of the workforce and therefore it challenges collectivity. This mechanism affects employees in that it enables them to negotiate directly and resolve their individual problems arising from production. Hence, the intention by management is that the resolution of these problems is facilitated by the members of the team as a common objective, and the potential to refer grievances to union representatives at the workplace is very limited. Accordingly, the opportunity for local union intervention in negotiating daily tensions at the workplace is reduced.

Management has limited the relationship between workers and union representatives within the team. Firstly, the role and status of the CPIs demonstrate the process of management's diversion of workers' attention away from trade union representation. The formal relationship between the UTE leader and union representatives—because of the managerial level to which the UTE leader has been legally appointed—underlines the fact that this is not the case between CPI and union representative due to the fact there is a clear incompatibility to play the two roles together. This is clearly illustrated by one CPI in Sata. Asked about how he perceives himself in managing the role of union representative and that of CPI within the team, he answered:

Since the beginning I found it very difficult to reconcile the role of CPI with that of union representative; the CPI has both a training and a labour process supervision role within the team, but at the end of the day the CPI has also to neutralise any tension which could lead to a conflict by sustaining a good mood within the team; he has to manage problems and prevent conflict in the team; the CPI involves team leaders only in the case where there are big difficulties; if he is able to solve problems on his own he must do it without considering that union representatives are traditional workers' reference points in the case of grievances. Hence, everyday I feel the contradiction between the status of Rsu and the role of CPI; luckily in my UTE I was able to manage this contradiction. Indeed, I

explained to team members that I want them to come and see me as a union representative and not as a CPI.
(FIOM Rsu, UTE 15—CPI—Final Assembly Body—Potenza—July, 1998)

Secondly, although trade union representatives have been legally recognised, the UTE rationale reduces the intervention of the RSU at the workplace by discouraging workers from reporting grievances to union representatives because of the informal UTE leaders' discretion in deciding on workers' capability to rotate to more or less skilled jobs within (and between) teams. In other words, workers who attempt to retain close relations with the union representatives are usually associated with less skilled jobs with limited opportunities to rotate in the team ('system of penalties'). Thirdly, it is often difficult for Rsu to know the problems within each team, especially when they do not have a representative there. Finally, workers need the permission of the management in order to move from one UTE to another and to deal with problems there.

The union representatives' responses to teamwork

The implications of the teamwork rationale for local unions' representatives at Melfi has to be understood as a reduction in the freedom they have to negotiate workers' interests with the company. The tendency is to change the traditional negotiation system of union representation in which unions were the mediators of collective workers' oppositional activities at the shop-floor. In the new rationale of teamwork, which underlines the company's wish to recapture control and manage conflict on the shop-floor, trade union representatives gain the role of 'facilitator'. In this sense, the Rsu status is not marginalised, but modified in a new dimension of non-conflict with management.

The interviews with union representatives revealed different perceptions about the implications of UTE for unions at the workplace, but a similar response to work restructuring. On the one hand, some union representatives perceived most of the dangers in the teamwork practice. They focused on the fact that teamwork resolves traditional issues without reference to workplace union representatives. Findings demonstrate that this is the case for local unions in dealing

with issues around particular skill profiles in the team. For instance, as the previous section showed, a union representative who also works as a CPI in one UTE, demonstrated clearly the contradiction between the two roles. Hence, the negative perception of teamwork is filtered through the Rsu's aversion to the role of CPI as a neutraliser of micro-conflict within the team. Alongside the negative attitude to teamwork, workplace union representatives did not feel marginalised by the introduction of the new work practices and, therefore, they did not respond by opposing them. As one Rsu remarked:

In the case of a big problem employees tell us what happened and we intervene straight away in order to support them; although the rationale of teamwork allows us to deal directly with the CPI and the UTE leader, many workers still refer to Rsu; teamwork does not marginalise our role; union members still refer directly to us, particularly those with a strong ideology; workers know they need our support in order to obtain what they need; therefore, the status of the Rsu is important; so I do not feel marginalised; Why should I?

(FIOM Rsu, employee, UTE 4—Final Assembly Body—Potenza—July, 1998)

On the other hand, some union leaders acknowledged the potential loss of influence on the shop-floor, but they also argued that, given the new organisation of work and the unions' new involvement in it, the final outcome would be favourable for unions in gaining advantages for workers. Thus, they viewed teamwork positively and believed that it could provide an opportunity for a new and stronger union influence at the workplace.

