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## Rethinking occupational welfare policies in long-term care organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic: an organisational ethics approach

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**Abstract:** Non-profit organisations, in particular long-term care organisations, have faced several challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Long-term care organisations have had to meet these challenges by relying on their core ethical values and human capital. This paper examines the occupational welfare policies adopted by a long-term care organisation during the pandemic and the individual, managerial, organisational and societal effects of these policies from an organisational ethics perspective. The study explores the case of a non-profit organisation – Fondazione Monsignor Alessandro Marangoni – that adopted occupational welfare policies, enabling it to manage the early COVID-19 outbreak without negative consequences. The findings show that organisational ethics are embedded into occupational welfare policies and demonstrate their role for the welfare society in times of crisis.

**Keywords:** long-term care; non-profit organisations; occupational welfare policies; residential services for elderly; intrinsic motivations; value-based organisations; welfare service management; organisational ethics; COVID-19 pandemic.

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## 1 Introduction

The health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has affected populations, businesses and organisations globally. Non-profit organisations (NPOs) that provide residential services for the elderly have been particularly affected. Moreover, long-term care (LTC) organisations have experienced high mortality rates because of residents’ susceptibility to infection when exposed to the COVID-19 virus (Comas-Herrera and Zalakain, 2020; Kimball et al., 2020). A large number of LTC organisations were affected by the virus and faced a severe health emergency for older adults and workers, and the Italian case was relentless – above all, in the north of the country (ISS, 2020). In contrast, other LTC organisations took effective preventive measures that contributed to minimising the negative impact of the pandemic (McMichael et al., 2020).

Therefore, LTC organisations have needed to implement strategic and operational policies to safeguard the health of employees and residents. These policies concern both healthcare and managerial/organisational aspects (Lai et al., 2020). Under the second perspective, LTC organisations have reorganised their internal spaces, adopted flexible systems in terms of work shifts, holidays and breaks, engaged in effective communication with stakeholders (including family members), and undertaken other actions to comply with national and regional laws. The main objective of these organisational measures was to protect older residents and staff members from the risk of infection, even though some protocols – such as the prohibition of residents’ families visiting the facilities – were severe (Gardner et al., 2020). Moreover, driven by their socially oriented missions, LTC organisations have implemented various voluntary measures, including the provision of

personal protective equipment to employees to reduce their risk of contracting the virus and consequently being absent from work because of ill health.

In this context, human capital plays a key role in the delivery of safe, high-quality services. Indeed, the nature of LTC services requires an intense relationship between older adults and staff members (e.g., nurses, physicians, socio-health workers, educators). Professional competences are crucial, but also, employee involvement and engagement are fundamental for the provision of high-quality and safe facilities. Therefore, the promotion of human capital is a crucial factor of success for LTC organisations, and occupational welfare policies (OWPs) can be decisive for meeting the most urgent needs, particularly during periods of crisis.

In Italy, both for-profit and non-profit LTC organisations exist, and in some regions, also public LTC organisations. All have been involved in the pandemic emergency, but their freedom to change their internal organisations – in particular, regarding human capital – was not equal. Private organisations have had considerably more autonomy in relation to reorganising themselves; moreover, NPOs are motivated by their social purpose, which fosters ethical behaviour. As the previous literature has underlined (e.g., Moore, 2000), the social purpose of NPOs is at the very centre of these organisations, which can be defined as purpose-driven organisations, and it affects different aspects of their management, such as leadership style and human resource management. In this context, the empowerment of workers is critical not only for enhancing organisational performance but also because during the pandemic NPOs that deliver residential services to the elderly had to cease their volunteers' work because of safety protocols.

Consequently, several NPOs, particularly LTC organisations, have strengthened their OWPs concerning their workers during this challenging and stressful emergency. Specifically, OWPs have aimed to meet employee needs by providing them with economic and motivational benefits. To the best of our knowledge, no empirical research to date has examined the potential of OWPs during the COVID-19 pandemic from an organisational ethics perspective. The lack of case studies makes this topic challenging. In this regard, the following research question is addressed: In relation to their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, how have the organisational ethics of LTC organisations spread through the adoption of OWPs?

