THE UNITED NATIONS PUBLIC SERVICE FORUM 2013
"Transforming Public Service Delivery to Advance Gender Equality"
Capacity Development Workshop
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WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND GENDER EQUALITY IN ITALY’S
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:
THE MINI*MIDI*MEF CASE-STUDY

ITALY’S MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND FINANCE
Central Directorate for Personnel
DAG’s mission and the Mini*Midi*Mef service

The Department of General Administration, Personnel and Services (DAG) is one of the four departments composing Italy’s Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF).

DAG’s role is to support MEF other departments’ activities. DAG is, inter alia, in charge of developing and implementing general guidelines on personnel (including implementing rules, directives, and circulars issued by competent authorities), as well as implementing operational procedures on HR policies and management.

Mini*Midi*Mef (MMM) is a service for MEF employees supplied by Office I of DAG Central Directorate for Personnel.
Introduction: what this presentation is about

1. Some simple reflections on gender equality analysis in Italy’s Public Administration

2. The theoretical framework behind MEF HR approach to gender equality

3. Mini*Midi*Mef case-study

4. Conclusions
Gender Equality

- For **gender equality** we intend a legal principle meant as the **absence of barriers to full participation** in economic, political and social development of any individual for reasons related to his/her gender.

- This definition in our HR management context usually translates into the principle implying that within **Public Administrations** there are no obstacles to women’s **full participation** in work processes and to their **full professional realisation**.
As follows, we will try to expand this approach to imply that, within an Italian Public Administration, gender equality is ensured whereby there are no obstacles to women’s full participation in work processes and to their full realisation both at personal and professional life level.
Obstacles to Empowerment

• The term **empowerment** is referred to a growth process based on increasing self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-determination to bring out latent resources and get the individual to consciously take possession of his/her potential.

• In our approach, female empowerment is restrained by two **obstacles** – i.e.
  
  • **Reconciliation Burden**
  • **Gender Discrimination**
Reconciliation Burden and Gender Discrimination

• The **Reconciliation Burden** can be equated to the effort a woman has to spend in organising and managing her family life (not to live it!) in order to maintain it at the desired level of quality or, alternatively, to the negative impact faced whereby the reconciliation effort is not sufficient.

• **Gender Discrimination** can be assimilated to the *prejudices* and *preference differentiations* expressed by men towards women – just because they are women – and translates into the need for women to allocate efforts uniquely to overcome the obstacles they encounter.
Gender equality in public organisations: Empowerment and Obstacles

Let’s now verify the actual level of **empowerment** achieved in Italy’s Public Administrations and the **obstacles** faced therein!
How do we measure gender equality implementation at MEF?

- **Quantitative** approach, based on organisational demography:
  - Attendance rates, in a gender perspective
  - Female staff share analysis, at various contract levels

- **Qualitative** approach, based on staff’s feedback:
  - Gender Equality (notably as to work-life balance) as perceived and experienced by staffs has been the issue of several analyses carried out by means of questionnaires and interviews amongst MEF personnel
How do we measure gender equality implementation at MEF? (2)

- Attendance rates and personnel shares approximate the level of participation in decision-making processes, thus the level of empowerment attained.

- However these indicators say little about the extent of obstacles to be overcome to get there, as they stem from the qualitative analysis of users’ feedback.
Quantitative analysis: positive audit on Empowerment revealed by figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DGs MANAGERS</td>
<td>32.68%</td>
<td>67.32%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.55%</td>
<td>44.45%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFFICERS</td>
<td>60.84%</td>
<td>39.16%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE-COLLARS</td>
<td>54.52%</td>
<td>45.48%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLERKS</td>
<td>34.70%</td>
<td>65.30%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>55.51%</td>
<td>44.49%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

- High Empowerment by directive careers gender breakdown hints that Gender Discrimination-related obstacles are limited within MEF.
Qualitative analysis: perceived Gender Equality seems quite different

• In the last year and a half, 4 surveys have been conducted through questionnaires notably to employees with school age children.

• The perceived level of Gender Equality implementation emerging from the qualitative analysis is not consistent with the level of empowerment actually attained.

• Employees perceive a significant barrier to Equal Opportunities mainly as to the Reconciliation Burden.
Empowerment vs Work-Life effort in Public Administrations

• Legislative Decree n. 165/2001 (Art. 7(1) Human Resource Management) states that Public Administrations shall ensure equality and equal opportunities between men and women with regard to work access and treatment.

