



Working Paper no. **157**

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December, 2017

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Abstract. The standard economics view suggests that steps to improve a country's competitiveness include a general emphasis on deregulation and decentralization of industrial relations. In this paper, we contribute to this debate by studying how firm-level collective agreements affect workplace training, a key ingredient to competitiveness. Theoretically, firm-level bargaining may affect workplace training in many ways, but quantitative analysis is usually ill equipped to provide an adequate account of them. This is where our paper mostly contributes. In the spirit of opening the “black box” of firm-level bargaining, we mix together quantitative and qualitative strategies. Following a sequential research design, our results suggest that decentralized collective agreements favor workplace training inasmuch as they grant to employers the access to dedicated financing schemes.

JEL: J24, J52

Keywords: workplace training, industrial relations, firm-level bargaining, Italy

¹ We thank the participants to the workshop on “*Skill mismatch: measurement issues and consequences for innovative and inclusive societies*” (Torino, June 2017), to the conference on “*Reassessment and Perspectives of Labor Policies*” (Roma, December 2017) and to the seminars held at LISER (Esch-sur-Alzette, November 2017) and at the Department of Economics and Statistics of the University of Torino (December 2017) for helpful comments and suggestions. The University of Torino and Compagnia di San Paolo Bank Foundation with projects “*Skill mismatch: measurement issues and consequences for innovative and inclusive societies*” and “*Productivity, welfare and decentralization*” are kindly acknowledged for financial support. We also thank the National Institute for Public Policy Analysis INAPP for data support. The usual disclaimers apply. Corresponding author: Fabio Berton (fabio.berton@unito.it).

1. Introduction

Intangible assets such as human capital and industrial relations are important sources of economic growth. Knowledge supports long-run competitiveness, and a significant part of the whole stock of skills and experience is acquired from vocational or on-the-job training. Workplace training, in turn, is often a matter regulated under collective agreements, both at the national and at the firm level. Moreover, the standard economics view – adopted by many international institutions that are deeply influential on national economic policies, including the OECD (2015), the IMF and the EU – argues that industrial relations and collective bargaining processes affect efficiency and competitiveness also directly, with a general take in favor of deregulation and decentralization.

In this paper we aim at contributing to this debate by studying how firm-level collective agreements affect workplace training decisions in a country – Italy – that, starting in the 1990s, has progressively shifted the collective bargaining process from the central/sectoral level, to the local/firm one, arriving in 2011 to introduce a law that allows firm-level decisions to opt out of national laws and of collective agreements. Firm-level bargaining may affect workplace training in many ways. First, unions and workers' representatives may provide valuable information on skill gaps and mismatches and on adequate interventions (the so-called “collective voice face”: Freeman and Medoff, 1984; McGuinness and Ortiz, 2016). Second, they may promote long-term employment relationships (Estevez-Abe et al., 2001; Busemayer and Trampusch, 2012) and bolster the integrity of internal labor markets (Harcourt and Wood, 2007), creating incentives for long-run human capital investments (Acemoglu and Pischke, 1999; Lazear, 2009). Third, the payment of wage bonuses – typically regulated by firm-level agreements – may be an incentive device to promote efficiency in the production process and to fix suboptimal investments in human capital (Katz and Ziderman, 1990; Leuven, 2005). Fourth, firm-level agreements may contain wage pressures (the “monopoly face”), refrain from opportunistic behaviors (the “hold-up” problem) and other actions to limit workplace flexibility (Card et al., 2014; Devicienti et al., 2017; Green and Heywood, 2011), ultimately freeing resources to “invest into the future”. Economic theory has indeed shown that training provided at the company level encourages workers and firms to bargain over the expected returns of firm-

specific skills accumulation (Hashimoto, 1981). When transaction costs make costly renegotiations, the training firm has to prevent that the worker quits after training, because the investment, which is only of value within the match, would be lost. In such a case, Hashimoto (1981) shows that the worker and the firm may maximize the joint surplus from their match sharing benefits and costs of training. As stated by Parent (2004: 38), “by writing a contract in which it is specified that workers get a certain percentage of profits, workers can feel more confident that they will not be held up ex post”.

While these causal chains are usually in place, quantitative analysis is usually ill-equipped to provide an adequate account of them, and related evidence is correspondingly rather scarce (see Bloom and Van Reenen, 2011). The limitation is in data availability. At best, indeed, quantitatively treatable data sources are informative on whether a firm-based agreement is in place or not. While this may be enough to ascertain that a causal link between local bargaining processes and workplace training exists, it is powerless with respect to the identification of the actual mechanisms. This is where our paper mostly contributes to the literature. In the spirit of opening the “black box” of firm-level bargaining, we mix together quantitative and qualitative strategies. Following Johnson et al. (2007: 123), “*mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration*”. More specifically, we apply a *sequential research design*: first, the application of state-of-the-art econometric techniques to a large representative sample of Italian companies surveyed over time through an extremely detailed questionnaire, suggests that the existence of a firm-based collective agreement enhances the probability that a worker receives workplace training and makes the per-worker and per-trainee cost of training grow. Second, thematic qualitative analysis of twenty-one semi-structured interviews to key informants of industrial relations, training programs and hiring strategies, allows us to identify three dimensions of the relationship between collective bargaining and skill formation: the (continuing) within-firm vocational training (CVT); the analysis on skill needs within firm; re-training in case of firm crisis. The joint reading of quantitative and qualitative results gives five working hypotheses: (i) firm-level agreements have a

positive effect on training; (ii) the hold-up story, if any, plays a minor role; (iii) similarly, the collective voice face interpretation can be disregarded, while (iv) the idea that unions support employment protection finds some support. Moreover, (v) the empirical analysis suggests another potential channel, i.e. local-level agreements favor workplace training by providing the employer with dedicated sources of financing. Only this last channels survives the sequential design of our approach.

Our paper proceeds as follows: in section two we provide the reader with a short account of the evolution of the rules governing industrial relations in Italy, with a focus on the progressive power shift from the national to the local (firm) level. In section three, we describe the data and our twofold empirical strategy. Section four comments the results, while section five goes deeper into the interpretation issues. Section six provides some concluding remarks.

2. Institutional background

For the purposes of our research, Italy stands out as a learning example of increasing decentralization of collective bargaining processes. Until the early nineties, Italy was a prominent case of strictly centralized – at the national and sectoral level – system of industrial relations. Aiming at fulfilling the Maastricht’s targets to enter the Euro zone, in 1993 the government and the social partners signed an agreement – known as the *1993 protocol* – that introduced decentralized bargaining, at both the local and the firm levels. More specifically, the centralized bargaining level was given an *inflation* target, as wage growth was bounded from above by *planned* rather than *actual* price growth. At the same time decentralized bargaining was introduced as the device to manage performance pay, i.e. to allow wage growth supported by *productivity* growth. At this initial stage, adjustments at the local or firm level could only enhance the wage and employment conditions set up at the national level.

Since then some major changes were introduced. The first one occurred in 2007, when Law 247 ruled that performance pays were subject to a (much) lower tax rate. This created an incentive for workers to push for a decentralized bargaining level in order to

take advantage of the more favorable tax rate; as a consequence, during the following years, the social partners signed a number of agreements that favored the shift of productivity policies from the national to the firm and the local level. The deepest change occurred however a few years later, and namely in 2011, when Law 148 – at its article 8 – ruled that firm- and local-level collective agreements could derogate *in peius* to both the labor law and the national collective contracts. In the political and economic turmoil following the sovereign debt crisis, Law 148/2011 was conceived by the Berlusconi government as an attempt to fulfill the request of major labor market reforms – and more precisely of a harsh reduction of the Italian employment protection legislation – included in the well-known letter to Italy signed by the incumbent and prospective governors of the European Central Bank (Draghi and Trichet, 2011). While Law 148/2011 was deemed insufficient to that purpose (Sacchi, 2015), it nonetheless introduced in Italy the actual possibility for employers to opt out from (national) collective agreements. As a final step in this twenty-year trajectory, it is worth mentioning that in 2013, performance pay policies have been entirely moved to the decentralized level. Not surprisingly, as our qualitative analysis will suggest, this is now a major driver of firm-level agreements.

3. Data and empirical strategy

Our quantitative empirical analysis is based on the information provided by the Employer and Employee Survey (RIL) conducted by INAPP, the Italian National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies. RIL is a nationally representative survey of partnerships and limited liability companies of any size operating in the non-agricultural private sector. It has a panel structure, with waves occurring every four or five years. For our present purposes, we use the last two waves, i.e. those conducted in 2011 and 2015.² RIL collects a rich set of information about personnel organization, industrial relations and other workplace characteristics. Mostly relevant to our purposes, the survey provides data on whether the firm has signed a specific agreement with internal union representatives, and on whether it opted out from sectoral collective bargaining or the national laws, by taking

² Answers refer to the previous year, hence to 2010 and 2014 respectively.

advantage of the opportunities introduced by Law 148/08 (see section two). Moreover, RIL includes extremely accurate measures of workplace training, ranging from the share of trainees on total employment to the cost of training and its funding source (whether internal or not). Eventually, we also have information on other firm personnel policies (such as the use of fixed-term contracts, and the educational and age structure of the workforce), as well as on its productive specialization and business strategies (e.g. innovation policies and export activities).