This paper aims to answer this question by exploring a case study that has engaged in good practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. Precisely, it aims to examine the effects of OWPs on an LTC organisation in the light of organisational ethics by investigating Fondazione Monsignor Alessandro Marangoni, a non-profit organisation, which assumed good practices during the COVID-19 outbreak. The findings are presented by adopting the theoretical framework of Melé (2009a), which facilitates understanding of OWPs' effects according to the following four dimensions of organisational ethics: individual, managerial, organisational and societal. The findings highlight that OWPs have positive effects only if management structures and shares them with workers before emergencies, thereby internalising them within the organisation's purpose.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: in the second section, a basic theoretical framework for OWPs in NPOs is provided, as well as the organisational ethics approach used in the study. The third section outlines the research design. The fourth section presents the findings of the case study analysis, which are then discussed in light of the previous literature in the fifth section. The sixth section clarifies some theoretical and practical implications of the study, and the final section offers some conclusions and reflections on the limitations of the study, as well as some suggestions for future research.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

In times of crisis, state welfare activities decrease while the need for social welfare and solidarity increases (Ohana and Meyer, 2010; Ohana et al., 2013). The state response to welfare needs arising from emergencies can be delayed, while other social and economic players may be more responsive (Castles, 2010). Within this context, NPOs and their human resources play a fundamental role in meeting these needs (Ridder and McCandless, 2010). Workers contribute to the overall performance of key service providers. Typically, employees of NPOs do not work simply for remuneration – their daily actions are also value-oriented because they consider stakeholder expectations essential (e.g., De Cooman et al., 2011). Thus, values and ethics are deeply embedded within NPOs, and employees act according to their intrinsic motivations. According to Frey (2012), “people just like to act in a certain way or because they have internalized social norms” (p.91). It is widely recognised in the literature that intrinsically motivated people can successfully perform (Heyes, 2005) when they develop a vocation towards a specific activity.

The ethical content of LTC services is crucial, and organisational performances have a clear ethical dimension. Even though organisations cannot be considered moral agents in themselves, Hasnas (2012) affirms the existence of a corporate moral character and responsibility that enable and foster individual ethical behaviours. Consequently, organisational choices about human capital and workers’ motivations have a wide impact on ethical performance (e.g., Caza et al., 2004; Bright et al., 2006). Different ethical perspectives can inspire these organisational choices: if both the deontological and the utilitarian ethical approach focuses on the ethical content of the actions, virtue-based ethics is centred on the ethical agent (that is, the managers and the workers) and on the purpose of the actions (Melé, 2009b). Organisations can foster ethical behaviours only if they have a clear commitment and shared values (Vriens et al., 2018), and if they cultivate a consistent managerial and leadership style (Roszkowska and Melé, 2020).

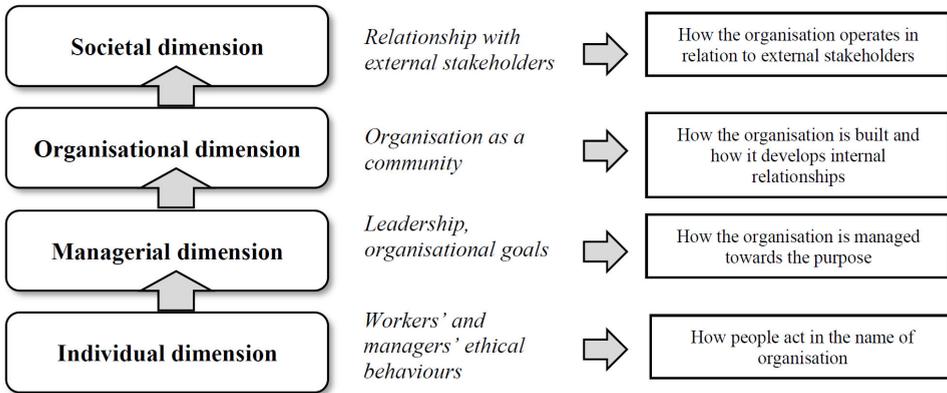
The ethical approach of all organisations – above all NPOs – is conditioned by their purpose (Fontrodona and Sison, 2006) and the intrinsic motivations that mark their workers. Generally, NPOs are strongly motivated to build trustworthy relationships (Hollensbe et al., 2014), centre their strategy on the social mission (Moore, 2000) and operate according to moral values. In doing so, NPOs foster workers’ ethical behaviour and promote organisational performance.

