

Full Length Research Paper

Humanities as a modern and effective tool to execute complex professions

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The relationship between school and world of work is one of the most controversial issues that national governments have been trying to tackle: several reforms have affected the world of education, in order for it to keep in step with the times and to be more *sensitive* to the companies' needs. The world of Italian school was given more autonomy, since it was and is still blocked by a centralist system. By relating business top management and education, the present investigation highlights that the antithesis between humanistic education and technical-scientific education represents a conception of education which is finding its place in Europe, but rather it is reducing its driving force in the world of American business schools. This conceptual dualism tends to produce incomplete educational models and contents. The paper aims to demonstrate that the scientific technical drift, inclined to define humanistic education at high school as ineffective or "*useless*", represents a step backwards with respect to the need of building highly-qualified human capital.

Key words: Soft skills, management, school, humanistic' education.

INTRODUCTION

This study relates management and higher¹ education, and it tries to answer the following question: is it still correct to talk about humanities as something useless to execute complex professions, such as management? First, the paper presents the current debate in Italian schooling, between those who want a more *specialised* school and those who want a more

generalist-*humanistic*² school, instead. This debate is also affecting business schools. Then, the work distinguishes skills characterising management and those mechanisms thanks to what they have acquired.

Education, management training and managers' skills

The issue concerning the modernity and the

¹ In Italy, the school system preceding University presents a single path called "Scuola secondaria di Secondo grado" (Upper secondary school), containing a wide range of courses: High schools (humanities-based high-school, scientific high school, high school specialising in modern languages), Technical schools (Secondary school for business, Industrial-Technical Secondary school, Secondary school for land-survey), and Vocational schools (Industry and Manufacturing Vocational school and Tourism Vocational school).

² Humanities in Italy are associated with more generalist paths where the higher the total hours of Latin, Greek, Philosophy and History are, the lower the impact of other technical subject is.

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contemporaneity of humanities significantly affects also the professional and managerial domains (Borgonovi, 2016), since it is an example of human space action at a high level of complexity and responsibility.

In the last years, the relationship between school and world of work has represented a controversial issue (Ryan 2001): in Italy, several reforms have affected the world of education in order for it to keep in step with the times and more *sensitive* towards companies, beginning from the Italian university reform³, which reformed the academic system by introducing a double track (Bachelor's degree and Master's Degree). Norms should:

- (1) Reduced the average age of graduate students.
- (2) Increased the graduate students' number (which is still the lowest number among the 34 countries in the organisation for economic co-operation and development (OECD) area)⁴
- (3) Strengthened the relationship between education and the world of work, by means of internships and training courses as an example of linkage (Bernardini, 2015).

Simultaneously, school seemed to be granted more autonomy⁵ aiming to promote more efficient educational models, where efficiency is often associated with a higher specialisation in education, such as the introduction in high schools of those subjects characterising technical paths so that high school could be more adequate to the company's needs.

School is thus considered a place which has to produce professionalization too, so the promoters of reforms believe it is necessary to reduce the total hours of humanistic subjects (Latin, Greek, Philosophy, History, Italian) to give room to scientific and technical subjects (Maths, Physics, Biology, IT, etc.).

In Italy, we have been discussing the usefulness of humanities-based high-school curriculum for a few years⁶. It is the "standard bearer" of the humanistic thought and generalist education, in opposition to more specialised educational paths⁷. Some believe the humanities-based high-school provides categories of complexity in a more and more knowledge-oriented and complex business world (Castels, 2004; Rullani, 2004). Some big managers interviewed on behalf of an investigation by the Istituto Marcelline Tommaseo⁸, have declared that:

"humanities provide tools which do not offer solutions, but

³ Regulation laying down norms concerning educational autonomy of Universities:

http://www.miur.it/0006Menu_C/0012Docume/0098Normat/2088Regola.htm

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/italy/Education-at-a-glance-2015-Italy-in-Italian.pdf>

⁵ Regulation laying down norms concerning the autonomy of schools pursuant to art.21, of the Italian law 15th March 1999, n.59.