The starting point for this view is that Rsu relate to management in a non-conflict relationship at the joint committee level. The joint committee at Melfi represents a means by which social partners believe they can tackle problems through negotiations, meaning that union disputes are only to be used in the very last resort (Pero, 1998: 69). The joint committee's procedure appears to bring both unions and management into contact with day-to-day problems affecting the plant. Moreover, it provides the occasion for joint study and a recognition of reciprocal influence according to a scheme that the Industrial Relations manager of Fiat-Auto defines as 'company-union co-operation'. This

implies a tacit partnership between firm and trade unions in a process of joint-regulation where many union leaders expect to break the barrier that preserved the regulation of work as a management prerogative. Negotiation at the joint committee level might be a way for unions to enter this domain without feeling marginalised.

In other words, one factor which could have influenced the positive unions' response is the fact that on the shop-floor the joint committee has become a way through which union representatives believe they can discuss directly the improvement of workers' job conditions with management by managing conflict and, therefore, play an independent role. Hence, local unions would become 'social partners' with management in controlling micro-conflict at the workplace. However, union leaders differed in their evaluation of teamwork and in explaining the reasons for their positive responses. Given the ideological or political role of unionism, and the legal recognition of the Rsu in Italy, some FIOM union leaders, for instance, focused on the workers' and unions' collective impact on the new management agenda. Concern about the change in the unions' role arising from the introduction of the new management practices had made FISMIC much more willing to accept it than the others. Nevertheless, in the attempt to face this dualism it could be argued that generally in the new dimension of social partnership, the unions' positive response to teamwork becomes a hostage to management's competitive agenda which claims competitiveness as both a management and a union objective. In this context, the only possible channel to deal with the company would appear to be 'co-operation'. Yet, the weak union tradition at Melfi played a key role in cushioning the unions' reluctance in taking up their new role of co-handling disputes with management.

The role of union representatives

The space for union representatives has been reduced within the new UTE rationale. However, the responses of local unions represents a key issue in the attempt to understand their role in the IF model and in analysing how this model affects their strength. The industrial relations tradition in Fiat has been shaped by the role that trade unions have had since the 1960s. From the crisis of the 'Hot Autumn' in 1969, it

progressed to the intense collective negotiation period of the 1980s. At that time conflict was recognised as an expression of collective opposition and trade unions negotiated workers' needs with the company (Annibaldi, 1994). In the 1990s, the implementation of the IF model led Fiat to re-think conflict as an integrated part of the new organisational process, rather than an expression of collective antagonism. In this context, the position of local unions has been reconsidered, in the sense of diverting unions' direct support to workers within each team and replacing it at the joint committee level. At this stage unions responded by supporting the company in working out the problems which were unresolved and, thereby they became a tool in regulating conflict, rather than being marginalised at the workplace.

By referring to the effects at the plant level it could be argued that teamwork organisation ought to be successful in managing conflict and, therefore, to establish social partnership between local unions and management at the joint committee level. Indeed, teamwork is based on an organisational structure that supports the team itself with excluding emerging dispute. Thus, the aim is to involve local unions in the resolution of problems at the committee level in order to avoid disputes. In this sense, the company's main objective is to elicit unions' commitment as a means of obtaining workers' consent at the shop-floor. Indeed, as the Industrial Relations manager at Melfi argued: 'unions are workers' voice'. Accordingly, local unions become necessary to the successful development of new management practices in a new logic which emphasises their acceptance as the driving force of workers' consent for the new management agenda.

The research findings, however, show that the relationship between unions and management is characterised by the consensual attitude of unions. The Italian local unions' consensual approach is mostly due to the fact that Fiat previously had considered joint committees as places where unions simply ratified company decisions. In this sense, changes in industrial relations could be understood as a means of facilitating the implementation of the IF model. The opinion of an union leader from FIOM, who is a union member in the main joint committees in Sata, is revealing:

For me talking about participation with the company at the committee level does not mean anything; I am still unable to understand what management mean for

partnership; if for them participation implies to use local unions in order to obtain workers' consent for everything they do; I do not feel this is participation

(FIOM Rsu, employee UTE 4—Final Assembly Body—Potenza—July, 1998)

Given the consensual nature of Italian local unions' approach to new management practices the degree of local unions autonomy at the workplace might be weakened by a new compromise, which also requires a more limited form of collective bargaining, on which the Italian unions have historically based their strength.