Therefore, as values-based organisations (Bruni and Smerilli, 2009), NPOs can strengthen employee performance by developing and implementing different activities and practices that improve workers’ living and employment conditions in a voluntary way, namely, by implementing OWCs, which aim to improve motivation, productivity and a sense of mission (Ascoli et al., 2018; Greve, 2007; Natali et al., 2018). However, NPO employees are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated and are conscious of their role in pursuing common or public objectives (Mann, 2006; Park and Word, 2012). Therefore, NPO employees make employment choices based on the expectation of not only financial retribution but also non-monetary benefits (Gazley, 2016; Ridder et al., 2012). The purpose-oriented commitment of employees in NPOs clarifies that human resource management is affected by the mission and values of the organisations (Ridder and McCandless, 2010), even though other factors – as financial constraints (Akingbola, 2013) – can influence choices about human resource incentives.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of diverse OWPs in terms of developing welfare- to-work policies (e.g., Wright et al., 2011), offering fringe benefits (e.g., Artz, 2010) and conducting employee training (e.g., Benevene and Cortini, 2010; Cooper et al., 2020). OWPs are the response of NPOs that wish to invest in their human resources and retain the loyalty of their employees through professional and skills development. In socially oriented organisations, OWPs are more satisfactory for employees, and also more effective, if the policies focus more on intrinsic motivations than on economic interests (e.g., Bassous, 2014; Borzaga and Tortia, 2006). In terms of organisational ethics, OWPs act as tools to develop worker wellbeing.

Business and organisational ethics are multi-level (e.g., Johnson, 2016; Melé, 2009a; Spencer et al., 2000), operating on four interrelated dimensions that can be considered a theoretical framework that is useful for understanding organisational behaviours (in this case, OWPs), as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** Theoretical framework based on organisational ethics



Following the bottom up order of Figure 1, the individual dimension concerns individual behaviours within the organisations (i.e., individual values, goals, ethics and moral judgments); this dimension focuses on how workers and managers operate in organisations and how they build relations with different stakeholders, including other workers. As mentioned above, individual ethical behaviours are not independent from organisational and managerial factors, such as leadership style or organisational purpose (Roszkowska and Melé, 2020). Second, the managerial perspective concerns initiatives promoted by managers regarding organisational purpose, leadership style and the role assumed by the leaders in fostering workers' moral behaviours. Third, the organisational dimension, which understands the organisation as a whole and as a community of persons, aims for common goals (i.e., organisational structure, values, culture and worker rights). From this perspective, the organisational capacity of fostering ethical behaviours by workers and managers is crucial. Finally, the societal perspective concerns organisation-society relationships arising from the social and political roles of the organisation.

Therefore, the theoretical framework adopted to analyse the case study is centred on the idea that individual (moral) behaviours are affected by organisational factors, and the analysis of organisational structure, leadership and culture – including, obviously, OWPs – is key to understanding organisational performance, even from an ethical perspective.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, LTC organisations have developed policies to ensure that their facilities remain adequately staffed (Gardner et al., 2020). Although these organisations have made specific investments in OWPs – as announced by managers in national and local magazines – this topic remains unexplored.

### **3 Methodological approach**

To examine how organisational ethics have affected OWPs adopted by LTC organisations during the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, a qualitative approach was adopted because it enables an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon in its real-life context. More precisely, the exploratory nature of the research question led to the choice of a single embedded case study approach as the research method. In addition, case study is considered a suitable method to address ‘how’ research questions, when the research is limited in the selected context and when the events examined are contemporary (Yin, 2015).