For a number of reasons, we focus our attention on firms with ten employees or more. Through this selection criterion, we seek to exclude self-employment (the rate of which in Italy is the highest in Europe) and firms whose employees are the owner's household's members. In addition, we expect this threshold to exclude firms with much unstructured recruitment and training policies. In order to drop outliers from the sample, we eventually exclude the top 0.5% of firms in terms of per-employee training expenditure. The resulting sample size is close to 4,000 firms, observed twice over our survey rounds.

On such sample, we apply two distinct estimation strategies. The first one, that can be considered a baseline, is a standard pooled OLS specification of the following type:

$$Y_{jt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FLA_{jt} + \beta_2 X_{jt} + \varepsilon_{jt} \quad (1)$$

where j is the firm, $t = \{2011, 2015\}$ is the survey wave, Y stands for one of our five training measures – i.e. i) whether or not the firm is undergoing any training initiative at time t , ii) the share of trainees on firm's total workforce, iii) whether the cost of training is funded by the firm, iv) (the log of) per-employee training cost and v) (the log of) per-trainee training cost – FLA is a dummy taking the value of one if j is enforcing a firm-level agreement at time t and represents our variable of interest, and X is a set of (potentially time-varying) controls including workforce composition (share of women, of blue-collar workers, of temporary contracts, of young workers, of workers with a tertiary degree and of those with a secondary one), firm's characteristics (manager's or owner's educational attainment, whether the firm is a family-owned one, sales per capital, whether the firm sells at least part of its output abroad, net worker turnover, firm's age, size and sector of activity), regional and year fixed effects. The condition for the unbiased identification of the causal

effect β_1 is that the idiosyncratic component ε_{jt} is orthogonal to FLA_{jt} , conditional on X_{jt} . In order to make this identification condition less binding, we take advantage of the panel structure of the data to estimate a firm fixed-effect (FE) model of the following type:

$$Y_{jt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FLA_{jt} + \beta_2 X_{jt} + \mu_j + e_{jt} \quad (2)$$

where μ_j captures a firm's unobserved time-invariant characteristics (e.g., quality of the management and firm culture) that might correlate to both training activities and the propensity to sign a firm-level collective agreement. The condition for identification is in this case less binding, and boils down to the (conditional) orthogonality of e_{jt} to FLA_{jt} . Table 1 provides some descriptive evidence: while we observe a rather stable share of firms with a decentralized agreement – growing from 9.6% to 10% – all the measures of training intensity, with the exception of per-trainee expenditure, exhibit a more clear-cut increasing path. Namely, total expenditure grows from around €4,500 to more than €6,200 (+38%), while per-employee expenditure from €98.5 to €123.3 (+25%) and the share of trainees passes from 23% to 39%. This seems to suggest that no relationship exists between training and decentralized bargaining. Our analyses, however, show that this is not the case.

In spite of the quality of the data, the resulting quantitative evidence has very little potential in terms of explanatory capacity. In other words, at best, we would know whether there is a causal relationship moving from firm-level bargaining to workplace training activities, with very limited knowledge on the actual processes and mechanisms linking the two. This is why, in order to explain the quantitative findings and to go into more detail in understanding the relationship between training, skill accumulation and recruitment policies on the one hand, and firm-level collective bargaining on the other, we have adopted a sequential explanatory research design. Precisely, we have run twenty-one semi-structured interviews with key informants operating in the secondary and tertiary sectors of a large Italian region, namely Veneto.³ The list of interviewees includes: seven union representatives from the three largest trade unions in Italy actively involved in decentralized collective bargaining; two representatives of the Italian employers'

³ See Berton et al. (forthcoming) for a discussion about the external validity of Veneto.

federation, who are actively involved in decentralized collective bargaining; five human resource managers from companies with best practices in terms of training policy and industrial relations and where i) there is decentralized collective bargaining ii) there is a well-defined personnel selection policy; three experts on skill mismatch and training; one person in charge of a private employment agency and one person in charge of a public employment center; one person in charge of a bilateral body which provides continuing vocational training in the tertiary sector; one worker in charge of the training within her company.⁴

The resulting interviews underwent a thematic qualitative analysis (Nowell et al., 2017), fit for the purpose of integrating quantitative results (Boyatzis, 1998) and identifying the existing patterns. All the interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed with the software for textual analysis Atlas.ti. In a first stage, we used the interview questions to guide our analysis and outline a list of themes that made the analysis more targeted. Interviews were carried out starting from the following grid of questions, the comprehensiveness of which was designed in order to leave the largest freedom of discussion to the interviewees:

- Is skills mismatch an object of discussion in your profession, both considering the analysis of skills gaps and the organization of (continuing) vocational training?
- Is in your experience firm-level collective bargaining a tool to intervene in skills formation?
- Which are the actual processes and problems?

However, since by using a predetermined thematic framework one loses in flexibility of analysis, and this can bias and limit the interpretation of the results, the list of themes of our qualitative analysis has been partly and inductively integrated in order to return the wealth of data and answer our research questions more in depth. Moreover, in a third step of our overall approach, we go back to quantitative data in order to check whether (some of) the results emerging from the joint reading of econometric estimates and of our interviews to key informants.

⁴ Interviews have been collected under the framing provided by the project on *Skill mismatch: measurement issues and consequences for innovative and inclusive societies* with the more general purpose of understanding how the interaction of social partners affects recruitment policies and skills formation. For the purposes of the present research, we extrapolated the arguments most related to training.

4. Empirical results

4.1 Quantitative analysis

Table 2 displays the estimation results from models (1) and (2). They unambiguously suggest that where a local-level agreement is in force, the probability that workers undergo workplace training is higher. This also mirrors into higher average training expenditure – both if computed as per-employee and per-trainee cost – but not into a deeper funding involvement of the firms. This is easily explained by the existence of other funding sources. As we will prove in the following, a major role is in this case played by the so-called *fondi interprofessionali*, i.e. by funds bilaterally managed by employers’ associations and trade unions. The access to such funds to finance workplace training requires an agreement with workers’ representatives. It is hence not surprising that the existence of a firm-level collective agreement eases the access to external funds for training, hence allowing the firms to keep internal funds untouched in spite of the higher amount of training provided. Our qualitative analysis will provide further support to this view.

The estimated effect of firm-level bargaining is positive also on the share of workforce undergoing training, but does not survive to a control for firm fixed effects. This apparent puzzle may be explained in terms of *training deepening*: the implication of a firm-level agreement is not that firms train *more workers*, but that they *train more* the workers that would have undergone training anyway. Eventually, another quantitative result that is worth noting, is that the magnitude of FE estimates is generally lower than the one from pooled OLS. This means that firms’ unobserved fixed effects – e.g. firm culture, managerial type – are positively correlated to both the existence of a firm-based collective agreement, and to the company’s propensity to train workers. In other words, there probably exist a “type” of management that favors workplace training and with which is easier to sign a collective agreement. This view as well finds support in our interviews.

4.2 Qualitative analysis

The interview data shed light on the relationship between firm-based agreements and workplace training. According to the data, in order to understand the actual mechanisms of this relationship, the process of skill formation needs to be disentangled in three stages: the (continuing) within-firm vocational training; the analysis on skill needs within the firm; the re-training in the case of plant closure or corporate restructuring. We found that specific groups of key informants tend to stress one dimension rather than another of the skill formation, depending on how central their role is in that stage. Specifically, the first stage is discussed both by employers' and workers' representatives, the second one is much more stressed by companies' human resource managers and employers' representatives, while the last one is more stressed by workers' representatives.

For the sake of readability, we organize our qualitative results in *claims* that we then discuss by quoting some of the original and most representative sentences from the interviews.⁵

Claim 1. Continuing vocational training within the company: the support of bilateral funds and the goal of negotiations for trade union.

According to the respondents, although the theme of continuing vocational training within the company is discussed more often now than in the past and is seen more as more important now than in the past, collective bargaining is not the most effective channel that workers' representatives and employers' representatives use to deal with the skill needs / mismatch issue. The first reason is that the main determinant seems to be the management, meaning how important employees' continuing vocational training is to the management. As an expert told us:

⁵ The interview take-outs are labelled *TO-##*, where *##* is a progressive number. In the main text we provide a translation of the original quotes in Italian, which are in turn listed in Annex A.