⁶ Humanities-based high-school curriculum is a upper secondary school curriculum.

⁷ For instance, Secondary schools for business, applied science high school programme and IT secondary school.

⁸ <http://www.marcellinetommaseo.it/>

rather train students' mind to find appropriate solutions".

A press report conducted by Canfora and Eco (2013)⁹ and the *Task force per il liceo classico* ("*Task force for humanities*") head in the same direction¹⁰. According to Hendry (2010), because of the control produced by the economic thought on education, whose criteria have become a *mainstream* in daily life, economy has replaced classical categories of thought as engine of humanity "at the expense of both critical reasoning and individual moral engagement".

Also, business has been influenced by those currents of thought according to which, good management and good decisions (intended in neutral terms) mainly depend on the strict application of economic theories, so that strictness in the company structure (Fordism) shifted to management tightening (managerialism). Companies are interpreted as business models where deals are "a mechanism for coordinating economic *inputs* and activities, and of the *manager* as a morally neutral technician engaged in a world of purely rational problem solving in the pursuit of efficiency" (Hendry, 2010).

Managers are daily called to take decisions concerning the human features of the company (as Schein declares), and these decisions require a deep knowledge of human activities, where decisional criteria proposed by economic theories (for example, cost-benefit analysis) are not appropriate. These considerations express the first position in the work area, but not the only one; there is also the other one, supporting that professional problems that young people face (finding a job, being performing and competent in carrying on their occupation) are partly due to the lack of specialisation that school should, but does not, offer.

Some believe the humanities-based high-school curriculum is "pedantic and inconclusive" (Ruggiero¹¹), since nowadays school should give a more specialised education to better meet the technological innovations of the company's world, thus providing technical skills, because modern production requires specialisation in the forms of learning (Margiotta, 2007).

The dichotomy between humanistic and technical subjects represents a useless construction, a separation which is analytically correct, yet not in terms of juxtaposition but rather of differentiation, because the separation between classical and scientific culture is the basis of reductionist processes which impede the development of creativity (Busacca, 2012).

This dilemma between classical culture and technical-scientific culture also affects the strictly managerial

⁹ The interviews and the complete analyses are available at the following portal: <http://espresso.repubblica.it/visioni/cultura/2014/11/13/news/ecco-perche-il-liceo-classico-non-deve-morire-1.187894>

¹⁰ The manifesto of the national petition is available at the following page: www.taskforceperilclassico.it

¹¹ The full article is available at the following link: <http://www.linkiesta.it/it/article/2015/10/11/la-cultura-classica-sta-sparendo-dalle-scuole-europee-ma-non-facciamon/27749/>

training, such as the one offered by business schools. This type of master course is very sought-after because of growing expectations and hopes of social mobility that students place in the acquisition of a more and more specialised and sector-based title. As a matter of fact, an investigation carried out by the Italian newspaper "Il Sole 24Ore"¹², has counted more than 10,000 Italian young managers who have MBA. Also, literature has dealt with it, especially when wondering about the usefulness of this type of preparation for the development of managerial skills and careers (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007).

In Mintzberg (2004) opinion, this type of master course leads to a severe social danger because "it only helps to feed students' haughtiness who are already very ambitious and, once further consolidated their ego, who risk to irreversibly damage a world dominated by the new financial capitalism", because the current scientific conception of management has contaminated master courses, thus making them distant from real life (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005), and almost exclusively worried about their positions in international rankings (Starkey and Tempest, 2006). The question concerning BS effectiveness, even if it raised in more recent times (since 2005), is spreading throughout Italy too; a new current of thought is trying to take the managerial science out of positivism, so that MBAs are able to provide a more complete frame about the problem of complexity (Brunetti, 2012) by introducing the humanistic culture in the company (Golinelli, 2012). The chance to reach top positions in a company, though, is not the mechanical result of an educational choice (a MBA) or another¹³.