A theoretical sampling approach (Patton, 2002) enabled the researchers to identify Fondazione Monsignor Alessandro Marangoni, an Italian NPO that operates in the health services field for the exclusive purpose of social solidarity, as a representative case of the phenomenon being explored. The foundation offers residential accommodation services for older people (including those with disabilities) along with assistance, health, religious, rehabilitation and recreational services. This organisation was chosen as one of the best practices because it was completely free of COVID-19 cases in both guests and operators during the early phase of the health emergency (from the end of February 2020 to May 2020), which can be considered until now the most critical period of the health crisis. Besides, this methodological approach enables an in-depth investigation and the inspiration for new ideas (Siggelkow, 2007).

Melé’s (2009a) theoretical framework guided the data collection and analysis. More precisely, data were collected using a key informant technique (Marshall, 1996). Three semi-structured interviews were conducted in June 2020 with the director, services coordinator and risk and safety manager of the foundation, respectively. These individuals were purposefully selected as key actors because they were actively and directly involved in decision-making processes. These key actors were approached by email, which informed them about the research topic and purpose and provided an overview of the issues to be discussed during the interview. The interviews each lasted about 90 minutes and were conducted following ‘a conversation with purpose’ (Burgess et al., 1991) approach. This approach enables the detail in the answers and the order of the questions to vary, thereby facilitating information collection. During the interviews, respondents were encouraged to discuss their lived experiences of residential service management, the OWPs adopted during the health emergency, and their effects on employees and the organisation. By adopting this method, the researchers captured interviewees’ thoughts, perceptions, feelings and experiences in relation to the research purpose (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2005).

The use of a single case study has been subject to some critique deriving from the limited number of interviews possible. To overcome this problem, two types of triangulation were employed (Jack and Raturi, 2006):

- 1 investigator triangulation, which employs multiple rather than single observers during the interviews – in our case, two
- 2 multiple triangulation, which interviews multiple observers (director, services coordinator, and risk and safety manager) in one investigation.

The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed and checked for accuracy. A draft of the case study report was provided to and discussed with the respondents to verify the validity of the results obtained (Yin, 2015).

Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Following a comparison and discussion of coding generated separately by the researchers, a consensus on common themes was reached. In addition to this deductive approach, an inductive approach was employed, which categorised themes using the Melé (2009a) mode. This provided a full picture of how Fondazione Monsignor Alessandro Marangoni had undertaken specific decisions about OWPs during the pandemic and the individual, managerial, organisational and societal effects of these policies from an organisational ethics perspective. Although the reference framework was conceptualised for ethics in general, this enabled the examination of activities and strategic decisions about the OWPs investigated in this study.

## 4 Findings

This section first discusses the findings of the Fondazione Monsignor Alessandro Marangoni case study and then the OWPs adopted during the pandemic. Next, this section presents the effects of OWPs in terms of organisational ethics during the COVID-19 outbreak.

### 4.1 *The case study: Fondazione Monsignor Alessandro Marangoni*

Fondazione Monsignor Alessandro Marangoni is an NPO located near Verona (Northern Italy). It was established in 1926 at the initiative of the local Catholic parish to host older people and those unable to work. Currently, Fondazione Marangoni offers LTC facilities for 60 non-self-sufficient older persons and has 55 workers. Human resources include different professional competencies in the health, social, educational and administrative fields.

The Statute of Fondazione Marangoni declares that it is a moral entity that does not seek profit creation and operates to reach solidarity goals. The purpose of the Foundation is mainly ethical because it is based on the evangelical precept to assist fragile people. Further, Fondazione Marangoni is authorised and accredited by the Venetian region, the public authority in charge of controlling socio-health services.

The ethical purpose of Fondazione Marangoni is declared by its organisational values, which include the dignity of human life, belonging to the community, respect for diversity, subsidiarity, responsibility, care, solidarity, sharing and the importance of prayer. Notably, Fondazione Marangoni declares that the promotion of human capital is a form of concretisation of ethical values, and that spiritual and professional training is at the heart of the organisation. The managers interviewed also confirmed these values as the guide for all organisational actions. Further, the risk and safety manager highlighted that responsibility for workers' health and wellbeing has been one of the central values

inspiring Fondazione Marangoni in its daily operations, both before and during the pandemic emergency.