The comparative analysis

Diversity or similarity for local unions?

Although there is a common teamwork rationale, consisting of a management strategy to gain control and manage conflict through the generation of direct communication and the individualisation of workers' problems within each team, the development of teamwork was initially opposed by the British local unions but not by the Italian union representatives.

The British local unions negotiated with management the implementation of the *New Deal* agreement. They asked for further changes on the proposals from the company. In particular, they paid detailed attention to electoral procedures for team leaders and their relationship to union-based channels of communication and grievance-handling, in order to secure a degree of control at the workplace. In contrast, the Italian local unions did not negotiate on the introduction of teamwork, nor on the selection system under which the UTE leader was appointed by the company. The role of the team leader did not threaten the role of the Italian union representative as much as it challenged the role of the British shop steward because of the legal parameters that underpin workplace representation and bargaining and the issues usually dealt with in that context.

At Melfi, union representatives viewed the CPI as a 'neutraliser' of disputes between *capi* and workers within teamwork and was thereby at odds with the traditional union role of negotiator of collective oppositional activity within the factory. It might be argued, however, that the legally recognised participation of Italian unions in the machinery

of representation at the workplace has not led Rsu to perceive the CPI—and teamwork practice in general—as undermining their position within the team. On the contrary, some Italian union leaders recognised teamwork as an opportunity for enhancing the level of trade union influence within the company. Hence, local unions did not perceive that teamwork, by solving workers' problems within the team, undermined their direct channel of communication with employees.

In the attempt to explain British unions' responses to teamwork, it is important to recognise its threat to local unions. Work restructuring undermines the organisational role of traditional representatives on the shop-floor. This does not imply that trade unions have simply opposed teamwork, but that they are concerned with the particular way in which work restructuring is operationalised. The emergence of team spirit leads management to establish a direct communication channel with the workforce via the team leader, and hence the potential to by-pass the shop stewards. Furthermore, the identification with the work group in a team, rather than with colleagues of the same occupation or craft, threatens the British logic of traditional trade union representation.

Whilst union leaders at Longbridge recognised the danger of the new work reorganisation practices and, therefore, responded by reacting to it, the Italian union representatives at Melfi gave a positive response to the implementation of teamwork, though their approach appears passive to a certain extent. Italian unions responses may be understood as a result of two factors: the legal support of workplace representation, and Fiat's ideological anti-union tradition during the 1960s and the 1970s. Within the balance of power relations at work the Italian unions did not oppose team leaders and they saw the new role of 'partnership' with management as a formal opportunity for developing a clear co-ordination of activity at the workplace to improve union regulation over conditions of work. The diversity of local unions' responses reflects differences in the way teamwork affects British and Italian trade unions.

An explanation of trade unions' responses

The different responses of local unions to teamwork can be explained by the diverse geographical positions and union structures at the two car plants. In the Rover Group, the

implementation of lean production techniques mostly focused on the 'brownfield' sites where the stronger tradition of workplace unionism, usually based on a history of militant trade unionism, led management to confront workers' and unions' resistance to the introduction of new employment practices. At Longbridge, after a period in which local unions opposed the implementation of these practices, they accepted the new arrangements with some variations from the national agreement (Stewart and Wass, 1998). In contrast, in Fiat the implementation of the IF at Melfi represents the development of a new organisational model in a 'greenfield' setting, which implies a new establishment, new employees—often younger people who are untainted by the old values of unionisation—and hence recruited to be compatible with a new philosophy, which breaks with traditional employee relations and integrates employment policies with wider business strategy. At Melfi, the presence of a traditionally non-unionised environment in the South of Italy, led to a faster development of management's innovations in work organisation and in industrial relations.