In particular, the managerial role is now affected by significant stimulations and changes (Block, 2016; Rifkin, 2014; Sennett, 2006) which have effects on the ways it is performed (Mintzberg, 2014). The speed of decisional processes (Perlow et al., 2002), the increase in information (hypothetically) at our disposition (O'Reilly 1980), and the sudden change of markets, requires innovations in performing the role and its essential skills (Bifulco, 2012).

Literature is rich in studies concerning the topic of skills (Armstrong, 2011), the key word describes managers' success and defeats, their classification and acquisition. When talking about skills, the first significant distinction comes to light, which has now found its place both in the academic and business domains. The hard/soft analytical distinction (Laker and Powell 2001) helps us to clarify:

Hard skills are strictly technical skills, concerning the *knowledge* of the subject to "*manu-agere*", of the specific techniques of the sector.

Soft or transversal skills, instead, are not linked to a

specific professional task (European Council, 2014), but rather they characterise the subject's way of being in executing his "profession" (Andrews and Higson, 2008), that is to say motivation, communication, relational skills, the ability to understand the company's culture and to convey it (Robles, 2012).

Over the last years, the debate about managerial skills focuses upon the growing importance of soft skills. A recent study conducted by Abravanel and D'Agnesi (2016) presents the attitude of "talent scouts", privileging soft skills to others. Possessing this type of skills allows, according to Goleman (1998), to transform technical knowledge in ability of positive job performance¹⁴.

According to Heckman and Kaytz (2012), in fact, soft skills foresee, produce and represent the key of success. According to the European Council (2014), "soft skills also refer to the ability to think critically, to take initiative, *problem solving* and to work with others. These skills are relevant both for individuals as citizens and for the world of work in the various and unpredictable paths of career today".

Literature presents two theoretical models about skill learning: from the one hand, the model privileging informal paths, from the other hand the model supporting formal paths (Roger, 2004). In the same time, one cannot forget that when referring to the topic of soft skills, it exists as a current thought, called *nativistic*, according to which an individual is already inclined from his birth to the development of specific skills, which are not learnt through experience (empirical or educational) but they have an hereditary character¹⁵ (Lawrence and Nohria, 2002). The construction of attitudes, behaviours and skills (also) occurs through in-formal processes, by means of which domains such as family, the peer group or affective relationships, intervene:

- (1) By influencing our nature
- (2) By affecting our personality
- (3) By showing us life practices, cultural models and assessment criteria, as it has been formally recognised by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) in the European Guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning¹⁶.

In the working environment, there exist the processes of informal learning, where one acquires/modifies not only his technical skills, but also identity skills. The level of influence on one's soft skills is particularly high here because it is all environment-specific skills to be mainly stimulated:

"Learning in the working place also affects many less

¹²

<http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnline4/Economia%20e%20Lavoro/2008/04/formazione-diecimila-mba.shtml?uuid=0e899198-1108-11dd-949b-00000e251029&DocRulesView=Libero&fromSearch>

¹³ Here I refer to the so-called *turn over*.

¹⁴ This relationship has been highlighted, for example, by Boyatzis (2008) and Kidwell et al. (2011) in their studies concerning the relationship between soft skills and job performance.

¹⁵ For a further understanding of Nativism, see a recent work by Ferretti (2014).

¹⁶ www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3073_it.pdf

formal activities of team development, knowledge sharing and knowledge management. These activities daily take place in the working place, because people learn by working, thus improving their abilities, finding new ways of working, sharing their knowledge and passing their own ability down to their colleagues. Informal learning in the working place has always been the most common form of learning, and even the least considered. In this case, learning and practice very often fuse together in one activity: learning "by doing", the most effective form of learning" (Stevens and Harrison, 2000).