Like other LTC organisations, Fondazione Marangoni was extremely vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic from healthcare, organisational, managerial and ethical perspectives. Significant challenges included the health risks faced by both the elderly residents and employees, compliance with safety protocols and family members being prohibited from accessing the building. Fondazione Marangoni dealt with the emergency by implementing strict safety measures before national and regional laws mandated them.

#### *4.2 OWPs adopted during the pandemic*

Fondazione Marangoni's belief in the importance of virtuous behaviour by all workers to continue delivering safe and quality services, enforced the organisation's attention on human capital during the pandemic emergency. Nonetheless, in contrast to other organisations, Fondazione Marangoni could not implement remote working methods for high-level employees because of the nature of their job, which required direct interaction with patients. For this reason, safety measures were accompanied by qualified training programs and by specific OWPs to support employees who were directly affected by the disruptions generated by COVID-19 (Bastani et al., 2020).

Fondazione Marangoni had initiated the implementation of OWPs in 2018, before the COVID-19 crisis, in part because of the fiscal incentives introduced by Law 2015/12/30 N. 208 and Law 2016/12/11 N. 232 that promoted OWPs. Nonetheless, Fondazione Marangoni profoundly modified its OWPs in response to the pandemic by embracing the specific needs of workers. It is important to note that a significant portion of workers are female. Specifically, Fondazione Marangoni promoted two interventions to support employees and their children: first, from the end of February 2020, weekly supplies of essential goods were delivered to the foundation's headquarters so that employees could avoid visiting shopping centres or supermarkets, thereby reducing the risk of coronavirus contamination. Each delivery had an individual value of 30 euros (calculated at cost-price).

Second, from March 2020, a professional babysitting service for children who could not be cared for by family members was provided. The director of Fondazione Marangoni explained the reasons for adopting this form of OWPs:

“On the one hand, we understood what it meant for our employees going to the supermarket with the risk of infection, to take care of their children without a helping familiar network. On the other hand, the foundation needed the presence of all workers and was aware of the difficulties in replacing any absent.”

#### *4.3 Effects of OWPs at the individual level*

Respondents highlighted that, following the implementation of the extraordinary OWPs, employees demonstrated an increased motivation to work. The absentee rate decreased because the majority of employees understood the importance of their role in preserving the quality of care for the elderly.

The adoption of OWPs fostered cooperative behaviours because employees understood that they were part of a team rather than simply the “raw materials” needed to deliver services. At the individual level, the implementation of specific OWPs affected

employees' intrinsic motivations and enhanced their skills in taking care of the elderly by generating an increased sense of belonging and willingness to cooperate. Regarding the cooperative posture shown during the pandemic, the services coordinator declared:

“Individual availability gave strength to the group. The work team reinforced during the emergency that it was ‘give and take’ because the managerial choice helped employees in their efforts.”

Working in the healthcare services involves the individual motivations of workers, and the risk of burnout is exceedingly high if the commitment to care is not well developed. The employees received the OWPs as a gesture of care given by Fondazione Marangoni, and this positively affected the individual motivations of all workers and of middle managers who contributed to the OWPs. The services coordinator noticed:

“It was taking care of people that take care. My role was important. I felt part of a positive system – helping those who help.”

The empowerment of workers, thanks to the OWPs, also enhanced professional skills during a crisis that could not afford any error, as declared by the risk manager:

“I had at heart colleagues' composure because I know that working under stress can generate negligence that is very dangerous, the ‘beginning of the end’.”

#### *4.4 Effects of OWPs at the managerial level*

Interviewed managers underlined the centrality of a cooperative approach to leadership as a typical characteristic of their work methods. When describing the beginning of his role in Fondazione Marangoni, the director underlined in detail that the decision-making process was naturally cooperative:

“When I began my job at Fondazione Marangoni in 2011, there were tensions between workers and the board of directors, also because of a planned workforce resizing due to a new regional law. I started creating work teams that I consult to discuss main managerial issues and to detect shared solutions.”