• Within Public Administrations, does it make sense to consider women's empowerment as an index of gender equality implementation?

• We propose a more general approach to the issue, based on the “Gender Equal Work-Life Effort Principle”.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND GENDER EQUALITY IN ITALY’S PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE MINI*MIDI*MEF CASE-STUDY
Gender Equal Work-Life Effort Principle (GEWLEP):

“The level of effort required for a woman to achieve the best result in one of the two spheres of life (private or work), set the result in the other sphere to the level experienced by a man of equal ability and commitment, must be no greater than that required to that man”.
GEWLEP: breaking down the gender effort “wedge”

• The principle assumes that any additional effort required to a woman versus a man of equal capacity must be used to overcome, respectively in life and work, the Reconciliation Burden and Gender Discrimination.

• The degree of gender equality implementation can be approximated by measuring the wedge of greater effort required to a woman versus a man to achieve the desired result in a given sphere of life, set the result in the other.
According to the approach proposed here, a policy that reduces the Reconciliation Burden improves the degree of Gender Equality implementation, regardless of whether it increases the empowerment level.

For this reason it proves most useful in the analysis of public organisations, where empowerment level changes have a *de jure* dynamic extremely slower than in private organisations.
**GEWLEP** is not strongly needed in private organisations

- In the Italian context, an approach to the analysis of Gender Equality in an organisation that is based on evidence relating to **women’s empowerment** level seems **most appropriate** in **private organisations**, where career progression mechanisms are more fluid and dynamic.

  - Within private organisations, **empowerment** is more likely the **consequential outcome** of the removal of **Reconciliation Burden** and **Gender Discrimination** obstacles.

  - Assessing women’s **empowerment level** allows evaluating the degree of Gender Equality implementation, as it corresponds to assessing the **degree of removal** of the two obstacles above.
Within PAs, GEWLEP can go beyond the analysis of “de iure” figures

- Within Italy’s public sector, law actually sets “quote rosa” (i.e. ladies’ share), 33%-50% of women presence in almost all positions, creating “de iure” empowerment.
- Hence it is no longer the necessary consequence of the removal of barriers to Gender Equality.

- The GEWLEP-based approach allows focusing on reconciliation and discrimination problems selectively, thus going beyond the mere numerical analysis of the empowerment degree.
How GEWLEP was born

• The principle allows properly assessing the need for greater support to reconciliation as a need for gender equality, even though not necessarily aimed at greater professional empowerment. Hence, GEWLEP can take into account the desiderata of the larger proportion of MEF female staff.

• This approach has matured to reconcile the two approaches to Gender Equality implementation on which MEF employees’ preferences were polarised.
How GEWLEP was born (2)

A portion of female staff (notably the 40-45 age group) required actions aimed at reducing the Reconciliation Burden to pursue career growth (hence greater empowerment).

The remaining female staff required actions aimed at reducing the Reconciliation Burden only to improve their own private life quality.
MEF gender equality policies

- The application of the principle has so far led MEF to focus its Gender Equality efforts on the reduction of the Reconciliation Burden.

- Furthermore, providing a work-life balance service requires less legislation than for implementing Gender Equality through policies to remunerate, reward, and employ female staffs.

- MEF has focused on providing reconciliation services, among which Mini*Midi*Mef.
Mini*Midi*Mef: case-study

- Need
- Service
- Recipients
- Premises
- Objectives
- Results
- Users
- Obstacles
- Exportability

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeTJVv-1lD0
The problem that is no longer a problem at MEF

- Before the Mini*Midi*Mef service, MEF did not offer any work-life balance service to employees with school age children.

- Personal life commitments, typically affecting mothers, increase when school activities are interrupted.

- During those periods, employees with children, mainly women, were forced to take leave.

- The situation caused a deterioration of the quality of parents' participation in work processes.
The Service: what MMM is and what MMM is not

- MMM is a free-of-charge care and entertainment service aimed at employees’ children aged 4-12.

- It operates in a dedicated facility at the Ministry Headquarters in Rome on weekdays when school services are interrupted.

- MMM is not a *creche* or a game room.

- The service operates on two *5-hour shifts*.

- *1 teacher for every 7 children* is always guaranteed (i.e. optimal proportion).
Recipients: MMM is a service for women, but not only

- Thanks to a better work-life balance, MMM allows for full and serene participation in work processes by female personnel at all contract levels.

- MMM advantages are equally valid for male employees, too.

- In pursuing overall organisational improvement, MEF has provided a service equally accessible to all parents with children in the service age range.
The MMM premises

- The Mini*Midi*Mef premises were obtained by renovating non utilised run-down rooms.