According to an investigation conducted by the Agnelli Foundation and the AID association¹⁷, one of the most significant deficiencies of the current educational model resides in the fact that young graduate students find themselves "devoid of" soft skills, which they perceive distant from their job (almost intangible, if not insignificant) and, instead, they are important in the choice the company takes in the moment of hiring.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the research aims, the author chose the qualitative methodology, with a specific reference to the semi-structured interview¹⁸. Two categories of influential participants were interviewed:

- (1) The professors of the most significant MBA master courses in Italy and;
- (2) Business trainers, because they are both considered as experts in management actions and training.

First, six Italian business schools were chosen, among those with the highest scores in national and international rankings¹⁹. Once the business schools are selected, the spokesmen of these schools were asked to join the research interview. All requests have been accepted. In two cases, spokesmen have indicated other colleagues to participate in the interviews. As for business schools, the following experts have been interviewed:

- (1) Boccardelli Paolo (Luiss University)
- (2) Cappetta Rossella (Bocconi University)
- (3) Caramazza Marella (Fondazione Istud)
- (4) Frattini Federico (Politecnico of Milan)
- (5) Nanut Vladimir (MIB Trieste School of Management)
- (6) Sobrero Maurizio (AlmaGraduate Bologna)

At the same time, one business trainer (Miccoli) was selected, as vice president of the Italian Trainer Association²⁰, and then through "snowball" sampling²¹ the other two business trainers were chosen.

¹⁷<http://www.fga.it/working-papers/tutti-i-working-papers/dettaglio/articolo/i-nuovi-laureati-al-giudizio-dei-direttori-e-dei-responsabili-del-personale-e-delle-risorse-umane-16.html#.WAdMgOCsu00>

¹⁸ Especially by reason of the tool of investigation used, the author decided to present the results by privileging the conversational aspect of the interviews with respect to other ways of synthesis. The interviewees' answers represent the core of this work, which aims to catch the opinions to show what trend the participants follow, since they are considered as significant participants in this issue.

¹⁹ <http://crasecrets.com/le-migliori-10-scuole-di-business-italiane>

²⁰ <https://associazioneitalianaformatori.it>

²¹ Corbetta (1999).

Thus, the following people joined the interview:

- (1) Miccoli Giusi (Asap Sole Administrator, Aif Vice President)
- (2) Grillitsch Norbert (trainer, self-employed professional)
- (3) Vardisio Roberto (trainer, self-employed professional)

All the interviews²² were carried out between April 10th, 2016 and July 22nd, 2016, and all interviewees were accepted to have their interview published.

RESULTS

The business trainers' point of view

The interview to business trainers may be divided in 2 sections:

- (1) The relationship between the humanities and complex professions, and the educational paths which have been considered the most proper ones for those who are willing to take up the managerial career.
- (2) The role/value of soft skills.

It is the issue of *soft skills* which business trainers' attention is focused upon:

"Differently from a teacher or a professor, who work on the individual's knowledge, the trainer (both in the technical and personal, motivational domains) works on the individual's skills, as Anglo-Saxons would say. The trainer is charged of developing skills in his clients, being a class or an individual".²³

The first section concerns the most appropriate educational paths for those who want to take up the managerial career. According to Miccoli, the ideal path would start with scientific studies:

"Because the humanities lack mathematical and scientific disciplines. I do not agree with graduate students in literature because not everyone of them takes up the managerial career. Then I would suggest a school of business studies or management engineering, and I would add an experience abroad and a volunteering experience" (my translation);

According to Vardisio, instead:

"the course of study of high school can equally start from a humanistic or technical base, we only need that students regain complexity after; in other words, if the student starts by attending a technical institute, then he studied mathematics and gets a specialisation in calculus, it is less likely that this person owns the

²² The interviewees gave their authorisation to use their own interviews in academical publications.

²³ Luciano Cassese, creator of the Professione Formatore format (my translation): <http://www.professioneformatore.it/>

categories of complexity. I do not know if there is a valuable path in absolute terms. The criterion is complexification, not fossilisation”.