Further, the risk and safety manager narrated that during the emergency, he decided to extend his working hours voluntarily to oversee managers' closeness to all employees and share decisions in critical moments. This specific leadership style was also adopted in the implementation of extraordinary OWPs. This enabled employees to be incentivised without reducing their jobs, which had increased in complexity and variety, to a mere contract. The OWPs ensured that employees' material, psychological, relational and emotional needs were considered. One interviewee compared the OWPs to the symbolic act of taking care of people. Rather than being merely a financial bonus, the expenditure on groceries symbolised feeding people and preserving their safety. The symbolic meaning of OWPs – united with their practical usefulness for employees and their families – reflected a leadership style characterised by listening to, involvement with and attention to people. In expressive language, the risk and safety manager declared:

“When we knew that the OWPs included weekly supplies, we cried. The meaning was very clear – your employer gives you food, it becomes like a mother, it does not use you!”

The effect on intrinsic motivation was not an accidental (although positive) side effect, but rather a correct choice aimed at valuing people at work. The director declared:

“People do not work towards economic gratification. They need other gratifications. So, we worked on motivations, because employees wanted to come to work gladly.”

#### *4.5 Effects of OWPs at the organisational level*

OWPs were focused on economic benefits for employees at Fondazione Marangoni. However, the specific procedures implemented during the pandemic were enabled through an extraordinary financing policy recommended by the board of directors. Specifically, financial provisions from previous years were allocated to support the OWPs, making a mark on the organisation-employee relationship. OWPs enhanced the quality of internal relationships and fostered a cooperative style of problem solving. The collaborative behaviours among employees became a tool with which to manage the organisational issues that arose as a result of the pandemic.

The OWPs were shared by all organisational levels of Fondazione Marangoni. As declared by the director, the board of directors immediately enacted the idea and did not hesitate to designate financial reserves to OWPs, middle managers took charge of managing the practical aspects of OWPs and workers were involved in planning specific actions. Consequently, the extraordinary OWPs involved the entire organisation and reinforced a cooperative and sharing approach. In relation to this, the director declared:

“Each worker that was seated at a work table had an idea, which had to be listened to and valued. So we built a sense of cooperation.”

#### *4.6 Effects of OWPs at the societal level*

Although OWPs implemented during the pandemic were focused on improving employee conditions, they also had significant effects for other stakeholders, including improved relationships with the local community. For example, the OWPs could be realised with the collaboration of trusted suppliers, who not only provided goods but also supported the project by applying special rates and supplying only local foods. Attention to the supply chain rendered possible the involvement of various firms, who benefited indirectly from the program. Moreover, families of the residents and other local stakeholders benefited from the reorganisation of Fondazione Marangoni in terms of reduced risks and lives saved.

Further, OWPs contributed to a positive stance during a tough situation and to creating legitimacy for Fondazione Marangoni in particular, and LTC organisations in general. The public evidence of a common struggle for safer care of the elderly, who were exposed to the pandemic risk, was one of the essential effects of the extraordinary OWPs. Even though during the pandemic, no one could enter LTC facilities from outside, social media and also some newspaper articles shared the inner life of Fondazione Marangoni and the positive effects of its OWPs. Regarding the adoption of the social network, the risk and safety manager declared:

“Social networks helped us a lot. It was important to see familiars and other people who were participating. After the first weeks, during which uncertainty was dominating, they understood that all people in our organisations were well, and we took care of each other.”

## 5 Discussion

This study explored the Fondazione Marangoni case, which represents a significant example of a social and economic player able to meet the social welfare and solidarity needs (Ridder and McCandless, 2010) arising from emergencies not readily covered by the state (Castles, 2010). Moreover, this case highlights the importance of organisational ethics in implementing specific OWPs aimed at dealing with the emergency with strict safety measures even before they were mandated by law.