[TO-1] *“I would say that this happens where the entrepreneur is “enlightened”; the drive comes more from them than from the unions. And, at the end of the day, this is understandable: you’re like at their own place. As long as it is a value that the entrepreneur already holds and s/he is a wise person, then you take that way, and you manage to go through this pattern.”* (Expert on skill mismatch and training)

Similarly, employers' and workers' representatives say that *«healthy companies»* do training, and do it regardless of whether this is the subject of second-level collective bargaining:

[TO-2] *“There are companies around with a sense for this, and that invest a lot in training beyond what is strictly compulsory, beyond the availability of third-party funds. They care a lot about internal resources and keep them up to date. And this becomes a value added for some of these companies. Some training programs belong to a company’s policy irrespective of collective bargaining.”* (Union representative)

[TO-3] *“Then you find companies, multinational corporations typically, with very advanced training policies that are carried over irrespective of unions and agreements. They simply do it, full stop. Maybe those policies are really advanced, efficient, productive and performance-improving, but they are managed without unions, without agreements, without bargaining over them.”* (Union representative)

[TO-4] *“Companies do training in any case; maybe in some periods it is not easy, but they do it anyway. Investing in people, skills and knowledge is important. Unions are not as sensitive to training. I’m not saying this because I work for employers, because training matters to employers. I mean: either you have workers who think – on top of carrying out their everyday duties – or you do not go anywhere. Having able, skilled and well-motivated workers is a need, otherwise firms simply do not survive.”* (Employers’ representative)

The second reason why collective bargaining is not the most effective channel to deal with the skill needs / mismatch issue lies in what workers' representatives and employers' representatives mean for collective bargaining. Respondents, indeed,

understand the last as a process of negotiation, which involves a trade-off for both sides, whereas the issue of continuing vocational training is not really negotiated by the social partners.

[TO-5] “[Training] *is not something that unions can bargain over, or raise the firm’s attentions upon. What do they trade for training?*” (Employers’ representative)

[TO-6] “*It’s not really bargaining, where there’s pure trade. I mean...when we talk of bargaining, we have in mind the one that occurs every three, four years or what it has to be. There are requests, a discussion and an output which is the contract.*” (Employers’ representative)

[TO-7] “*Usually unions say ‘yes’ because making a war over training is making a stupid war.*” (Union representative)

The necessity to fill a skill gap or a shortage of training generally is not a sufficient reason to initiate a second level collective bargaining. [TO-8] “*I have no idea of agreements exclusively dedicated to training*” told us a workers' representative. Similarly, an employers' representative said: [TO-9] “*I cannot remember of any example. It is not the right channel. Maybe because [training] is not an issue discussed in those circumstances*”. The main reasons to initiate a second level collective agreement are wage and working time. Here the answer is clear and unanimous. The mechanism is the following: at the beginning, there are complex claims with various themes and very long discussions with the consequence that the top issues are the most debated (wages and working hours) and other topics, including training, are overlooked. This is especially true if it is the first agreement between the partners involved. If the agreement is renewed, then it may be that, in addition to wages and work organization, the agreement tackles the theme of (continuing) vocational training within the company.

[TO-10] “*We usually do comprehensive agreements: at some point we deem that the overall conditions are ready to make our claims over several dimensions, including – among them*

– the time-schedule, the pay scheme, the skills, training, educational rights, the wage, and the like...also health and safety. We make complex and comprehensive agreements, and indeed discussions last quite a lot. It is not really productive, as discussing of so many things is at risk of forgetting something, and this one [training] is among them: when bargaining is prolonged, it loses relevance. In some cases, we chose to stop and go. But, generally speaking, is the willingness to bargain over a comprehensive agreement what brings the discussion on training. Training is not the leading reason. Usually, what brings a company to second-level bargaining is either the time-schedules or performance pay. All the remaining issues follow. When agreements are extended or renewed, then one is also able to go into details. Because if our system of performance pay works, if our agreement on time-schedules works and the company does not have any particular need, then we can focus on the other issues in the next bargaining round. But it is not the driving force.”
(Union representative)

On the contrary, bilateral funds (the *fondi interprofessionali* mentioned above) turn out to be a major support for training within the company.⁶ They became more prevalent across Europe as a response to the co-financing issue among all stakeholders, introduced by the Copenhagen resolution. This institutional *manoeuvre* was introduced as an incentive tool in countries, such as Italy, with little traditions in CVT (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009). In particular, respondents refer to *Fondimpresa* (a big bilateral fund for CVT for the companies). It is constituted by the Italian employers' federation and the three largest trade unions in Italy (Cgil, Cisl, Uil). It funds training courses for workers in the companies which subscribed into to the fund. The companies contribute with 0.3% of paid wages. What the analysis shows is that the unions have little control over how these funds work: the company needs the signature of the union but they generally become aware of the training course only at the last moment. The unions provide only the post-training function of monitoring. In particular, they monitor the actual delivery of courses, the level of satisfaction of the workers who participated, and the level of understanding of the importance of CVT by workers, i.e. the importance of human capital and employability.

⁶ In Italy, they exist since the 2000s.

Trade unions are not involved in the content of vocational development, which is instead managed through bilateral funds mainly because they do not have the needed competences.

[TO-11] *“Yes, companies manage the bilateral funds, and we are involved inasmuch as we need to sign. Full stop.”* (Union representative)

[TO-12] *“We ask for more time. Even if, to tell you the truth, any intervention gets really complicated, and, as trade unions, we simply ask to play some role in order to check how the training program has gone [...] as sometimes the discussion is about so technical issues that it is hard for us to judge. ‘We want to reinforce our UK market, let’s take an English course!’, ‘Fine!’, and I simply check with the trainees whether the course was useful to work with customers or not, in order to fine-tune the program. [...] We seldom intervene on training contents, as skills are very technical and company-specific, and firms should promote them in many ways, and therefore I just care about checking that training is given the right relevance and that it’s not happening the opposite, as we know of episodes in which firms organize training courses that make trainees say: ‘What a mess! It useless that we lose our time, it does not make sense!’. We worry about this as far as training is concerned, as we would like to reinforce the attitude for skill formation, but if participants’ experiences are negative, then the opposite happens, and people just say: ‘No way, I tried once and it was a total mess, I just lost time and I got bored’.”* (Union representative)

For the unions the goal of negotiations is their political participation from the beginning to the end in the decision-making process leading to the organization of the courses. It basically boils down to be informed and consulted.

[TO-13] *“We’d like to play a major role, but we hardly propose training plans, we are more for fine-tune those initiated by the companies, or to tell them: ‘Why don’t you involve us in due time?’, as they usually involve us the day before the call’s deadline, just because otherwise they lose funding”* (Union representative)

[TO-14] *“In the companies we work with, the employer decides upon the specific training program because s/he is advised in this way by the employers’ association. Then s/he comes*

to the unions and: 'Well, let's do it this way', and we reply: 'Why didn't you tell us before, so that we could discuss and improve it?', but nine times in ten we end up accepting: 'OK, rather than miss it, let's do it your way'. [...] Therefore, whenever we are able to share the path, it's already a non-negligible step towards participation. [...] We are really convinced that without participation there is no serious way out from the crisis. [...] I believe that a key issue is to try – we are promoting this in companies of a certain kind, not in small ones, but in companies where there's a management of a certain kind, and union representatives are prepared enough to be involved – to do combined workplace training. Combined means that managers and workers are trained together.” (Union representative)

[TO-15] *“Skills formation, after the introduction of bilateral funds, has gained some more interest, but just in terms of the bargaining issue; in other words: 'don't do it by yourself, but share the process with local union representatives'. But no one ever told, for a given sum X that can be paid to workers: 'let's spend some in training! [...] Maybe now, with this new emphasis on new forms of welfare [...] it may happen, but I'll be able to tell you in three or four years, not now. At the moment, I see little attention.” (Employers' representative)*

On the contrary, according to employers' representatives, this is a unilateral issue to which only the management is entitled, due to tradition and to “objective” reasons as well. The objective reason is that the management knows business strategies; they know training needs; and they are often forced to work in a "crisis" mode, meaning that they have very limited time, and this does not allow room for collective and shared reflections - especially in SMEs.

[TO-16] *“Here is my training plan. As I have already paid my money for the bilateral funds, then I try to get it back and use it here. Such training plan is checked by local union representatives, and then signed. Can it go under collective bargaining? Yes and no. The unions may say: 'No, I think you're wrong, you should not take Russian classes, but Chinese classes.' But this usually does not happen, so in theory they [the unions] may*

intervene, but in practice they don't. [...] It is not really bargaining, there's a kind of validation." (Employers representative)

In companies that have been specified as examples of companies with best practices, the unions are involved as "political" partners because they are informed from the beginning to the end of the decision-making processes regarding the training courses. They are not involved in the development of the content of courses. However, occasionally, management recognizes that the trade unions happen to understand the training needs of workers, and they are able to be a bit involved in the content as well. However, the collective agreement on the training program financed by the fund does not fall in second-level bargaining.