Nevertheless, Grillitsch believes it is preferable to choose strictly scientific studies:

“I would suggest scientific or engineering studies, and perhaps a master course in psychology after...I would say a School of Management Engineering, or Law or Economics at most” (my translation)

The study participants' answers show two inclinations:

(1) Using the specificity of the profession to be taken up from the very beginning as the guideline in the school choice, and privileging technical-scientific studies (high schools for scientific studies or technical institutes).

(2) Using the complexity criterion characterising this occupation, and choosing courses of study which take into account both "humanistic" education (providing the categories to read the reality) and "technical" education, providing the specific tools of the occupation. For this second position, the humanities-based high-school curriculum as well as the high school for scientific studies represents two equally important choices to opt for.

The relationship between the humanities and their influence on managerial performances, and between the humanities and the *soft skills* learning, represents the distinctive mark of this research:

When according to Vardisio *“the humanities count much more than in the past, because technical knowledge, rationality and Descartes's quantum models make sense as long as the context is predictable. The humanities offer open-mindedness which helps to reason on shades, abstractions, imagination, on complexifying things, because before simplifying, if I have not embraced the reality at a certain level of wideness, it is difficult that my equation works. The humanities give the chance to see things in a wider way”*; (my translation)

Miccoli believes that *“the relationship between humanistic culture and managerial skills exists, but it is not so evident. We could say that humanities provide a useful mindset”*; whereas according to Grillitsch, the humanities are condensed in transversal skills.

In other words, the humanities and soft skills correspond, because *“humanities better prepare for the comprehension of soft skills”*. These answers highlight a double interpretation of the relationship between the humanities and management: according to Vardisio, there is a super-ordination relationship of the humanities on the professional experience, since they offer “a mindset”, provide the categories to read the context, thus tracing the frame in which one may use technical-

scientific equipment; on the contrary, Grillitsch assesses humanistic education as equally important as technical equipment, *“humanism intended in terms of behaviour, an attitude”*. As seen in literature, the more apical is the professional role performed, the bigger is the effect of skills on the professional performance. In fact:

“(these) are not (simple) skills, they are meta-skills, characteristics which are not so far from what someone defined, stay hungry, stay foolish, they are open-mindedness and curiosity. Open-mindedness, flexibility, patience to know how to stay in incertitude, self-esteem, and motivation” (Vardisio)

“by "soft" I mean anything which is not technical. One of the skills of the future will be the management of complexity, where there is less certitude. In my opinion, soft skills mean to make decisions in the domain of incertitude” (Grillitsch)

“leadership, strategic abilities... good open-mindedness” (Miccoli)

Even if all trainers interviewed agree on the importance of soft skills, we have different opinions about mechanisms and dynamics supporting and/or generating their acquisition:

“Professionals learn soft skills in the training courses I organise. Soft skills mean to make decisions in conditions of incertitude. This ability cannot be taught, you learn it from experience and self-reflection” (Grillitsch)

“One learns from experience, but experience is a necessary condition, yet not sufficient. You need to reflect about experience presenting the categories to reflect” (Vardisio)

In Miccoli opinion, some soft skills may be learnt with *“master courses”*, others *“in external education tools, such as corporate theatres”*, while for others *“where education is necessary yet not sufficient condition, you need a basic education. Nevertheless, a part of them is innate (that is, the strategic ability)”*

There is no one-way preference for a skill learning model (experiential, nativistic, formal): for each one of these models, there is a preferential order and the acknowledgement that only the co-habitation of the two educational models (formal and informal) generates an integral development of skills; according to Miccoli, the innate identity affects individual characteristics.

The master courses professors' point of view

This part too is organised according to the sections dealt with in the interviews:

(1) The new generations' preparation and the relationship

between humanities and management

- (2) Skills and places of acquisition
- (3) The role of *business schools*.

