

## Deindustrialisation and Management Sciences. The Shadow of *Velleitarismo*

By Massimo Bianchi\*

*In recent times some scholars have pointed out the parallel advancement of the process of de-industrialisation and of the crisis of Management Sciences. On one hand, as authoritatively stated, the structure of strategic and advanced sectors of Italian Industry has been disjointed and /or poorly sold to companies of other countries transferring the control and initiatives of national development to the international economy. At the other hand it seems that the Management Sciences developed in Italy, represented mainly by the Business Management (Organizzazione Aziendale), are struggling to keep up with the changes induced by the technological and socio-economic revolution. In addition, Management researchers, according to what happens globally, must face the uncertainties arising from the multiplication of inter, trans and cross disciplinary proposals to which the multi-disciplinarity, originally claimed by the doctrine of Business Management doctrine, no longer offers an adequate response. In this perspective, the eclecticism emerging from the evolution of studies seems not to reach an adequate and shared level of maturity to represent a challenging and reliable paradigm of reference. This leads to consider the actuality of Federico Caffè's research on eclecticism and velleitarismo (wishful or unrealistic thinking) in Economics referring to the post World War II in Italy. The last studies hypothesise a similar behaviour regarding the evolution of management studies in the face of the challenges of the rapidly changing world in recent decades. In this paper, we will use the term velleitarismo as it relates to its first applications to political analysis by Antonio Gramsci of Federico Caffè's later insights into political economy. From this reasoning, the attempt is to apply this concept to the contemporary crisis of industrialisation and to the difficulties of management studies, a perspective that can be extended to the diminishing role of industry in Europe and Western Countries<sup>1</sup>.*

**Keywords:** *Velleitarismo; Deindustrialisation; Eclecticism; Business Management; Federico Caffè*

### ***Velleitarismo and Adequacy***

The first question concerns the risk that *velleitarismo* is playing a negative role in the ongoing change of the Italian Economy and its Organisations.

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<sup>1</sup>Kucera.& Milberg (2003).

Based to the unsatisfactory results of Managerial Theories in recent decades, Researchers and Managers have pointed to the advancing process of de-industrialisation and the problems of management sciences, particularly in Italy.

On the one hand, as authoritatively stated, since the 1960s, the structure of strategic and advanced sectors of Italian Industry has been disjointed and / or poorly sold to companies of other countries ceding control and initiative to the international market<sup>2</sup>.

At the other hand the Management Sciences, mainly represented by Business Management, are struggle to keep up with the changes induced by the technological revolution<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, Management researchers faced the uncertainties arising from the multiplication of inter, trans and cross disciplinary proposals to which the multi-disciplinarity, originally claimed by the doctrine of Business Management, no longer offers an adequate response to the needs of an innovative approach.

In this perspective, the eclecticism emerging from the evolution of studies has not reached an adequate and shared level of maturity to a challenging and reliable paradigm of reference.

Moreover, one can consider the actuality of researches conducted by Federico Caffè on eclecticism and *velleitarismo* in Economics in post-World War II Italy<sup>4</sup>.

The latest studies hypothesise a similar behaviour regarding the unrealistic evolution of management studies in the face of the challenges, in recent decades, of organisations rapid change.

From this line of reasoning, today's perspective is to apply this hypothesis to the contemporary crisis of industrialisation and the difficulties of management studies with the aim of avoiding that the *velleitarismo* plays a negative role in the change of organisations and economies.

Despite the doubts about the use of the term unrealistic or wishful thinking to analyse Italian identity, we propose to apply the *velleitarismo* in the meaning attributed by Gramsci both as a limitation of the attitude of intellectuals toward historical judgment and as an escape to utopia and the unrealism, which for Gramsci is opposed to the rational will<sup>5</sup>.

In particular, Caffè considered, in post-World War II Italy, the distance of Italian Economists from Keynesian Policies and from the interventions oriented toward the centrality of labour in social life<sup>6</sup>. This brings the concept of *velleitarismo* closer to that of inadequacy, whereby the judgment of the behaviour of political economy scholars is reversed to that of management theorists with their approach to the situation in which no attempt was made to influence the development of an industrial economy or to defend it, in later times, from the industrial decline.

Today the situation is completely different situation from the post war period but from many quarters there emerges in Italy a statement of the inadequacy of

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<sup>2</sup>Gallino (2014).

<sup>3</sup>Mercurio, Martinengo & Mangia (2016).

<sup>4</sup>Poettinger (2021).