[TO-17] *"It is not a specific agreement of the firm-level, as to us firm-level agreements include workers' pay, work organization and new working conditions, and the needs of such peculiar context..."* (Union representative)

[TO-18] *"Bargaining dynamics is made of someone who proposes, and somebody else that either suggests an alternative, or accepts, but this is not the point...the subject in charge of evaluating the proposal is the internal workers' representation, which is directly voted by the employees, while with collective bargaining, in nine out of ten cases – if not in 9.5 out of ten – there's always some external assistance. It's not a bargaining process as we usually mean it"* (Employers' representative)

[TO-19] *"Employers' and workers' representatives have good grounds with each other, they are here every day, all projects on bilateral funds, continuing vocational training, and the like, but what's actually in their words? There's signatures, not really something true...a real acknowledgement with respect to transformation's contents. Thus, one thing is saying 'We agree, let's do these things...' and another is to give contents to the dialogue. And so, as employers' representatives are late in the identification of the three pillars of the industrial revolution, so unions are late in suggesting what are the right skills formation policies"* (Expert on skill mismatch and training)

[TO-20] *“I’ve had a long period – now I realize it was an illusion – when I believed that funds were a part of the issues we are talking about, as 700 million Euros per year are managed by the social partners, and therefore also by us. We are in a position to decide together also about the contents, it is compulsory, as our signature is compulsory, but they’re always formal matters...”* (Expert on skill mismatch and training)

Claim 2. Analysis of skill gaps/needs within the company: different mechanisms between manufacturing and tertiary sectors

Why is it so difficult for trade unions to be involved from the beginning in the decision-making processes leading to the organization of training courses? According to the interviews, first of all, the difficulties are related to the union representation – generally – of the blue-collar workers: they usually do not understand the importance and usefulness of training, and they do not recognize their skill gaps, with the consequence that there is «resistance» from the workers.

[TO-21] *“There’s always another side of the story then: resistance from workers, when they say: ‘My company is asking me to do training, but if afterwards I do not get promoted, why are they making me do it?’ This is the thing. There’s resistance on the side of the workers. In other words, it means that training courses that are not aimed at a higher pay, then... On the contrary you may say: ‘Yes, that’s also an objective, but another one is to give you skills that are useful to retain your current job’. But this is not an easy message.”* (Union representative)

[TO-22] *“They are not uninterested, but less sensitive. The average worker – generally speaking – would like to do always his job without being demoted. Then one becomes sincere. Because, obviously, changing one’s occupation somehow generates...some disease, and so going back to a classroom or gather experience generates – how to say? – a kind of unease, because one feels – in particular with workers employed there since many*

years – to be evaluated again, to start all over again. ‘Maybe the youngsters should do it, why me?’” (Union representative)

We have also to take into account that blue-collar workers generally have to attend basic and compulsory courses, such as safety courses. Whereas white-collar and highly-skilled workers are likely to occupy positions closer to the management and thus can better transmit or share their perception of skill gaps with those who are in charge of the company. This suggests that information asymmetries in the skill dimensions, which may, in turn, lead to sub-optimal training investments, are more common within low-skilled organizations (McGuinness and Ortiz, 2016).

[TO-23] *“...but we should say that companies are more prone to make this kind of skills formation on the high levels, and not on blue-collar workers. For the blue-collars, they propose the compulsory courses, i.e. those on safety; while on the high levels it’s an issue they’d like to manage on their own, they do not like to talk about. That’s indeed the point: what we usually say on skills formation is: ‘If this time training is devoted to managers, next time it will be the other ones’ turn’. [...] Companies bet on those ones. And the discussion is: ‘let’s try to involve everyone, to prepare something that may be of interest to the ones we do represent the most’.” (Union representative)*

[TO-24] *“It is clear that unions – correctly, in my opinion – mostly focus on pays and safety. Soft skills are relevant, but just to some extent, also because they mostly work on the low levels, i.e. they are blue-collar workers. Already the white collars and the middle management are less close to unions.” (Person in charge of a private employment agency)*

A second difficulty for trade unions to be involved in the development of training courses is that employers' representatives believe that the issue is totally unilateral, and should not be part of negotiations. This is true whether they have support from bilateral funds or not.

[TO-25] *“I believe that unions have other priorities; from the companies’ standpoint – and I think this is correct – we think that we do not need to discuss with unions on skills needs, search or formation. It’s a traditionally unilateral policy: I have a need, I do identify it, make a plan and carry it out [...]. On top of being a company’s management’s prerogative, things simply work this way: there’s an issue of timing [...]. There’s never been another partner involved.”* (Employers’ representative)

[TO-26] *“Companies’ duty is caring about resources, human resources in particular. It’s a company’s prerogative, it’s not in the bargaining space. This is in our experience. [...] The generating moment is all on the company’s side. When the need emerges, as I was saying, 99.5% of times there’s already an agreement between the company – that is in need of retraining the workers – and the unions, that say: ‘Fine, so that workers will be more employable!’. Then maybe someone does not understand, but s/he’s out of bargaining. [...] The company prepares the technology, the raw materials, the markets, tries to understand and prepare the human resources, and it has always been a company’s matter. I mean, there’s no time to wait or discuss of this, but it is not because one refuses discussion, it’s because one needs to do it earlier. [...] The day we buy an accounting software, we are already late with training. [...] It is in everybody’s experience that work organization stays on this side.”* (Employers’ representative)

In case of skill gaps or skill needs, a third point to consider is that it is up to the management to choose whether to use an internal channel of skill development or an external channel of personnel recruitment.

[TO-27] *Interviewer: “Do unions enter in the choice between the two channels?” Interviewee: “No, it’s a company’s choice.” Interviewer: “And even if the company goes for the internal channel, is again the company who decides about skills formation?” Interviewee: “Yes, definitely. The company has to determine its own work organization and the development of its resources.”* (HR manager of a company with best practices)

[TO-28] *“The other thing is that training a worker is not a matter for bargaining with unions, because there’s a picture of roles necessary to the production process. The company decides about professional roles and then makes the union know about them.”* (HR manager of a company with best practices)

[TO-29] *“Companies are really protective of their own, in Veneto in particular. The company decides. If they share, they do it up to some extent, but it’s the employer who decides what the employees need, and they simply make the unions know about it. The workers need this and that, I plan and let you know. And we simply acknowledge and accept.”* (Union representative)

As we read, the union essentially has no power to intervene in this choice: it must merely accept the decision made by the firm, although it is always in favor of the internal channel (Cobb, 2016). In some cases, the social partners conclude an agreement whereby the company is committed to give priority to the internal channel in case of skill needs/gaps. [TO-30] *“In firm-level bargaining, we nonetheless always aim at using the internal channel, even by planning some ad-hoc training, before looking for new resources outside. [...] We insist in many agreements that the company commits, in case of need of new skills or higher responsibilities, to use the internal channel before the external one. As long as we agree, it means that this is a shared principle, so there’s no issue of non-compliance.”* (Union representative)

Whether to opt for an internal or external channel seems to depend mostly on the firm's sector, its business size and the skills they are looking for. In manufacturing, firm-specific skills are prevalent, so in case of skill gaps they tend to prefer the internal channel, meaning the development of human capital within the company. Especially large companies, where HRM practices tend to be higher, make a multi-year plan for identifying skill needs and consequently they plan their training. In this decision-making process, the trade union can participate. In some cases (such as in best-practice firms), the trade union has been involved from the analysis of skill needs and all the way up to the tailor-made job description link to the salary-level within the company. The external recruitment channel

– on which the union intervenes very seldom and informally – is used only to cover very specific high skill needs, skills totally missing or new to the company, or in case of emergency conditions for SMEs.

[TO-31] *Interviewer: “Do unions play a role in the external channel?” Interviewee: “Really a little one, and not in an institutional way. I mean: not through structured processes. It may intervene by word of mouth, it would not be the first time...but it is not a structured process. It’s not the first time that an employer asks me: ‘Don’t you know anyone who is able to do that job?’ And maybe two hours earlier I’ve assisted to a layoff of exactly those skills, and then, yes, we do it, we let demand and supply meet. But we do not do it in a structured way, even if the laws would allow us some space. [...] The fact is that we are not able to take advantage of this enormous amount of knowledge we have about the labor market, we are not able to channel it in a structured and consistent process, say through making demand and supply meet. And so we seldom intervene. And, in case, in an informal way.” (Union representative)*

[TO-32] *“For some kind of skills, companies use the market and get them on the market: a HR or administration professional, some staff functions expert, can be brutally bought on the market. Then you have a series of technical skills, very sector-specific [...]. In this case, it is hard to find specialized technicians on the market, and therefore firms identify their best internal candidates and invest on them. [...] It is an important signal that motivates workers, and also represents an investment on the firm’s capital and know-how.” (HR manager of a company with best practices)*

For SMEs it is very difficult to understand what skill gaps and skill needs are. They reflect very little about themselves and do not anticipate the future because they do not have long-term strategy plans. As a result, they have to go into «*crisis management mode*».