The first topic to be dealt with concerns the most complete preparation for those people striving for the managerial career:

"Today there are two orientations: one, maybe more cultural orientation represented by the humanities-based high-school curriculum and the other one represented by technical-vocational institutes. These orientations divide the world in two big areas. The big issue is that we should change the learning method. I would say that the most general approach helps to open the mind" (Boccardelli -my translation)

"I attended a traditional humanities-based high-school which is perfect to prepare students to become a human being. A manager learns with time, becomes an adult, thanks to adult learning processes. I think that a 16-year boy should develop solid knowledge and ability to analyse and synthesise, even if he does it by studying Latin or Maths" (Cappetta - my translation)

"I think that it is not the school course of study itself which makes the person a winner, but learning in general...I support something which is not spread in Italy yet as pedagogical model, which is to say work-linked training in educational systems" (Nanut)

"I think that basic culture is fundamental independently from the job which will be done" (Caramazza)

"Too often I see students in our university courses, both coming from high schools, technical institutes or others, who are a little sensitive on problems happening around them. This is why, in my opinion, we need to recover the value of secondary-school paths creating a cultural background, a whole-heartedly mindset. It is urgent to recover the value of high schools, especially the humanities-based high-school" (Frattini)

Besides, the preference for high schools, due to the more complete mindset they provide, the central element is general basic culture which offers the categories to read the reality. Professors are less inclined to distinguish between humanistic and scientific high schools, but they underline the pedagogical character of high schools in general. A second element related to the topic of skills is the role of the humanities, on which a several-level debate is open:

- (1) School
- (2) University
- (3) Post-graduate

"Today the manager's occupation requires to create

interconnections on different levels, especially acting on emotional and social lines which reinforce links among people. In this sense, the manager's sensitivity to the human side is inevitably essential" (Frattini)

"I say it out of conviction. ISTUD is the school where everyone is introducing humanities for management. Humanities help the manager to understand what a business is in a wider view. It is the person's culture and one cannot do without it" (Caramazza)

"I know excellent managers with technical background and excellent managers with humanistic background. If we talk about adults' education, I think that soft skill training is crucial" (Cappetta)

"I believe that a successful manager, that is to say an authentic professional and human quality person, is the result of many complementary training paths where the cultural and humanistic aspect is undoubtedly important, yet the other knowledge features, such as maths, are equally important" (Nanut)

From the one hand, the relationship between humanities and management is confirmed, on the other hand one notices that this relationship generated two different orientations. Some believe that humanities develop the knowledge of the complex thought helping the manager precisely in the moments of more liquidness and complexity, where the mechanical application of strict rules does not produce positive results; on the other hand humanities *trains* the sensitivity to soft skills acquisition. As for the importance of soft skills, the participants believe that:

"Soft skills must be read today in one's own stamp. Life skills are seen as abilities to have an on-going learning approach... in de-structured contexts... it is necessary to have those skills enabling a better interpretation. The interpretation of society is today one of the most needed abilities for a top-manager...skill acquisition must be provided by means of a mixture of professional experience and structured training activity" (Boccardelli)

"if the company was not a community, the manager would not need soft skills. Given that these skills are the individual's before being the manager's we should say that we learn them already in the family, then at school... today if we say that cooperation inside organisations is important, school cannot be ruled only by competition without purpose" (Caramazza)

"anyone doing business knows that success in business derives from both his knowledge and technical tools, and from all the rest... these leadership skills are acquired in two ways: from practical experience...and from experiential courses" (Cappetta)

"(soft skills) are a way to transpose the person's essence in work. We are our relationships. I think there are things one learns in all contexts where he is forced to engage with others" (Sobrero)

"they are undoubtedly important in a more and more complex and uncertain world... The place where (to learn them) is linked to educational institutions in which these methodologies have been built through a long and articulated path of analysis by the teaching staff" (Nanut)

"In my opinion, it is easier to develop technical skills than soft skills of leadership in work, because soft skills demand to strike one's right is deeply-rooted in the daily behaviour. I strongly believe that soft skills have to be learnt in specific courses" (Frattini).

