

THE VALUES OF SPORT FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF DIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to show that sport activity, bolstered by the social, educational and cultural principles that govern it, can contribute in a positive and concrete way to the management of diversities. The current socio-economic context is characterized by the phenomenon of globalization, which requires a plurality of different relationships between individuals that are different from each other for different reasons, which can vary from the race to the cultural and economic status, up to the physical or mental conditions. So managing optimally the concept of diversity becomes a primary objective to guarantee the sustainable social and economic development in time. In this connection, sport is identified as one of the few sectors able to manage diversity through an effective and efficient strategic approach that produces educational, cultural, social and economic benefits for the community.

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Introduction

The current social, cultural and economic scenario is increasingly characterized by a series of phenomena that can reduce the physical distances and increase the number of relationships with individuals considered different from each other for various reasons. Both at company level and in the community it needs to manage this diversity with

the aim to enhance it and not let it become a barrier to the economic development, on the one hand, and socio-educational and cultural development, on the other hand, in full compliance with the principles laid down by the Diversity Management model. Obviously, there are different strategic approaches in the management of diversity and each has a different potential socioeconomic outcome. At the same time, very few business (and therefore social) contexts can implement optimal Diversity Management strategies that lead to the attainment of economic, cultural, educational and social outcomes. In this regard, in the sports field and in its natural and planned dynamics,

an environment potentially able to implement the most performing strategic approach (both in terms of efficiency and effectiveness) for the management of diversity, is identified. So an area able to promote inclusion and integration that sees diversity as a resource is to be exploited.

Diversity: a resource to manage and enhance

Demographic changes, migrations, new attitudes and expectations of the working force, due to phenomena such as the increase of women in the working world and their increasing entrepreneurship, attention increasingly focused on the issues of multiculturalism and disability, increased visibility by cultural minorities, increased average age of workers, exponential growth of technology that allows a greater spread of information to everyone. These are just some of the phenomena that have deeply changed the current society, and this has caused that cultures, values, preferences and needs of every person can no longer be taken for granted

today, even by those who are responsible to satisfy them: the companies. In fact, faced with a growing differentiation of markets and needs, companies are seen forced to create more and more differentiated products to distinguish themselves from competitors, in a context in which the talent of the human capital remains the only unique and inimitable organizational resource, essential to understand and anticipate new trends^(1; 2). At the same time, there is more and more sensitivity towards the ethical and social dimension of work, new anti-discrimination laws have been laid down at European level, and there is an investors' growing interest towards that side of the company that goes beyond the financial aspect: the "intangible assets". This is without mentioning the impact of the current economic crisis, which is making even the most established companies live in a climate of uncertainty⁽³⁾.

In this scenario, which has become the primary field of study for the experts in this topic in recent years, the values and ideals are less traditional, while the classic models of recruitment, employment and consumption are questioned and have become inadequate: so it needs a new organizational management approach that allows companies to deal with this changing environment, taking advantage of its peculiarities to successfully reach their business objectives. Hence more and more studies, especially from America, have proposed Diversity Management as a possible solution adoptable from those successful companies which, having understood the changing situation, decide to adapt their culture and look towards what most identifies the citizens (and therefore the workers) of the new millennium: diversity^(4; 5; 6).

It needs to go beyond the prejudices, discrimination and differences in treatment, in order to be competitive in an increasingly "multi-color" market, it becomes essential to recognize the diversities that characterize the actors operating within and outside of the organization itself, and to be able to manage and enhance them by adopting specific policies as an integral part of the company's strategy⁽⁷⁾.

For this reason, since the early Nineties, an increasing number of managers, especially in America and Northern Europe, has decided to adopt the philosophy of diversity management, in order to better stress the unique contribution that each individual can make to the achievement of the company objectives, and consequently to the whole society.

Management strategies for diversity

Originally, the Diversity Management Strategy was designed to ensure equal opportunities within the world of work for those categories considered "weak" and discriminated (e.g. women and handicapped subjects). Only recently the logics of diversity management have been also addressed to all the other categories considered different even in relation to race, culture, religion, etc⁽⁸⁾. The Diversity Management theorized models are mainly of North American matrix and thus are better suited for multinational companies; for the other contexts, especially if characterized by the presence of small and medium-sized companies, it needs to make an assessment with respect to the conditions of use of the US model, which still remains the necessary starting point. The traditional model distinguishes two dimensions useful to the classification, interpretation and design of Diversity Management strategies^(5; 9; 10):

- The strategic response type given by the presence of minorities within the company. We can distinguish different management solutions, in terms of Diversity Management, which can be implemented by the company, depending on the degree of openness and development of diversity within the company itself;

- The implementation rate. In this case it is the stability with which companies pursue diversity management policies and strategies, including them or not within the company's strategic planning process.

- Rejection strategies. The main thesis is related to the idea that diversity is a threat and a cost to the company. In this case, the strategy to be implemented is that to remove ("reject") the subject in question. This will lead to maximize organizational homogeneity and maintain the status quo;

- Assimilation strategies. In this case, the starting point is the acknowledgement that there are regulatory restrictions (e.g. the obligation to hire a minimum number of disabled employees) or economic restrictions (the need for specific professional figures not available on the Italian labor market, e.g. the immigrants), such as to make the recourse to the employment of different categories of persons inevitable;

- Pluralism/separation strategies. For the companies implementing such strategies, diversity is seen as a source of competitive advantage. The idea is that the competitive advantage linked to diversity can be maintained only by virtue of a preservation of the initial diversity;

- **Integration strategies.** In this case, the companies that choose to adopt the Diversity Management strategies are aware that diversity can generate benefits even at the cost of greater complexity and potential conflicts within the organization. So the investment in this type of strategies is preceded by a careful assessment of the costs and benefits related to the management of diversities. A second criterion of Diversity Management strategies classification is represented by their implementation rate, distinguishing between⁽¹¹⁾.