[TO-33] *“We also make a lot of ‘ER’. Companies can’t afford much time to think about themselves. I make a project, an investment, I need some skills, hire them, create and train them. Also prompt decisions, and for what you have in mind...100 discussion tables would*

be wrong...One needs to discuss until it is useful, but at some point..." (Employers' representative)

In the tertiary sector, there is little skill development within the company. Generally, they prefer to use the external channel (that of personnel recruitment) to search very high-profile skills (typically in the advanced tertiary sector), to recruit unskilled workforce (like domestic workers or security guards) or for generational replacement of sales workers.

[TO-34] *"Anyway I have the feeling that also in our sectors, the evolution has been really fast, some process innovation...I would say production process innovation, but we are not talking about production; to understand each other, let's think about ICT companies; they need to evolve continuously, to develop new paths and processes, to introduce professional profiles that ten years earlier simply did not exist and that developed in the meanwhile. [...] We talked about the advanced tertiary sector, but we hardly recognize the same dynamics when we talk about shop assistants, don't we? Because maybe one prefers younger personnel, with professional skills a little bit...; if one goes on the external channel because prefers a 'Miss' instead of a 'Mrs.', well, I'll stop here...; or, if you want a youngster instead of an older Mister...They are different dynamics that quite often occur, and that make our very peculiar world a little bit more precarious. Nowadays, there are few realities where you find people coming from a long tenure, they're all worlds with a rather fast turnover, if I think to trade and tourism."* (Union representative)

[TO-35] *"Let's say that in this kind of companies, recruitment makes mostly use of the external channel, because processes are deeply partitioned, and so maybe I'm the genius of software, but I do not know anything of the hardware, and this is a problem."* (Union representative)

[TO-36] *"In that perspective, companies' sensitivity is not that much, meaning that when companies face some kind of innovation, they prefer to recruit someone with the needed skills, as they deem it too cumbersome and difficult to keep incumbent workers' competences up to date; and training itself is not that used"* (Union representative)

Here the trade union representation and claims are almost absent. There are few firm-level agreements because the units, such as the shops, are often too small, with the result of having to resort to regional bargaining or directly to the national one. In this context, the union mainly carries out a consultancy function for individual workers.

Claim 3. Re-training in the case of firms closing or corporate restructuring

We have seen that, when doing collective bargaining, training is important for trade unions in order to gain some power in the decision-making process (to be informed and consulted). When bargaining is *defensive*, that is after a firm's closing or a corporate restructuring, trade unions become much more involved. Sometimes it happens that the union is involved in the contents of training but generally a political approach prevails, which however is felt in this situation more strongly than in the case of continuing vocational training in the company. Workers' representatives are the key informants who stress more this dimension of the skill formation process.

[TO-37] *"To us training is a way out, in order to protect the employment"* (Union representative)

[TO-38] *"And we signed agreements aiming at insisting with companies to support redeployment also through retraining, also in order to manage the employment protection issue. Then, as unions, we did not enter into the contents of training, this is all up to the companies. What we said was: 'You, company, make an effort, if you want to manage this restructuring process we are going through, to retrain the workers, in order to manage the employment issues at best'"* (Union representative)

Other interviewees tell us that they have been dealing with the trade union only in the case of firms closing or corporate restructuring. These discourses refer to the stage of re-training in the skill formation process. Two types of intervention provided by the union are described: an internal one, that is vocational re-training for some employees in case of company restructuring, and an external one, that is outplacement agreements for redundant

workers so that they can undertake re-training courses (a role for active labor market policies). In some cases, but they are exceptions, the union participates in the organization of a training course aimed at people who have lost their jobs.

[TO-39] *“We deal with the unions mainly during crises, when companies close up; in those cases their support becomes pivotal, meaning that on top of discussing about collective layoffs, we also agree on the best strategies for those who have lost their jobs. So, what I trivially mean, they help us with enrollment procedures in order to minimize the inconveniences, as these workers, on top of having been laid off, they also need to gather here in the morning in groups of fifty and then to wait maybe six hours to receive some service”* (Person in charge of a public employment service)

[TO-40] *“In some cases the unions prove attentive, and when there are negative situations that lead to layoffs, if afterwards we are involved by companies, they ask them: ‘Why are you now recruiting if you just laid off someone else?’ In a sense companies do what they like most, but these are the cases, beyond which there is no...”* (Person in charge of a private employment agency)

[TO-41] *“During the last years, this issue emerged as a part of the bargaining process...it envisages layoffs or redeployment, and often outplacement which includes some training. But also in those cases, the unions do not discuss of contents, they simply say: ‘Give them the tools to re-qualify’”* (Employers’ representative)

5. Interpretation and discussion

The literature review portrayed at the beginning of this study highlights the existence of many possible channels through which unions – through decentralized collective agreements – may affect workplace training. While quantitative analysis alone is not sufficient to disentangle among them – and hence ultimately to identify the rationales

behind their potential relationship – we argue that our combined approach is better equipped to shed some light on those processes.

First, our quantitative analysis shows that a relationship between decentralized bargaining and workplace training actually exists, and that – other things being equal – its sign is positive. This rules out the option that employers may refrain from training (a *hold-up* behavior) in order to minimize the room for rent-sharing, or – better – that this channel, if exists, is not the dominant one. Something else must be in place. Second, qualitative analysis also excludes the *collective voice* story, i.e. that unions – through decentralized contracts – contribute to the identification of skills needs at the firm level. This is not the case for a number of reasons: employers conceive training as a totally top-down issue; union representatives often lack the skills to discuss about training in terms of contents; the internal channel of skill acquisition – to which workplace training is most relevant – is dominant in the manufacturing sector, where nonetheless (blue-collar) workers do not seem to understand the relevance of training, if not as a device of wage growth. Third, interviews suggest instead that unions play a more pivotal role when training represents a tool to prevent layoffs in case of a crisis; this seems to be consistent with the positive effect that decentralized bargaining may have on training through the internal career channel: unions favor employment protection, and this in turn enhances workplace investment in human capital. Fourth, and last, our key informants also suggest that local-level agreements may positively affect training inasmuch as they grant access to external sources of financing, and namely to bilateral funds.

In the spirit of a sequential research design, we go back to the quantitative data in order to check the robustness of our two emerging interpretations, i.e. that decentralized collective agreements favor workplace training inasmuch as they i) represent a way to bolster internal labor market careers and employment protection, and ii) grant access to dedicated funding sources. We do this by specifying models (1) and (2) of the following dependent variables: whether firms use bilateral funds to support the cost of training (y/n); the firm-level separation rate; the firm-level net workers' turnover. Table 3 displays the estimation results: while quantitative evidence unambiguously shows that decentralized bargaining is positively correlated with the use of bilateral funds, once we control for firm fixed effects we find no support for any relationship between local-level agreements and

employment protection, as measured in terms of separations and net workers' turnover. Results displayed in Table 4, show eventually that – once we control for firm-specific fixed effects – all the effects detected in Table 2 are driven by the manufacturing sector, while disappear in services. This is again consistent with our qualitative analysis and, in particular, where it suggests that the manufacturing sector – in order to fill skill gaps – primarily relies upon the internal channel, and therefore on skill *formation* (what indeed requires training), while the service sectors often prefers the external channel, i.e. that of skill *selection*, that, on the contrary, does not involve training.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we study the relationship between decentralized collective agreements and workplace training. While quantitative analysis alone is often ill equipped to disentangle the many possible causal relationships linking the two, our mixed-method approach allows us to open the “black box” of firm-level bargaining. The joint reading of quantitative and qualitative results, indeed, rules out the “collective voice face” of unions, and limits to a minor role the possible hold-up behavior of employers. Two remaining channels survive: local-level agreements favor workplace training inasmuch as they grant to employers the access to dedicated sources of funding, and since they promote employment protection, hence creating an indirect incentive for employers to invest in (internal) human capital. In the spirit of a sequential research design, we go back to quantitative data and, while we are able to exclude the latter explanation, we find clear support for the former.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	<i>2011</i>			<i>2015</i>		
	<i># Obs.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St. Dev.</i>	<i># Obs.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St. Dev.</i>
Share with DCB	4,745	0.096	0.30	4,524	0.100	0.30
No. of trainees	4,746	10.67	54.96	4,511	16.01	87.15
Share of trainees	4,756	0.23	0.34	4,524	0.39	0.42
Total cost	4,423	4531.5	30903.2	3,759	6258.4	47308.8
Per-employee cost	4,431	98.5	452.7	3,760	123.3	556.4
Per-trainee cost	4,430	340.2	2281.2	3,759	308.7	1908.0
Share using internal funds	4,746	0.31	0.46	4,524	0.40	0.49

Source: own computations on RIL data. Notes: costs are at constant prices in Euros.