These answers agree in acknowledging the maximum importance to soft skills, but the participants convey different importance to the various learning models. For the participants, these skills represent essential qualities, an indispensable asset for the top manager, both for the complexity of the business organisation demanding proper leadership skills and because *soft skills* are the person's way of being also in the working environment; moreover, de-structuring of organisation processes (that is to say, the abandonment of Fordist models of business production and organisation) requires those adaptation abilities representing the key of success. Secondly, some participants are inclined to transmission through formal learning models, that is to say specialised agencies; others believe that practical experience in the working environment is the ideal mechanism to acquire this type of skills. The interviewees believe that school and family represent significant places where to acquire soft skills, since they are *worlds* affecting the personality development. What should a manager be like? According to some:

"(a manager should be) curious, flexible, able to lead with his example" (Sobrero)

"the best managers have a vision and must know how to implement it" (Cappetta)

"a manager should be a little technical and with a high ability to analyse, innovate and manage other assets" (Boccardelli)

"I think that until 7/8 years ago, technical skills dominated; in other words, a manager had to be a prepared person who knows technicality. Today, instead, 80% is made by relational skills, the ability to be a driving force, a motivator, a recognised leader" (Frattini)

According to this position, the technical component takes a second place, not because it has lost its importance

with respect to the individual's way of being. There exists another, yet minor, position, according to which

"top managers should be very competent in what they do, thus they should master advanced skills: I support specialisation... We need to have an interpretation of the context, of the complex domain where we work and these are issues that no manager can dare not to consider" (Caramazza).

Caramazza's words privilege technical specialisation as a priority. It is not about opposing "two right things", *managerial leadership* and *technical knowledge*. Orientations highlight the aspect which is considered the "priority": the analytical work allows to make a classification in terms of higher or lower importance of an element compared to another.

Conclusions

The interviews highlight the presence of a strong orientation, according to which the manager's romantic picture as a lone wolf does not correctly describe the real state of things, and the way with which the managerial role is performed.

Firstly:

- (1) The manager works in highly complex contexts, so that it is essential for him to own a high specialisation in any business sector; the possibility to take on the manager's role is not the direct result of the increase in his own technical skills;
- (2) The complexity given by being companies-communities demands, the manager to own the relational skills which are necessary to establish a collaborative and trustworthy climate that Frattini synthesises in what we now define as the leadership ability;
- (3) In this sense, management training requires both ongoing renovation processes of one's own knowledge (MBA executive), and a continuous attention to all those worlds able to solicit the increasing development of soft skills (charity, game, etc.). The never-ending (almost neurotic) succession of courses, degrees and master courses which are attributed as the secret of one's hypothetical success, represents a non-sense, if it aims to achieve top positions. In order to achieve this professional aim, simple increases in one's education qualifications and/or the acquisition of technical skills do not represent the sufficient way.

The interviewees confirm the high value represented by soft skills, as an essential component of success: the way they are learnt, or can be acquired, is what divides the interviewees' orientations.

The first believes that soft skills may be acquired mainly through the working experience (business life); according

to that, it is especially daily application to shape the individual and to make him able to communicate, work in a team, etc. Daily application is not exclusively intended as total working hours, but it also concerns other aspects of life such as sport, volunteering, activities promoting interpersonal relationships. Here it comes as a useful indication for school aiming to boost practices promoting more cooperation among students and avoiding competition which conveys meanings opposing "teamwork" (we refer to the talent show model that in some cases is borrowed in schools²⁴).

The second orientation privileges the skill transmission through a formal model, both MBAs (who are increasingly inclined to teach soft skills²⁵) and specific courses are organised inside companies. According to some people, a special influence on this aspect should be given to humanities, which is considered as *the model of education* which promotes the soft skills development.

The study of literature and philosophy (in particular) is considered as a factor promoting the knowledge of diversity and preparing the individual to open-mindedness towards anything which is not rationally controllable. The excess in rationalism is one of the main charges that much literature brings against schools and the educational world; hence, it is about overcoming the opposition between humanities and technical knowledge, thus giving importance back to those aspects of education that, even due to the excessive technicalisation ruling the external world, is seen to be erroneously considered as "useless".