<sup>5</sup>Gramsci (2015).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, at 3.

management theories as a reaction to the decline of the industry, particularly manufacturing industry, and the inadequate support of Italian best practices in industry and innovation oriented towards a highly work- and knowledge-intensive development<sup>7</sup>.

These shortcomings include the lack of modeling of small and medium enterprises, a shortcoming that, despite the continued successes achieved, decade after decade, by companies of this size that characterise the Italian economic system, continues to fuel criticism on the small business system.

A second limitation stems from *velleitarismo* considered as inadequacy of managerial thinking and as inversely related to the concept of Adequacy. The introduction of the concept of Adequacy recalls the failure to resolve the contradictions implicit in performance analysis of (which afflicts the very definition of wishful thinking) and in the relationships among the indexes of Adequacy, Effectiveness and Efficiency indexes.

In these relationships, it emerges that Adequacy (Ad) is directly related to Effectiveness (Ec) and indirectly proportional to Efficiency (Ez) [1].

$$Ad = \frac{Ec}{Ez} \quad [1]$$

This relationship highlights the limitations of judging on entrepreneurial Adequacy, with the introduction of the concept of Leibenstein 's X Efficiency<sup>8</sup> which represents the unclear, if not predominantly unknown, composition of entrepreneurial performance at the basis of economic and managerial approach<sup>9</sup>.

According to the analysis of the crisis of managerial sciences, would this relationship be the tool to be applied to avoid the *velleitarismo*: a new balance between Ec and Ez in an Ad perspective?

### **The Surge of Eclecticism in Business Management<sup>10</sup>**

Over the past 25 years, manufacturing employment, as a share of total employment, has declined dramatically, a phenomenon widely referred as "deindustrialisation"<sup>11</sup>.

As defined in economic studies "Deindustrialisation is not a singular event but a prolonged process of structural change, which runs in parallel with opposed phenomena at both a global and a local level"<sup>12</sup>. Only today the almost widespread international wars have, produced a reduction in the fall of employment in manufacturing in the world's most advanced economies<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>Mercurio, Martinengo & Mangia (2016).

<sup>8</sup>Leibenstein (1966).

<sup>9</sup>Mefford (2017).

<sup>10</sup>Visentin & Penocchio (2017).

<sup>11</sup>Rowthorn & Ramaswamy (1997).

<sup>12</sup>Zazzara.(2020).

<sup>13</sup>ISPI (2024).

In Italy, de-industrialisation,<sup>14</sup> is particularly evident due mainly to four negative macro events: the loss of green investment, the increased of imports of electric vehicles from China, the rising energy prices as a result of the Ukraine war and uncertainties due to the increasing of international risks in international logistics<sup>15</sup>.

As already stated, ‘understanding deindustrialisation in Italy involves recognizing its interdisciplinary nature. It is not merely about industrial decline; it impacts communities, ideologies, forms of labour, territorial development, and public responses’<sup>16</sup>, claiming an eclectic perspective in approaching the phenomenon.

Within this international situation, technological innovation, and productivity growth of a country or area, is related more on what happens in services which, in general, are less technologically advanced<sup>17</sup>. This implies that productivity growth in the manufacturing sector will become less influential in improving living standards in advanced economies but, above all, it means that the management will have to adapt to new forms of organisation that are less propulsive to the general welfare<sup>18</sup>.

Because of its structural weakness on the financial side, Italy is most affected by this phenomenon especially since it will be burdened on human resources, on the one hand, and on investment in research and innovation, on the other.

Another undisputed issue about the development of Management Sciences, is the indifference of Management Theories to the variety of organisational functions in which they are applied. This legitimates the question whether it exist a different approach of management theories regarding administrative functions compared to the production ones or to the ones of commercial areas.

The hypothesis is that the need to approach these different areas and the variety of issues to be faced by Management implement a process also detected in other disciplines and called eclecticism.

Particularly in Management the eclecticism could be viewed positively or negatively:

- In a positive perspective the eclecticism is connected to Multi, Trans, Inter, Cross disciplinarism and considered as any theoretical elaboration resulting from the coordination of elements of different origin.
- In a negative perspective, eclecticism is defined as a tendency to combine heterogeneous elements in a disorganised way, with an arbitrary choice and without a precise criterion.

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<sup>14</sup>Berta (2016).

<sup>15</sup>International Monetary Fund (2024).

<sup>16</sup>Caruso & Corona (2019).

<sup>17</sup>Born, Vogt & Geering (2022).

<sup>18</sup>Larsen (2020).