Table 2. Estimation results

	<i>Workplace training (y/n)</i>	<i>Share of trainees</i>	<i>Use of firm funds (y/n)</i>	<i>Log of per-employee cost</i>	<i>Log of per-trainee cost</i>
Pooled OLS	.119*** (.015) 7913 - .137	.078*** (.013) 7913 - .096	-.023 (.017) 7906 - .030	.695*** (.089) 7187 - .144	.780*** (.103) 7177 - .144
Fixed effects	.063** (.028) 7913 - .052	.029 (.025) 7913 - .081	-.015 (.032) 7906 - .009	.389** (.180) 7187 - .040	.497** (.219) 7177 - .032

Source: own computations on RIL data. Notes: *** = 1% significant; ** = 5% significant; * = 10% significant. Robust standard errors in second lines. Number of observations and adjusted R-squared in third lines. Controls include a time-trend, managers' educational level, type of ownership (family-based or not), workforce composition by gender, age class, education, occupation (white and blue collars) and type of contract (permanent or temporary), value added per employee, presence in foreign markets, firm's age and size, sector and macro-region.

Table 3. Robustness: more dependent variables

	<i>Use of bilateral funds (y/n)</i>	<i>Separation rate</i>	<i>Net workers' turnover</i>
Pooled OLS	.124*** (.013) 7900 - .180	.060*** (.013) 7949 - .130	-.004 (.004) 7918 - .013
Fixed effects	.082*** (.025) 7900 - .060	.006 (.029) 7949 - .02	.008 (.011) 7918 - .017

Source: own computations on RIL data. Notes: *** = 1% significant; ** = 5% significant; * = 10% significant. Robust standard errors in second lines. Number of observations and adjusted R-squared in third lines. Controls include a time-trend, managers' educational level, type of ownership (family-based or not), workforce composition by gender, age class, education, occupation (white and blue collars) and type of contract (permanent or temporary), value added per employee, presence in foreign markets, firm's age and size, sector and macro-region.

Table 4. Robustness: manufacturing vs. service sectors

	<i>Workplace training (y/n)</i>	<i>Share of trainees</i>	<i>Use of firm funds (y/n)</i>	<i>Log of per- employee cost</i>	<i>Log of per- trainee cost</i>
<i>Manufacture</i>					
Pooled OLS	.122*** (.022) 3778 - .176	.070*** (.019) 3778 - .104	-.021 (.023) 3776 - .031	.700*** (.128) 3424 - .179	.823*** (.152) 3418 - .181
Fixed effects	.102*** (.037) 3778 - .096	.045 (.034) 3778 - .119	-.001 (.046) 3776 - .015	.694*** (.229) 3424 - .082	.497*** (.219) 3418 - .032
<i>Services</i>					
Pooled OLS	.107*** (.023) 3201 - .129	.088*** (.021) 3201 - .102	-.005 (.028) 3198 - .028	.695*** (.143) 2909 - .143	.718*** (.162) 2907 - .138
Fixed effects	.026 (.046) 3201 - .033	.021 (.040) 3201 - .055	-.013 (.049) 3198 - .019	.283 (.297) 2909 - .021	.329 (.354) 2907 - .025

Source: own computations on RIL data. Notes: *** = 1% significant; ** = 5% significant; * = 10% significant. Robust standard errors in second lines. Number of observations and adjusted R-squared in third lines. Controls include a time-trend, managers' educational level, type of ownership (family-based or not), workforce composition by gender, age class, education, occupation (white and blue collars) and type of contract (permanent or temporary), value added per employee, presence in foreign markets, firm's age and size and macro-region.

Annex A: Take-outs from interviews to key informants: original Italian texts

[TO-1] *«Mi verrebbe da dire che questo succede dove c'è un imprenditore illuminato, mi sa che l'input viene più da lì che dai sindacati. In fondo sei a casa loro, lo capisco un pochino [...] se è un valore che già l'imprenditore sente ed è una persona intelligente, allora vai in questa direzione, riesci a fare questo tipo di percorso».* (Expert on skill mismatch and training)

[TO-2] *«Ci sono aziende che hanno la percezione di questa cosa e che investono molto in formazione al di là appunto di quella obbligatoria, al di là di Fondimpresa. Ci tengono molto a sviluppare le risorse interne e a renderle, diciamo, a passo con i tempi....e questo diventa anche per alcune di queste aziende il...diciamo, valore aggiunto [...] Alcuni percorsi di formazione rientrano già nelle politiche delle aziende anche al di fuori della contrattazione; cioè, stiamo parlando di aziende di un certo tipo».* (Union representative)

[TO-3] *«Dopo di che ci sono aziende, multinazionali, che hanno delle policies aziendali di formazione molto avanzate ma le fanno indipendentemente dal sindacato e indipendentemente dagli accordi, le fanno e punto. Stop. Magari molto belle, molto efficienti, produttive e performanti ma le fanno senza sindacato, senza accordi e senza contrattazione».* (Union representative)

[TO-4] *«L'azienda la formazione la fa a prescindere, fa fatica in determinati periodi ma la fa. Far crescere delle persone, degli skill con acquisizioni e competenze, conta. Il sindacato non è così sensibile [...] Non lo dico perché lavoro per le aziende, conviene alle aziende. Voglio dire, o hai le persone in grado di fare determinate cose e anche di pensare, e non solo di fare il pezzo o di fare il pezzettino che serve, altrimenti non si va da nessuna parte. [...] È una necessità, avere persone capaci, anche motivate e competenti, è una necessità, altrimenti le aziende non vanno».* (Employers' representative)

[TO-5] *«Non è un elemento su cui il sindacato possa scambiare qualcosa, o sollecitare l'attenzione dell'azienda. Cosa scambia su questo aspetto qua?»* (Employers' representative)

[TO-6] *«Non è contrattazione vera e propria dove c'è uno scambio puro. Voglio dire, non è che ci sia...In genere, quando si parla di contrattazione, si presenta la contrattazione che conosciamo dal punto di vista di quella che avviene periodicamente ogni tre anni, ogni quattro, ogni quello che è...c'è una serie di richieste, un confronto, e un output che è il contratto».* (Employers' representative)

[TO-7] *«Generalmente il sindacato dice di sì perché fare la guerra sulla formazione è una guerra stupida».* (Union representative)

[TO-8] *«Io proprio non ho in mente nessun accordo che tratti solo di formazione»* (Union representative)

[TO-9] *«Non riesco a ricordare degli esempi. Non è il canale...forse...perché non...non fa parte proprio delle materie che vengono trattate in quella sede»* (Employers' representative)

[TO-10] *«Noi in genere facciamo accordi complessivi, quindi: arriva un bel momento in cui ci sono le condizioni che riteniamo mature per produrre una piattaforma rivendicativa e nella piattaforma mettiamo dentro gli orari di lavoro, l'inquadramento professionale, la professionalità, la formazione, il diritto allo studio, il salario e chi più ne ha e più ne metta...la salute e la sicurezza. Facciamo anche piattaforme più complesse e infatti la discussione dura molto. Non è sempre produttivo, perché mettere tanta carne al fuoco rischia di abbandonare alcuni argomenti per strada e spesso questo, come dire, è uno dei primi: se la trattativa va lunga, cade di interesse. In qualche caso scegliamo di spezzare proprio le cose. Però, generalmente, è l'esigenza di fare una piattaforma complessiva che porta a discutere anche di... Non è diciamo la causa scatenante. Generalmente la causa scatenante in un'azienda priva di contrattazione di II livello è, spesso e volentieri,*

dipendente da due fattori: l'orario di lavoro e il salario aggiuntivo. Tutto il resto si crea attorno le prime volte. Quando la contrattazione viene reiterata o rinnovata e via dicendo si riesce anche a specificare. Perché se noi abbiamo un sistema premiante che funziona, un accordo sull'orario che funziona, l'azienda non ha esigenze particolari, possiamo magari dedicarci nell'accordo successivo di più sul punto a, b o c. Però non è l'elemento scatenante». (Union representative)

[TO-11] *«Sì, i fondi interprofessionali li gestisce l'azienda, siamo coinvolti ne senso che devo firmare. Finisce lì». (Union representative)*

[TO-12] *«Noi chiediamo di avere il tempo. Anche se, dico la verità, intervenire è sempre molto complesso, per cui noi stessi da questo percorso formativo chiediamo di avere uno spazio come sindacato per verificare come è andato il progetto formativo [...] perché certe volte entri in ambiti molto tecnici su cui noi facciamo fatica a esprimerci. “Noi vogliamo rafforzare il mercato con l'Inghilterra, facciamo un corso di inglese”. “Va bene!” Verifico con i dipendenti se era effettivamente un inglese che serviva loro per lavorare con i clienti o meno, per correggere il tiro o meno. [...] È raro che noi interveniamo nel merito perché sono competenze molto tecniche della azienda che a rigore di logica dovrebbe mettere in atto in molti modi, e quindi a me interessa verificare che sia stato, che sia, come dire, che si continui a dare valore alla formazione e non si faccia il contrario, perché assistiamo a episodi in cui un'azienda organizza formazione che fa dire ai dipendenti: “che schifezza! Inutile che perdiamo tempo, non ha senso”. Ecco questo ci preoccupa della formazione, perché noi vorremmo rafforzare la cultura della formazione però se le persone vivono queste esperienze come negative, si crea una condizione contraria, dove le persone dicono. “No lascia perdere che ho provato una volta ed era una schifezza, ho solo perso tempo, mi sono annoiato”». (Union representative)*