- We managed to curb renovation costs by capitalising on the architectural skills available within DAG.

- The open space rooms are designed to meet users’ needs as much as possible, complying with all rules on school services.
MMM objectives: female talent, well-being, productivity

1. Allowing for full use of the Administration’s **female talent** through a better work-life balance.

2. Enhancing the whole organisation’s **productivity** by increasing attendance rates and improving organisational climate.

3. Meeting the **actual life needs** of a large segment of personnel.
Results: MMM does work!

- A partial measure of the impact attained can be appreciated in the attendance rate change recorded amongst the staffs who used the service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>MEF AVERAGE</th>
<th>MANAGERS</th>
<th>OFFICERS</th>
<th>WHITE-COLLARS</th>
<th>CLERKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WOMEN</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The attendance rate of MMM users is on average higher than that of other employees with children of the same age.
Users: MMM is appreciated at every level

- The 800 and more employees with school age children account for about 20% of the staff of MEF Offices in Rome.

- Employees who have used the service are evenly distributed throughout all contract levels, including managers.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>MEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MANAGERS</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFFICERS</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITECOLLARS</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AREA I</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
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Contract levels of employees that used MMM, by gender. Figures refer to all the service operational periods.
The first big obstacle is overcome: a service to be understood

- Neither the current *State Budget Law* nor the definition of *competences* of organisational units within several PAs (and notably MEF) acknowledge Gender Equality relevance.

- Italy’s PAs tend to perceive Gender Equality as a *semi-undistinguished* element of a wider area such as “personnel well-being” which, by its own nature, is simultaneously addressed to categories of personnel with opposed interests (e.g. both “young” and “aged” employees).
A service to be understood: the “generational” perspective

- Due to limited turnover, 80% of the personnel that did not use the service are rather convinced they will never use it, as they are over 45 and their children are over 12.

- MMM is addressed to a significant share of the personnel of MEF Offices in Rome. Yet, within Italy’s PA organisational culture, MMM could be mistakenly considered as a “selective” social service rather than as a service aiming to Gender Equality improvement.

- In other words, the MMM service can be also assessed from a “generational” perspective, not merely from a gender perspective...
A service to be understood: the big picture

- In response to such instances, the approach underlying the definition of work-life balance policies within MEF has been generalised.

- The Work-Life balance – hence, the Reconciliation Burden – is not merely referred to children management but also to a variety of human situations – e.g. elderly family care.

- GEWLEP has thus been generalised to include every Equal Opportunities situation related to Work-Life balance.

- GEWLEP has thus become EOWLEP “gender corollary”.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND GENDER EQUALITY IN ITALY’S PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE MINI*MIDI*MEF CASE-STUDY
Equal Opportunities Work-Life Effort Principle (EOWLEP):

“The level of effort required for a reconciliation burden facing individual to achieve the best result in one of the two spheres of life (private or work), set the result in the other sphere to the level experienced by an individual of equal ability and commitment who faces no reconciliation burden, must be no greater than that required to that individual”.

Equal Opportunities Work-Life Effort Principle (EOWLEP):
Mini*Midi*Mef: a driver for change, once understood

- Consistently with EOWLEP, MEF is differentiating its range of actions so as to reduce the Reconciliation Burden originating in numerous aspects of employees’ private life.

- Once framed in a wider range of targeted policies, the MMM has been better understood also by non-user personnel.

- The personnel is getting progressively used to the implementation of better targeted and more selective policies, which first impact on top effort wedges.
The actions undertaken by MEF

MEF has set its work-life balance improvement policy within its organisational structure along 3 intervention lines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention lines</th>
<th>Actions undertaken</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation services</td>
<td>• Corporate kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mini<em>Midi</em>Mef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More reconciliation-compliant ways to organise work</td>
<td>• “Telework“Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation Vouchers</td>
<td>• “Caregivers/baby-sitters” Voucher Project</td>
</tr>
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Work-life balance and gender equality in Italy’s public administration: The Mini*Midi*Mef case-study
MEF Work-Life balance initiatives, as per inclusiveness degrees

**INCLUSIVE INITIATIVES**
They reconcile by bringing private life closer to work life

**CONCILIATIVE INITIATIVES**
They reconcile by bringing one closer to another

**FLEXIBILITY INITIATIVES**
They reconcile by bringing work life closer to private life

- **Private Life (Life)**
- **Work Life (Work)**

- Mini*Midi*Mef Corporate kindergarten
- Voucher Project Part-time leaves
- Telework “Project”

Inclusiveness Empowerment
Second big obstacle overcome: rankings operation

- Access to the service results from **rankings**, drawn up consistently with criteria granting priority to employees with heaviest **Reconciliation Burden**.