## De-industrialisation and Management Sciences in Italy

In order to discuss the perspective of an analysis based on *velleitarismo* and eclecticism one hypothesis to consider is the reaction of management researchers and practitioners to the constraints placed, in the last decades of the new millennium, on developing a new path of theoretical and practical research on the industrial development. It has been argued that two powerful counteractions have been triggered, geared toward maintaining and preserving the existing doctrine and directing researchers' careers with the well-known mechanism of incentives and penalties<sup>19</sup>. This induced the Italian researchers and the practitioners who want to innovate and intervene in the managerial policies of organisations to explore alternative paths producing, on the one hand, an eclecticism of approaches and themes and, on the other hand, unrealistic proposals on management development, with a behaviour that can be classified as *velleitarismo*.

In this way, the Italian Business Management proceeded with an abandon of promising developments of industry and innovative positions in applied research. The cases of the Atomic Energy (ENEA), of the Computer Science<sup>20</sup> (Olivetti), of the Steel Plants (ILVA), of the Aerospace industry (Centro Ricerca San Marco) and of the Industrial Chemistry (Enichem, SIR and Montedison) remark the downward spiral of the industry in Italy.

In most of these cases, failure of the top governance and of the strategic management can be detected, both involved in the turmoil that overwhelmed these major organisations and in the inability to find an adequate strategy to react to the weakening of big industry.

Some might argue that the ban on nuclear energy in Italy, the country where young researchers from the Institute of Physics in Via Panisperna implemented the first controlled nuclear reaction, or the bankruptcy of the chemical sector buried by scandals linked to alleged corruption, after the international success of Enrico Natta's Polypropylene Moplen or the missed opportunity of the common rail by Fiat, all these and others failures occurred outside the management context.

However, this is not completely true. In that period when the Ministry of Economic Planning and the CNEL (The National Economic and Labour Council), indicated as examples of farsightedness in the government of public affairs, and survived to the aura of the so-called Italian "*miracolo economico*", the strategic management of industry and government were definitively lost.

Olivetti was lost, whose community ethos was at least ignored if not mocked. Broglio, the visionary promoter of the San Marco Platform for aerospace activities, was put under investigation for low-level issues. Roul Gardini was annihilated by the rising tide of "mani pulite". Facing these crises none of the State Servants, or of Grand Commis who in other countries, despite scandals and political conflicts, supported the independency and the development of the

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<sup>19</sup>Tourish (2019).

<sup>20</sup>The prototype ELEA 9003: (Machine 1T), in 1959 was designed entirely in discrete (diode-transistor logic), and after the previous year's announcement of the IBM 7070 transistor computer, was the first fully transistorised commercially used in concrete companies.

national industry, no one was able, in Italy, to direct the intervention of the State in favor of strategies essential for the creation of a robust industrial structure, and to protect and enhance these great initiatives.

The “*miracolo economico*” became a dream that dazzled everyone's mind. In the years to come, however, things were different: the numbers, within a few years, vanished everywhere. In the 1980s and 1990s, these and other initiatives to achieve and maintain a stable and structured industrial sector in Italy, were aborted before they were born.

Consider the definition of strategic planning, one of the tools promoted in the hyper-competitive environment, for the governance of large companies.

For these organisations, which in other countries were considered the visible hand of big businesses and of the managerial revolution<sup>21</sup>, it was difficult to survive, grow, and expand in the long term if they do not have strategic planning. Strategic planning is an activity that determines goals and considers the internal and external environment in order to design, implement, analyse, and adjust strategies, with the aim of gaining a competitive advantage but, above all, to impose one's vision, on an environment whose consensus is necessary to thrive.

In Italy, this strategic planning, after attempts to include it in the National Government Policies with the Ministry of Economic Planning created in 1947 and abolished in 1997, then aggregated with the Ministry of Finance and Budget and finally suppressed in 2001, has been considered at least unrealistic and classified as an expression of *velleitarismo*.

Parallel to this process the rise of eclecticism in Italian Management Studies<sup>22</sup> should be considered. On the one hand, there have been difficulties in the insertion of Business Management (*Organizzazione Aziendale*) in academic studies of Business Economics and of Business Engineering (*Ingegneria Gestionale*) in the Faculties of Engineering<sup>23</sup>. On the other hand, the basic structure of the Italian economy, founded on Small and Medium Enterprises, interpreted by most as an anthropological phenomenon, has produced a sceptical attitude, partially overcome only in recent times, towards Business Management.

This has contributed, in Italian management researchers to a tendency to develop their studies towards eclecticism seen as overcoming of multidisciplinary from which theory and practice of organisations started. The eclectic attitude, considered in other contexts a reason for survival, at least scientifically, has merged with unrealistic theories. In this way the importance of the function performed by politics and academic power was recognised, admitting that there is a role played by contingencies not only in the process of innovation, but also in the one of knowledge development<sup>24</sup>.