[TO-13] *«Difficilmente, cioè vorremmo riuscirci di più ma difficilmente siamo noi a proporre un piano di formazione, siamo più per correggere quelli aziendali o dire all'azienda: “Almeno consultami per tempo!”. Perché normalmente ti vengono a*

consultare quando è il giorno prima della scadenza del bando solo perché altrimenti non hanno il finanziamento». (Union representative)

[TO-14] *«Nelle aziende che seguiamo, il datore di lavoro decide il percorso da fare perché viene stimolato dalla sua associazione di categoria e dagli industriali di turno. Viene dal sindacato e dice: “Bene, facciamo questa roba qua”. E noi, come si diceva prima diciamo: “Non potevi dircelo prima che magari ne discutevamo, miglioravamo...». E nove volte su dieci diciamo: “Va bene, piuttosto di perderlo facciamolo”. [...] Per cui se già riusciamo a condividere il percorso è già un passo come dire...di partecipazione non da poco [...] Senza partecipazione noi siamo convinti che non usciremo in maniera competitiva e definitiva dalla crisi [...] Io credo che una chiave di volta potrebbe essere nel tentare dove si può – lo stiamo promuovendo però in aziende di un certo tipo, non lo promuoviamo in aziende di 18 dipendenti, lo promuoviamo in aziende dove c'è una classe dirigente aziendale di un certo tipo e anche una classe dirigente sindacale sufficientemente preparata e disponibile al coinvolgimento reciproco – di tentare di fare formazione aziendale congiunta. [...] Congiunta vuol dire quadri aziendali e gruppi di lavoratori, insieme». (Union representative)*

[TO-15] *«Il tema direttamente formativo, dopo l'avvento dei fondi interprofessionali, diciamo che si è sentito chiedere un po' di più, ma come momento di confronto negoziale; cioè non fate cose unilateralmente ma condividete anche con le RSU, questo sì. Però nessuno ha mai detto a fronte di una somma X che si può dare cominciamo a destinarne una parte alla formazione...forse adesso con questa nuova spinta verso le forme di welfare [...] può darsi però questo glielo saprò dire tra 3 o 4 anni non adesso. Ad oggi non riscontro una particolare attenzione». (Employers' representative)*

[TO-16] *«Ecco questo è il mio piano formativo. Siccome ho già messo dei soldi là in Fondimpresa cerco di andarmeli a riprendere per utilizzarli qui. Questo piano formativo passa necessariamente al vaglio della RSU e viene sottoscritto. Può essere un elemento di contrattazione? Ni. Sì, potrebbe il sindacato dire: “no, secondo me hai sbagliato, non il russo ma il mandarino dovresti insegnare”. Però non succede, quindi teoricamente sì*

possono intervenire, in pratica no. [...] Non è un momento contrattuale nel senso...però c'è come dire una convalida» (Employers' representative)

[TO-17] *«Non è un accordo specifico che rientra nel 2° livello, perché per noi l'accordo di 2° livello contiene aspetti economici, organizzazione del lavoro e nuove condizioni di lavoro delle persone, e le esigenze di quel contesto lì, particolari...» (Union representative)*

[TO-18] *«La dinamica contrattuale è fatta in generale da qualcuno che propone, da qualcuno che contropropone o accetta ma non è questo il problema di fondo...anche il soggetto a cui viene sottoposto è la RSU interna quindi un soggetto diretta espressione dei lavoratori, mentre nella contrattazione in 9 casi su 10, mi verrebbe da dire in 9,5 su 10, c'è sempre l'assistenza dell'organizzazione esterna. Non è un momento contrattuale inteso come normalmente lo pensiamo». (Employers' representative)*

[TO-19] *«Poi Confindustria e sindacato ottime relazioni, sono qua tutti i giorni, tutti i progetti sui fondi interprofessionali e poi supportano la formazione continua vengono dialogati però cosa c'è nella sostanza del dialogo? Ci sono le firme burocratiche, non c'è un vero ...una vera presa di atto e di posizione rispetto ai contenuti delle trasformazioni. E quindi una cosa è dire siamo d'accordo facciamo queste cose, un'altra cosa è dare sostanza al dialogo. Allora come Confindustria è in ritardo nel dire quali sono appunto i 3 pilastri su cui bisogna accompagnare la trasformazione industriale, così secondo sceme è in ritardo il sindacato nel dire e nell'accompagnare quali che sono le politiche dell'adeguamento delle skills delle persone». (Expert on skill mismatch and training)*

[TO-20] *«Ho avuto una lunga fase, adesso capisco che era un'illusione, che fossero i fondi a fare una parte di questa cosa di cui stiamo discutendo, perché cazzo sono 700 milioni di euro l'anno, sono gestiti dalle parti sociali quindi anche da noi, siamo in grado anche di decidere anche i contenuti di sta roba, è obbligatorio, perché la firma è obbligatoria, ma sono sempre condizioni formali...» (Expert on skill mismatch and training)*

[TO-21] *«Dopo c'è poi sempre un altro aspetto: la resistenza da parte dei lavoratori sul dire "l'azienda mi fa fare il corso di formazione, ma se dopo non mi dà la categoria che cazzo lo fa fare?" Questa è un po' la cosa quindi...c'è un po' di resistenza da parte dei lavoratori. Cioè, vuol dire che se fanno fare i corsi di formazione che però non sono finalizzati a pagarmi di più, in sostanza.... Invece tu potresti dire: "Sì, l'obiettivo è anche quello, ma è anche quello appunto di darti delle competenze aggiuntive che ti possono essere d'aiuto per conservare il posto di lavoro che hai". Ma questo non è proprio facile farlo passare come un messaggio».* (Union representative)

[TO-22] *«Non c'è disinteresse ma sono meno sensibili. Il lavoratore medio – generalmente – vorrebbe fare sempre il suo mestiere e non essere demansionato. Allora si diventa sinceri. Perché, chiaramente, il cambio di mansione crea in qualche modo...spariglia un po' le carte, crea un po' di disagio, quindi rimettersi in aula o fare esperienze crea sempre un pochino di, come dire, di disagio, perché si ha la sensazione, specialmente se sono lavoratori che lavorano lì da molto tempo, di essere rivalutati di nuovo, di dover ricominciare daccapo: "Forse è meglio che lo facciano i giovani, ma perché lo devo fare io?"»* (Union representative)

[TO-23] *«...però diciamo che le aziende sono più portate a orientare questo tipo di formazione sulle fasce...sui livelli alti, non sulla base operaia; oppure, sulla base operaia, propongono i corsi che sono obbligatori per legge, cioè quelli sulla sicurezza; mentre per i livelli più alti è un tema che vogliono un po' gestire in proprio, cioè, sono un po' restii a discuterne. Infatti quello lì è il punto: normalmente nella formazione quello che diciamo noi è: "Se stavolta faranno i corsi i quadri, la prossima volta lo faranno altri". [...] Le aziende puntano su quelli. E lì la discussone che si fa è "cerchiamo di coinvolgere anche gli altri, di preparare qualcosa che abbia un interesse per i livelli che rappresentiamo di più"».* (Union representative)

[TO-24] *«È chiaro che i sindacati, secondo me giustamente, sono più attenti dal loro punto di vista agli aspetti di sicurezza e alle retribuzioni. Cioè, le competenze soft si capiscono che sono importanti ma chiaramente fino a un certo punto; anche perché, tendenzialmente,*

loro lavorano su una fascia un po' più bassa, operativa, cioè gli operai. Magari già il middle management, gli impiegati, non sono tanto vicini ai sindacati». (Person in charge of a private employment agency)

[TO-25] *«Credo che da parte sindacale ci siano altre urgenze; da parte aziendale, e dico giustamente a mio avviso, c'è l'idea di non doversi confrontare col sindacato sui fabbisogni formativi alla ricerca di determinate competenze, creazione o sviluppo. È una politica che tradizionalmente si fa in modo unilaterale: ho un bisogno, lo identifico, strutturo un percorso e lo faccio [...]. Ma oltre che spettare tradizionalmente al management, è che le cose vanno così: c'è un problema di tempistiche. [...] Non c'è mai stata un'altra parte in causa». (Employers' representative)*