- Rankings shall fulfill all law requirements on **public acts**, as they represent the final output of a proper **administrative selection proceeding**.

- As a matter of fact, compiling and managing such rankings strongly differs from managing other types of rankings – e.g. public competition selections.
Rankings operations: peculiar features

- **High number**: For the sole summer operational period, **88 different rankings** are compiled.

- **Strong variability**: The rankings are subject to ongoing changes prior to the service operation period – i.e. some employees waive and others are subsequently entered.

- **“Neutrality”**: The rankings shall not impact service access by employees, who would be stressed by the feeling they are repeatedly participating in a selection procedure similar to a proper public competition.

- **Timing**: The timing for rankings compilation shall fulfill the preferences of the different typologies of users.
Exportability: Mini*Midi*Mef is a replicable initiative

- The service shows **good financial and organisational sustainability**:  
  *Initial investment* < 100K€  
  *Annual spending on educational services* < 50K€  
  *Annual FTE – Administrative personnel* < 85  
  *Annual FTE – Officer personnel* < 45

- Since its incipit, the Project has been intended as a package of **modular solutions** easily and selectively replicable in other organisational contexts.

- Among them, the **Mini*Midi*Management Application (MMMA)**.
Mini*Midi*Management Application [MMMA]

- **MMMA** has been developed by **DAG Central Directorate for IT and Innovation (Office VIII)** and MEF’s IT in-house company (**Consip Spa**).

- MMMA is a **J2EE web-based application**, running Linux Red Hat, Oracle WebLogic Application Server 10.3.4 with a Cisco Load Balancer, and Oracle 10g v. 10.2 for DB.
MMMA: features

**MMMA**

- Collects *registrations*
- Dynamically generates *rankings* for access to the service
- Ensures *maximum coverage* of available places via multiple tenders
- Helps manage possible *special requests* from users
- Manages the on-site *presences* of children and educators
- Automatically *Contacts* users upon rankings definition
- **Archives** data on previous editions
- Enables *business intelligence* on usage data
WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND GENDER EQUALITY IN ITALY’S PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE MINI*MIDI*MEF CASE-STUDY

42

The functions available to users vary dinamically in accordance with tender phases.

The application is automatically pre-compiled by the system.
• Rankings are drawn up daily, based upon requirements: income, household composition, underage children with disabilities, multiple minors, etc.
MMMA: exportability and replication

- **Italy’s legislation on re-use of IT programmes** ("of parts thereof") enables Public Administrations to reuse, free of charge, IT programmes or parts thereof developed on behalf of or paid by another Administration and to adjust them to own needs.

- The **MMMA technological and functional features** enable fast exporting and disseminating it within other institutions and/or public bodies.

- MMMA is an **important tool for MMM service model exportation and replication**, as it is conceived to incorporate all of its main management processes and maintain high functional parametrability.
Summing up....

• A service that improves the balance between private life and work can be, in some cases, even more effective in terms of Gender Equality promotion than a regulatory intervention that introduces provisions on employees’ working methods to which one must comply, even whereby flexible.

• The gender policies implemented through MMM do not change the rules of the game between men and women, but put women in a position to play with the same rules (on equal terms) as men.
Summing up... (2)

• The value generated by providing a service tends to be perceived by personnel as more “tangible” than organisational rules, thus better understood and more easily accepted.

• Providing a Work-Life balance service requires less legislation than to implement equal opportunities through interventions on policies so as to remunerate, reward, and employ female personnel.
Final thoughts....

• The main **success** we deem the Mini*Midi*Mef has achieved within MEF is therefore not only confined to the improvement of the conditions for **women’s participation in work processes** and to the resulting **overall empowerment** ...

• It lies in having contributed to **changing the working women self-image within the organisation**.
Final thoughts....

• Through this service, MEF has conveyed a clear message: parental commitments should not be a reason for embarrassment or sense of guilt from employees.

• MMM is a truly “inclusive” initiative, as it counters the sensation of being organisationally marginalised, which can be the case for women as they have to bear most of the burden of reconciling family and work.
Grazie!

Lorenzo Marcianò-Agostinelli

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Department of General Administration, Personnel and Services
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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeTJvV-1ID0