Considering the role of business schools in this evolutionary trend allows the Italian case to be linked to the international perspective.

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<sup>21</sup>Chandler, Jr. (1977).

<sup>22</sup>Bianchi (2023).

<sup>23</sup>Baldissera (1996).

<sup>24</sup>Tomo & Mercurio (2012).



## The Critical Management Studies and the Failure of Business Schools

Criticism on management and organisational science began at the end of last century with Critical Management Studies and the raise of post modernism<sup>25</sup>. Scholars have declined this theme from different perspectives.

With unquestionable courage, Bennis and O'Toole<sup>26</sup> in 2005 denounced in the Harvard Business Review what Business School graduates had been experiencing for some time, namely the inadequacy of their preparation and the discontent of their employers with the performance expected from them. Mintzberg pointed the inadequacy of MBA programs as the culprit, but also the to the result of a lack of reform at the root of which should be the conception of Business Management as a profession and not as a doctrine along with the needs for a rebalance between scientific rigor and practical relevance. In this sense the theme of previous critical analyses, already advanced, when North American theories of management began to be introduced in Italy, and concerning the relationship between theory and practice in Business Organisation, returns<sup>27</sup>.

It should be underlined that Bennis and O'Toole recommended teacher training on practice and a more widespread orientation of teaching towards learning by doing.

The undisputed theme of the ambiguities of the earlier introduction of management sciences in Italy stems from the initial source of managerial knowledge traditionally linked to the publication of the Papers on the Science of Administration and later confirmed by Simon's Administrative Behaviour, both introduced in Italy in 1960s.

In these books the term "administration" referred to Business Management as a whole and confirmed by the publication of a Behavioural Theory of the Firm by Cyert and March (1963), which was considered a culmination of the new intellectual directions in the study of organisations after Administrative Behaviour by Herbert Simon's (1947)<sup>28</sup>.

his new approach helped in Italy to overcome the mistrust that had matured since the first introduction of the Taylor's Scientific Management, which began during the First World War and was subsequently strengthened by its convinced acceptance and promotion by fascist ideology.

Also in Italy, the initial uncertainty about the acceptance in Economic studies of the Business Management (Organizzazione Aziendale) was almost partially solved during the conference of AIDEA, Accademia di Economia Aziendale (Italian Academy of Business Economics) of 1982<sup>29</sup> in which the introduction of the "Organizzazione Aziendale" was made officially.

The dual approach to Italian doctrine between Management and Administration was not so negligible because, on the one hand, it highlighted the

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<sup>25</sup>Deetz (1995).

<sup>26</sup>Bennis & O'Toole (2005).

<sup>27</sup>Bianchi (1976).

<sup>28</sup>Cohen (2007).

<sup>29</sup>AA.VV. (1983).

administrative side of the organisation mainly oriented to office activities and, on the other hand, it restricted the field of research on the material organisation to the Production Area, considering the main tripartite distinction into Administrative, Commercial and Production functions that characterises the most widespread organisational structures.

Although these methodological observations, summarising the features of research that can be included in the *velleitarismo* positions, most of them can be listed as follow:

- The use of Multi, Inter, Cross and Transdisciplinary approaches only partially included in a coherent analytical model<sup>30</sup>.
- The use of new terms non completely defined as Emergy<sup>31</sup> and on the run of previous experiences like the very known Pareto's *Ofelimità*<sup>32</sup> and Entropy introduced in Economics, after its first use in thermodynamics<sup>33</sup>.
- Incoherent performance indexes
- Contradictory indications concerning the same subject, such as "Narrowly tailored – Broadly Taylored"<sup>34</sup>.

### Contrasting and Preventing

Assessing the relevance of *velleitarismo* in business sciences raises the problem of the measuring of this influence.

Considering the *velleitarism* as a managerial category in organisational control, we included both in the field of performances indexes and recognised as Inadequacy or, at the other side, as an unsatisfactory relationship between Efficacy and Efficiency according to the demonstrated relationship.

In the failure of Control Systems, the role of Efficacy and Efficiency has been analysed. On the side of the Efficacy, it has been recognised that when "I am an industry with excess capacity, managers fail to recognise that they themselves must downsize; instead, they leave the exit to others while they continue to invest."<sup>35</sup>

At the other hand there is the Efficiency of Controls, decreases dramatically with the surge of the frequency of control identified as Control Span, a concept referred in ISO Norms, that is the number of controls performed in a period. In this way we can distinguish the standard frequency from forced frequency, which is used according to the risk of errors and misalignments, but mainly related to the significance of the negative event that may result.