Moreover, the acquisition of a higher educational qualification in Italy has represented the guarantee to enter the world of work for years, because of a series of reasons going from:

- (1) The reduction of jobs offered by the Italian market
- (2) The lack of proper roles in proportional number with respect to graduate students and
- (3) A gap between the labour market demand and the range of courses.

The debate concerning the brain drain from Italy to other western countries, poses questions about the risk of resource scattering, especially in terms of human capital, that each year weighs on Italy (OECD, 2017)²⁶. The problem in attracting educated population also concerns the "last" level of education: the PhD. According to an Irpps-Cnr enquiry²⁷ almost 3,000 PhD students leave Italy each year to enter other labour markets. In this

sense, school policies are one of the factors on field as important as the labour market's: a stronger partnership between the two environments is one of the ways which is useful to take.

The first step to take, when starting the educational path, is to promote a choice which, on the one hand, increases one's talents, and on the other hand offers a complete preparation to the human subject. In this sense, from the present research, a very strict relationship between high school and management emerges: almost all participants involved in the research believe that high school is the most proper school to develop the human capital who is appropriate to take up the managerial career. The development of the ability to synthesise and analyse, as well as the ability to interpret social phenomena, give high school the prevalent favour of the interviewees.

The reasons of the preference for high schools go beyond the school-manager relationship; according to the interviewees, high school should be the favourite school because they consider it necessary and unique in developing personality, able to generate that particular mindset, representing the secret of Italy (Dionigi, 2016). These data help to overcome some disapprovals that have been made towards the humanities-based high-school curriculum in the last period; it is still considered as an extremely significant school by those who occupy top positions and it is still positively valued due to the fact that it represents one of those schools (as the high school for scientific studies) which does not reduce the *transmission of knowledge to the transmission of skills*.

The classical high school ensures the acquisition of all those categories able to face the problem of complexity (in business, but not only): it is positively considered due to its humanistic style, that is to say the simultaneous presence of Greek, Latin and philosophy that, in the general, orientation of the study participants represent useful tools in the identity development. The modernity and the strength of the humanities-based high-school curriculum are also supported by a recent study of AlmaLaurea (2017) enquiry, according to which those who have attended the humanities-based high-school get, on average, higher scores (in terms of marks in the university exams) with respect to those who have attended other secondary schools.

This is a point in favour of those who do not agree with the *de-classicisation* of the humanities-based high-school curriculum, that is to say a reduction of the total hours of Greek/Latin in favour of the increase in more "professionalising" disciplines. In this sense, humanities still find their appropriateness and modernity opposing those hypotheses of reformulation on which this paper works.

Each school path, especially high school, presents its own identity which cannot be hybridised by following the hypothesis of a greater corporatisation, due to not better specified "corporate needs". As Martinoli (1962) already reminded, what corporate companies look for is people

²⁴ An example of it is the talent show to choose the school promoted by Confindustria in the Piemonte region, whose title is "*Fai la scuola giusta*" ("Make the right school"): <http://www.uicuneo.it/uic/associazione/progetti/failascuolagiusta.uic>

²⁵ <http://www.magazine.unibo.it/archivio/2017/02/22/soft-skills-per-gli-studenti-unibo-e-fondi-per-le-associazioni-studentesche>

²⁶ www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/EAG2017CN-Italy-Italian.pdf

²⁷ <http://www.irpps.cnr.it/it/attivita-di-ricerca/risorse-umane-e-societa-della-conoscenza/mobilita-e-migrazioni-altamente-qualifi>

with a significant basic education and an excellent adaptability, with working heads and not full heads.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of this work is the low number of interviewees, which was due to limited available resources. Moreover, it is very difficult to draw an overall framework of the number of active business trainers in Italy in order to deduce a representative sample. This work presents a possibility of development through further interviews to a new category of participants, the managers of big companies, in order to integrate the trainers' opinion (professors and business trainers) with the active managers'.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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