[TO-26] *«La parte aziendale è la cura delle risorse, quelle umane in particolare. È una prerogativa tipicamente aziendale, cioè non sta nello spazio contrattuale. Questo nella nostra esperienza. [...] Il momento genetico di questa esigenza è tutta dalla parte aziendale. Quando si manifesta nella sua necessità, come dicevo prima, 99,5 volte su cento c'è già la convergenza tra azienda, che ha bisogno di riqualificare le persone, e sindacato che dice: "Molto bene, così la persona sarà più occupabile!". Poi magari la persona non ci sente, ma quello sta fuori dalla contrattazione. [...] L'azienda predispone tecnologie, materie prime, mercati, cerca di capire e forma le risorse umane, e è sempre stata una leva tipicamente e fisiologicamente aziendale; cioè non c'è neanche il tempo per aspettare o discutere di questo, ma non perché si rifiuti la discussione, ma perché bisogna farlo prima, è già tardi quando... La mattina che noi acquistiamo un sistema gestionale siamo già in ritardo sulla formazione delle persone. [...] È nell'esperienza di tutti che l'organizzazione del lavoro passa da una progettazione che sta di qua». (Employers' representative)*

[TO-27] *Intervistatrice: «Il sindacato interviene sulla scelta dei due canali?» Intervistato: «No, la scelta è una scelta aziendale. » Intervistatrice: «E anche se l'azienda sceglie il canale interno, resta in capo all'azienda la decisione sulla formazione?» Intervistato: «Sì assolutamente, devo dire di sì. L'azienda deve determinare la propria organizzazione del lavoro e lo sviluppo delle proprie risorse». (HR manager of a company with best practices)*

[TO-28] *«L'altro aspetto è che la messa in formazione di una persona non è oggetto di contrattazione sindacale, perché c'è una fotografia dei ruoli necessari per ricoprire il processo produttivo dell'azienda. È l'azienda che stabilisce quali sono i ruoli professionali e ne mette a conoscenza il sindacato».* (HR manager of a company with best practices)

[TO-29] *«Le aziende sono molto gelose della propria...l'azienda media soprattutto in Veneto decide lei. Se condividiamo, lo si fa fino a che le cose sono condivisibili, ma sono io imprenditore a dire che cosa serve ai miei dipendenti e per cui te lo comunico a te sindacato, a te sindacato ti comunico che serve questo, questo e questo; metto in campo e generalmente ti informo, e generalmente noi recepiamo e subiamo».* (Union representative)

[TO-30] *«Noi comunque nella contrattazione aziendale puntiamo sempre a dire che prima di ricercare all'esterno certe figure, si passi dall'interno, anche costruendo poi una formazione ad hoc. [...] Noi pretendiamo in molti accordi che l'azienda si impegni, qualora servano nuove competenze o responsabilità più elevate...che prima si peschi all'interno dell'azienda prima di accedere all'esterno. Se facciamo l'accordo vuol dire che è condivisa l'idea, per cui non c'è nemmeno il mancato rispetto».* (Union representative)

[TO-31] *Intervistatrice: «Nel canale esterno il sindacato interviene?» Intervistato: «Pochissimo, non in via istituzionale. Intendo non attraverso processi e percorsi strutturati e via dicendo. Interviene qualche volta con il passaparola, non è la prima volta...non è un percorso strutturato. Non è la prima volta che un datore di lavoro mi chiede: "Ma lei non conosce nessuno che sa fare quel lavoro lì"? Magari io due ore prima ho seguito la procedura di licenziamento di un'azienda dove licenziavano quelle competenze lì, allora sì, lo facciamo, mettiamo in contatto domanda e offerta. Però noi non lo facciamo in modo strutturato, anche se la normativa consentirebbe degli spazi di incrocio tra domanda e offerta. [...] È che noi purtroppo non riusciamo a sfruttare questo enorme bagaglio di conoscenze che abbiamo sul mercato del lavoro, e non riusciamo a incanalarlo in un processo strutturato e coerente, diciamo con l'incrocio vero domanda e offerta. Quindi interveniamo pochissimo. E semmai in via informale».* (Union representative)

[TO-32] *«L'azienda per certi tipi di competenze va sul mercato e le acquista sul mercato: un professionista delle HR o del controllo di gestione, un professionista di qualche funzione di staff, si possono acquistare sul mercato brutalmente. Poi ci sono una serie di competenze tecniche specifiche del settore di appartenenza [...]. In questo caso i tecnici specialisti è difficile trovarli sul mercato e quindi qui l'azienda individua i suoi migliori operatori e li fa crescere internamente. [...] È un segnale importante nei confronti dei lavoratori che li motiva ed anche un investimento sul capitale e sul know how dell'azienda».* (HR manager of a company with best practices)

[TO-33] *«Si fa anche molto pronto soccorso. L'azienda non è una realtà che ha molto tempo e molte risorse per riflettere in continuazione su se stessa. Faccio un intervento, un investimento, mi servono delle competenze, le assumo, le creo, le formo. Decisioni anche rapide e per quello che pensa lei...100 tavoli di confronto sarebbero anche sbagliati... Bisogna confrontarsi fin dove serve, però bisogna anche a un certo punto...»* (Employers' representative)

[TO-34] *«Però ho l'impressione che anche nei nostri settori l'evoluzione sia stata molto veloce, un'evoluzione di processi...mi viene da dire produttivi, ma qui non si parla di produzione; ma, per capirci, immaginiamo le aziende di informatica e telecomunicazioni; insomma, sono aziende che hanno la necessità di evolvere continuamente, di sviluppare nuovi percorsi e nuovi processi, la necessità di inserire all'interno figure che magari anni prima non c'erano neanche perché si sono sviluppate nel frattempo. [...] Abbiamo parlato del terziario avanzato ma le stesse dinamiche facciamo fatica a comprenderle quando si pensa agli ausiliari alla vendita, vero? Perché magari, che ne so, preferisci avere personale più giovane, insomma, dal contenuto professionale un po' ecco...; se la necessità di pescarla fuori è che...piuttosto che la signora vuoi la signorina, va bè mi fermo lì; oppure, se invece del signore vuoi il ragazzo giovane... Lì sono altre dinamiche che molto spesso accadono e che rendono anche un po' precario tutto il nostro mondo, mondo molto particolare. Sono poche quelle realtà oggi dove trovi persone che arrivano da molto lontano, sono tutte realtà dove c'è un turnover anche abbastanza veloce, se penso alla parte turismo e commercio».* (Union representative)

[TO-35] *«Diciamo che in questa tipologia di azienda, si tende proprio più a reclutare dall'esterno, perché sono lavorazioni molto parcellizzate, per cui io sono il genio del programma ma dell'hardware non so assolutamente nulla e questo è un problema».* (Union representative)

[TO-36] *«La sensibilità nelle aziende non è il punto forte da questo punto di vista; nel senso che spesso un'azienda di fronte a qualche innovazione, preferisce recuperare qualcuno che abbia quelle competenze, perché ritiene che sia troppo faticoso e difficile aggiornare le competenze a chi lavora; e anche la formazione stessa non è molto diffusa».* (Union representative)

[TO-37] *«Per noi una via di uscita è assolutamente la formazione, per salvare l'occupazione».* (Union representative)

[TO-38] *«E abbiamo fatto degli accordi per dire alle aziende di favorire, anche per gestire tutta la partita occupazionale, favorire anche la ricollocazione attraverso riqualificazione. Poi non è che come sindacato siamo entrati nel merito di come viene fatta la riqualificazione e che indirizzo dà eccetera, cioè questa è tutta una partita che viene lasciata in mano all'azienda. Quello che abbiamo detto noi è: "Azienda impegnati, se vuoi gestire questa ristrutturazione impegnati anche a riqualificare le persone per tentare di gestire al meglio l'aspetto occupazionale"».* (Union representative)

[TO-39] *«Noi abbiamo rapporti con il sindacato soprattutto in caso di crisi aziendali, quando chiudono, e allora diventa abbastanza preponderante il loro aiuto; nel senso che comunque oltre a partecipare alla discussione sulla messa in mobilità ci mettiamo d'accordo come intervenire nei confronti delle persone che hanno perso il lavoro. Quindi voglio dire, molto banalmente, le pratiche di iscrizione, ci danno una mano a organizzarle in maniera tale che ci sia il minor disagio possibile, perché questi oltre a essere licenziati, si trovano magari qui davanti in 50 la mattina e aspettano anche sei ore per avere un servizio».* (Person in charge of a public employment center)

[TO-40] *«I sindacati in alcuni casi sono attenti a quello e quando ci sono delle situazioni difficili che portano a mandare via tra virgolette delle persone, se poi veniamo chiamati noi magari possono chiedere, non tanto a noi ma all'azienda: "Perché stai cercando quando hai delle professionalità che hai mandato a casa?". L'azienda fa quello che vuole tra virgolette, però ecco solo questi sono i casi, per il resto nessun tipo di...»* (Person in charge of a private employment agency)

[TO-41] *«Negli ultimi anni questo aspetto è venuto fuori nella contrattazione...che prevede delle uscite o accompagnamento gestionale, prevede spesso anche la parte dell'outplacement dove c'è dentro un po' l'attività formativa. Ma anche lì, il sindacato non arriva a dire questo invece di quest'altro. Dice: "Dagli lo strumento per riqualificarsi"».* (Employers' representative)