- **Episodic strategies.** Those Diversity Management strategies that are isolated and occasional, managed by ad hoc logics. In this case there is no need to adopt an orientation to diversity.

- **Freestanding strategies.** These are Diversity Management strategies constantly pursued by the company; however, they are not implemented with the overall strategic plan of the company, keeping a certain distance from the other undertaken strategies.

- **Systemic strategies.** The realities choose to adopt diversity management strategies in a stable and long-term way, forming fully part of the overall strategic planning process. These strategies are implemented in the companies where there is a high level of management motivation and involvement. It seems obvious that, in order to ensure a concrete social and economic development, both at the company and at the community level, it would be appropriate to implement management strategies that are more systemic and integration-oriented. Nowadays, unfortunately, there are few companies, and even fewer socio-economic areas, where diversity is managed according to this strategic approach; probably, an exception is sport and the realities that represent it.

The benefits of the strategic approach of the sport for diversity

Sport has the potential to be an important tool when starting new processes of integration and inclusion. In fact, the intrinsic values of sport emphasize the need to want to excel, cooperate, respect the rules and laws of the community, its role as a support for a policy of health and hygiene and, above all, the cohesive function with respect to the ethnic, religious and social diversities, constituting a vital contribution to the set up of modern nations^(12; 13; 14).

The challenge to social inclusion is one of the issues of the near future and sport, in future societies, acts a means through which it is possible to fight against all types of discrimination based on origins,

gender, or any other personal circumstance (especially in a multicultural environment), including also physical and mental disabilities^(14; 15).

Some research refer to sport as an experience based on relationships, help, support, solidarity and responsibility; he also refers to others' experience, comparison, exchange and dialogue; these are key issues in the approach to the topic of integration. Precisely on cultural diversity, which could be a cause of exclusion and discrimination, we argue that sport is paramount to the first contact: "the first contact is pleasant, it leads to think together of the result and change attitudes. The principle is clearly illustrated in the multi-ethnic team. Here a goal is important; the way the team is composed is irrelevant". Sport can be for the subject a fundamental field of experimentation in the socialization process, it promotes a common sense of belonging and participation⁽¹⁶⁾. For example, analyzing the White Paper on Sport, the document published by the European Commission, it is clear that sport can be considered a tool for social inclusion and can promote a shared sense of belonging and participation. Specifically, in fact, sport is one of the very few contexts that can be distinguished for a strategic approach to diversity that is both systemic and integration-oriented. Indeed, almost all kinds of professional sports societies today, from the amateur to the professional ones, have athletes and subject denoted by multiple diversities according to race, social class, culture, religion, etc. In this sector, these diversities are valued for the attainment of a sporting goal that overcomes any inclusive barrier, and allows also to pursue an economic and socio-educational objective^(7; 17; 18).

The socio-educational objective is the direct consequence of the exaltation of the sporting values that facilitate the relationships with others and the integration of the diverse; at the same time, from an economic standpoint, the benefits are provided by the ability to attract a wide range of consumers-viewers fascinated by a multicultural context able of enhancing all diversity. All this seems to be well established both in the planning processes and from a temporal point of view, and an example of this are:

- The increasing presence of female realities in every sports discipline;
- The aforementioned variety of personal peculiarities in the various company realities;
- The willingness of entrepreneurs to invest in sports, albeit in territorial and social contexts apparently distant from their culture;

- The multitude of sport initiatives for disabled people that finds its maximum expression in the Paralympics;

- The presence of several national teams which coexist, compete and collaborate in a multitude of sporting events.

Of course, there are still sporadic cases of exclusion of diversity also in sports, but they tend to be marginalized and punished over time in accordance with the dictates of Diversity Management. So sport is an example of social context and set of entrepreneurial realities able to manage diversity efficiently, encouraging both a cultural and social development and the possibility of promoting more advantageous economic conditions.

Conclusions

Diversity management has proved to be an element of fundamental importance both for the achievement of an economic goal, at a company level, and for the improvement of a cultural, educational and social status for the entire community. Between the different strategic approaches of Diversity Management there is, among the most efficient ones, that one characterized by a systemic implementation rate in the planning and management of diversity, and by a willingness to integrate the diverse resource. Obviously, for the economic constraints and the social exclusion phenomena, both in the companies and in the daily dynamics of society, this strategic approach is difficult to implement. However, this work has found in sport a sector of economic and social nature able to adopt a management strategy very similar to that identified above, which sees diversity as a resource to be valued and able to add value to the entire system. In fact, the way sport reality is characterized by the management of a multitude of relationships between individuals different from each other because of their race, religion, culture, etc., and who operate in the pursuit of a common goal, was analyzed. Cooperation in this field not only accepts diversity, but uses and exploits it to increase the productivity of the "team" (whether it is a sports team or a company team).

In conclusion, sport is a model to emulate, for any other social and entrepreneurial context, thanks to a strategic management able to generate socio-economic benefits through integration and enhancement of diversity.

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