Nevertheless, industrial relations institutional factors mainly shaped different trade union responses to the introduction of teamwork (Blyton and Martinez Lucio, 1995; Ortiz, 1998). In the Italian system, unions are not so strongly organised among the workforce as in Britain, but they are protected by a legal framework, which allows them to respond in a proactive way not based on the defence of the *status quo* but on an 'active articulation of union and worker interests of the processes of restructuring' (Terry, 1993: 145). Hence, Italian unions did not oppose teamwork but they perceived the new work organisation as an opportunity for enhancing the level of co-operation with management in order to improve workers' job conditions. Yet, even if legal protection does not imply full recognition, Italian unions have been able to make limited advances, and retaining their position at the shop-floor. In Britain, by contrast, teamwork diverts union members' attention away from local unions as the main reference point in handling their grievances. By undermining the basis of British trade union organisation this practice leads to the marginalisation of trade unions at local level.

The kind of union response is, therefore, facilitated by the organisational and institutional arrangements in each system (Terry, 1994). In Italy, union activities within the

legal structures are shaped by their political and cultural histories, which are very different from the British. The latter emphasises a decentralised system in which workplace autonomy was celebrated and defended as 'voluntarism'. It indicates a system whose regulation mainly depends upon the principle of management authority. This might lead to very difficult developments in seeking collaborative industrial relations at the local level and allows for a different regulatory power in the labour-management relationship. The managerial and government policies in the UK since the 1980s have exacerbated this issue. The literature has been highly controversial in explaining what has happened to industrial relations in the UK since the rise of Thatcherism (McCabe and Black, 1997). Some authors identified continuity in the nature of industrial relations; in particular, it was argued that the institutions of trade unionism at the workplace survived the economic and political challenge of Thatcherism (McInnes, 1987: 100). Others claimed that even if much remained the same, shop stewards had been weakened during the 1980s (Terry, 1989). What is commonly agreed is that in this period British industrial relations was characterised by declining trade union membership and influence, high unemployment, and a decline in the number of stewards. All these factors increased British unions' suspicion and mistrust towards the implementation of new management practices. Both these practices and legislation challenged the unions' role at the workplace, not least by restricting union activities by weakening collective bargaining and promoting non-unionism. Faced with this challenge, British unions tried to retain some influence within the new structures by opposing and/or redirecting management agenda and thereby securing their influence in joint regulation.

Conclusions: beyond marginalisation what's the role of local unions?

One-dimensional arguments on trade union marginalisation cannot explain how the new management practices affect local unions in a cross-national perspective. Rather, the common logic of teamwork, which consists in reducing any emerging micro-conflict at the plant level by establishing inter-personal relations has a variable affect on local union

organisation. In particular, the comparison of Italy-UK shows that political, social and legal contexts are crucial in determining the effects of work restructuring for trade unions. It indicates how the specific shape of new work organisation is significantly influenced by national and local institutions and circumstances, which are mostly attributed to features of the industrial relations system in each country. Thus, even if the rationale of organisational change consists of a new management approach, which considers conflict as an integrated part of its structure, rather than an antagonistic force, the implications for local unions are different.

In the UK, the lack of legal support affecting union identification and objectives means that teamwork may be perceived as a particularly problematic change. In contrast, in Italy the institutional guarantees on the shop-floor, were key factors in encouraging local unions to perceive teamwork as less threatening. The positive response of Italian trade unions was shaped by an environment in which they were already legally recognised through an institutional definition of union power on the shop-floor. Thus, Italian unions derive their strength from sources such as legal rights other than the membership directly (Terry, 1994), which led unions to be not significantly marginalised. Accordingly, in the IF model Fiat's traditional attempt to elicit commitment from local unions to manage its relations with workers by achieving consent from them was established at a joint committee level. The role of informal interaction between company and unions is therefore growing at the workplace, but in a context of consent rather than of unions' potential intervention in managerial decision-making processes.

This account reflects the concept of trade unions as a representative institution, which may be pushed towards strategies tendentially collaborative (Hyman, 1996), in contrast with the classic view which considers labour-management relations as a method of conflict resolution in any industrial society (Kerr, 1964). The analysis of the ability of management to provide a viable framework for a negotiated compromise between employers' needs for a flexible workforce and labour's goals, focuses on the ways in which management seeks a consensus with the unions. At this stage it becomes interesting to analyse whether the role of unions as collective organisers of producers is affected by the new management agenda and how this affects unions' strength.