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<sup>30</sup>Renn (2021).

<sup>31</sup>Combination of *Embodiment* and *Energy*. Seth (2024).

<sup>32</sup>Introduced by Vilfredo Pareto instead of Utility as, in his opinion, better representing the individual satisfaction. Cfr. Pareto (1964).

<sup>33</sup>Maggi (1958).

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Jensen (1993).



In this sense the increasing the Control frequency causes an increase in control costs, but can also reduce its effectiveness. A related concept is the Time Span of Control which measures the maximum period between two successive controls on which the characteristic activity of a position is based<sup>36</sup>.

According to Jaques and Brown, by the exceeding this duration, referred to as the Time Span, the supervisor is assured that the subordinate is operating outside its own competencies<sup>37</sup>. This type of control is directly related with the Control Span as an optimal Gaussian distribution that gravitates around the optimal size of the control frequency coordinated with the Span of Control that is the number of subordinates submitted to a single hierarchical superior<sup>38</sup>.

An inconsistency between different Control Spans of control systems will condition the fall of industrialisation in Italy along with the inadequacy of managerial theories and practices in preventing and countering this inauspicious trend. This perspective, punctually analysed by Caffè in his critique of the Welfare State<sup>39</sup>, attributed to a formal rigor of façade that hides the analytical impoverishment already denounced in his time by Bartoli<sup>40</sup> and recently taken up in Mintzberg's critique of the prevailing management<sup>41</sup>, may constitute a reason for broadening the crisis of industrialism in a global dimension.

### **Italy, Europe and the Global Economy**

At the end of this analysis on the problems of industry and management in Italy, it is worth addressing the problem of deindustrialisation for the western world, evoked by some observers until the beginning of this century<sup>42</sup>.

Significant, in this regard, is the perspective adopted by Linkon<sup>43</sup> in which the concept of the half-life of radioactive isotopes is taken as a metaphor for the decreasing importance of the industrial sector in advanced countries, revealing once more the centrality of time in the analysis of this phenomenon and as a dimension capable of uniting the economic and the managerial approach. At the same time, it confirms the eclecticism that this metaphor reveals<sup>44</sup>.

The issue is related to the repositioning of countries within the world economic system with the growth of the BRICS and the Pacific area countries. The conflicts that have emerged in recent years, rising energy prices and logistical difficulties are just a few aspects. But there are also aspects of the so-called de-industrial revolution and changes in the role assigned to people at work with the "implacable

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<sup>36</sup>Jaques & Brown (1967).

<sup>37</sup>Jaques (1964).

<sup>38</sup>Urwick (1974).

<sup>39</sup>Ramazzotti (2014).

<sup>40</sup>Bartoli (1967) at 222-224.

<sup>41</sup>Mintzberg. (1990).

<sup>42</sup>Alderson (1999).

<sup>43</sup>Linkon (2018),

<sup>44</sup>We can also underline the characteristic eclecticism that this metaphor implies.

devaluation imposed by the present and by the rhetoric of meritocracy"<sup>45</sup>. These are managerial aspects such as those proposed by Mintzberg in his critique of the business management approach and those already advanced by Critical Management Studies.

In any case, when the issue of responsible management and deindustrialisation with its effects was raised, and those related to the growth of the service economy, this trend was pointed out as an opportunity to increase the welfare of society although this link was not completely shared by scholars<sup>46</sup>.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the conclusion of this analysis may be that the diffusion of the eclecticism in the managerial sciences can be linked to the *velleitarismo* as the concept of unrealistic or wishful thinking proposed by Gramsci and Caffè can be translated<sup>47</sup>.

Furthermore, this occurred in conjunction with the decline of industrialisation in developed countries, where managerial sciences were, at least until now, particularly cultivated. This orientation of studies manifested itself with the development of an eclecticism linked to a poly-disciplinary approach that can be interpreted, in turn, as a reaction to the doctrinal limits placed by Economic and Management theory on understanding current turbulent situations.

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<sup>45</sup>Zazzara & Garruccio (2018).

<sup>46</sup>Caffè (2021).

<sup>47</sup>To this purpose Poettinger points up a citation of Caffè "l'eclettismo, oggi, più che una scelta è una necessità" (*Eclecticism, today, is more of a necessity than a choice*) p.5, n.22 in Poettinger (2014) Federico Caffè e la diffusione del pensiero economico, Università Luigi Bocconi, Working Paper from Federico Caffè, Scritti Quotidiani, Roma, Il Manifesto, 2007, p.105,

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