Findings demonstrate that in the recent climate of industrial relations in both Italy and Britain, workplace restructuring implied changes in capital-labour relations. In the new context characterised by management's effort to reshape the individualistic nature of the employment relationship Bacon and Storey (1993b) argue that 'social partnership' is 'the winning way in which by moving towards individualism trade unions can shape their future as collective representatives' (Ibid., 15). Furthermore, Wells (1993) indicates 'social partnership' to be the way forward for British union.

According to these arguments the union role 'must be as a willing contributor' that means as a 'facilitator of change together with management' (Overell, 1997: 27). Nevertheless, our analysis at Longbridge illustrates that 'social partnership' is a problematic issue for British trade unions due to the deregulatory industrial framework characterising labour relations on the one hand and the weakness of unions' articulation between national and local levels, which might derive as a consequence of co-operation with management, on the other hand (Ackers and Payne, 1998).

In contrast, in Italy findings show that the local unions' approach to work restructuring has been driven by the management's need to establish a consensual relationship with unions at the joint committee level in order to legitimise management's action and thereby gain workers' consent. However, evidence illustrates that 'social partnership' appears as a new apparatus within the IF model whose main aim is to convert traditional collective antagonism to a management tool for retaining control and increasing value within the production process. In this sense, it might be argued that the consensual dimension accompanying union-management co-operation in Italy may reflect a weak union involvement in managerial decision-making on the one hand and underline a lack of confidence in the Italian union's power on the other hand. Hence, the contradictory result is the creation of an illusory framework for 'social partnership'.

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Notes

1. The research was carried out before the demise of Rover in the spring of 2000.
2. Teamwork is defined as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993; Procter and Mueller, 2000).
3. The Employment Relations Act (28 January 1999) enables trade unions to apply to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) for recognition from employers with more than 20 employees. The Act introduces the right to recognition for bargaining purpose if a majority of the bargaining unit and the least 40% of those eligible to vote support the union in a ballot. The automatic recognition may be granted without a ballot if the union shows that over 50% of the bargaining unit are members of the union.
4. In accordance with the 'single channel' of workplace representation there is no clear cut distinction between collective bargaining and the role played by trade unions outside the workplace.
5. When the research was carried out the plant employed 14,000 employees (10,500 blue collar and 3,500 white collar). At the end of 1997 it produced 7,500 cars per week. At Longbridge TGWU is the biggest with almost 8,400 members; AEEU has 1,000 members; MSF has 840 members and, finally, GMB has 210 members.
6. Formally, as Vernon (1994: 24) reports, shop stewards concerns were over 'no-clocking'; payment by weekly credit transfer; the implications of job rotation for workers with incapacity or incapability; medically constrained workers returning to work on their old job, and company work wear.
7. 'Major changes in working practices embrace a new ideology as companies attempt to win the hearts and minds of our members, in

- many cases resulting in the marginalisation of trade unions. We cannot, therefore, maintain a simple oppositionist stance. We must seek to develop a strategy of positive engagement with the employers whilst at the same time retaining the trust and support of our members' (TGWU, 1998: 3).
8. Further evidence of unions' resistance of the wide-ranging changes in Rover is reported in Smith (1998).
 9. A comprehensive implementation of the IF programme was achieved only with the development of two new plants on 'greenfield' sites at Melfi and Pratola Serra. In June 1998 at the Fiat's car plant in Melfi (Sata) in the South of Italy, the company produces two models—the Punto and Lancia Y. The plant employed 6,149 employees (5,744 blue collar and 405 white collar). The production capacity is 1,600 cars per day. In the plant there are five union federations: UGL (ex CISNAL) which consists of 4 Rsu; FIM-CISL (*Federazione Italiana Metallurgici*) and FIOM-CGIL (*Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici*) with 18 and 17 Rsu respectively and, finally, UILM-UIL (*Unione Italiana dei Lavoratori Metallurgici*), and FISMIC (company union) with 9 Rsu each.
 10. Management has defined the UTE as 'a unit which governs a segment of the process (a technological subsystem), in which such activities as quality control, variance absorption, self-control and continuous improvement are carried out in order to achieve the company's goals in terms of quality, productivity, costs and service' (Fiat-Auto, 1994: 15).

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