The results highlight that OWPs have individual, managerial, organisational and societal effects from an organisational ethics perspective. More precisely, in relation to the effects of OWPs at the individual level, the results confirm that intrinsic motivations are crucial in organisations (e.g., Heyes, 2005; Frey, 2012), especially those that are purpose-driven as LTC organisations. In this regard, Fondazione Marangoni was able to deal with the emergency better than other organisations, avoiding the health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for its guests and workers. All employees collaborated to implement safety practices and deliver additional services to the residents to attenuate the psychological and emotional effects of the pandemic. As values-based organisations highlight (Bruni and Smerilli, 2009), a stronger adhesion to ethical values and the sense of care that Fondazione Marangoni demonstrated to its employees fostered these beneficial individual practices. The choice to trade off direct economic incentives for improved employee welfare also improved employees' sense of belonging during the emergency. Employees understood that their employer cared about their lives beyond the synallagmatic relationship arising from their work contracts (Gazley, 2016). Further, the sense of belonging positively contributed to professional performance.

Regarding the managerial dimension of organisational ethics, the evidence collected confirmed a clear relationship between leadership style, employee motivations and organisational performance. The OWPs instituted by Fondazione Marangoni revealed the features of a humanistic management style (Melé, 2009a) that morally transformed managerial actions. It was visionary: while this practical strategy bore fruit during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was cultivated before the emergency by nurturing social capital and building relational capital into the organisation itself. Indeed, it was clear that during the pandemic it would be possible to adopt emergency protocols; however, it would be impossible to change leadership style and to grow relational capital if this was not done before the emergency. Further, it was transformational: the leadership style avoided the use of power to reorganise internal practices by encouraging employees to participate through fostering an increased sense of belonging. The testimonial value of managers' behaviours positively affected workers' behaviours in a natural manner. Finally, it applied moral imagination: the managerial approach compensated for the lack of a clear legal framework or similar precedents that led to uncertainty during the first weeks of the pandemic outbreak. Compliance with national and regional guidelines was insufficient to face the emergency.

At the organisational level, OWPs help LTC organisations in their efforts to develop a cooperative model to address the stresses arising from a pandemic (or any other unpredictable emergency). According to previous research (e.g., Mariani and Cavenago, 2013; Hollensbe et al., 2014), a case study such as this confirms that the organisation-employee relationship is crucial for enhancing service quality and workers' motivations.

From a societal perspective, OWPs can foster an ongoing dialogue between organisation and society (Inkpen and Tsang, 2005) by involving various stakeholders in a systemic project that extends beyond individual employee benefits. Linking people and organisations favours social cohesion (Billis and Glennerster, 1998) and a sense of community (Sen, 1999).

## **6 Implications**

The findings from this study have theoretical and practical implications. In theoretical terms, this study is one of the first attempts to apply the business ethics model to an NPO, specifically an LTC organisation, during an emergency. Further, it is also the first article that has examined the potential of OWPs during the COVID-19 pandemic from an organisational ethics perspective. Therefore, the study contributes to the debate about tools that may foster intrinsic motivation and cooperative behaviours in NPOs in critical situations.

This article also helps render the results readable and easily comparable in terms of effects of OWPs at individual, managerial, organisational and societal levels. From this point of view, this research counters the progress of ethical studies of organisations in line with the Melé (2009a) model and the theoretical proposals of Johnson (2016) and Spencer et al. (2000).

From a managerial perspective, several key elements have emerged that contribute to the determination and beneficial outcomes of OWPs in NPOs. First, the constant presence of middle managers and a cooperative organisational model contribute to a strong sense of belonging and a willingness to collaborate among employees. Employees must perceive that they are an essential part of a team, which can only occur if team members feel valued and are aware of their indispensable roles, regardless of their hierarchical level.

A second important managerial implication is that a leadership style that offers practical insights should be cultivated before emergencies. This approach would also mitigate differences between private and public LTC organisations. In fact, the freedom of public organisations to change their internal organisations – above all regarding human capital – is not equal to that of private organisations. Usually, private organisations have broader autonomy in reorganising themselves, but it is also true that if the style and organisational mechanisms are already properly instigated with a cooperative approach of collaboration and mutual trust between staff members and the different hierarchical levels, then there would be no need to make such important decisions in a short time. Conversely, the ability to intervene in the use of financial reserves would certainly remain different depending on whether the organisation is private or public. With respect to the issue of the extraordinary use of financial reserves, a major difference could lie in the profit or non-profit orientation of the organisations. Hence, the social purpose that fosters ethical behaviours is the most important aspect affecting the outcome and impact of management decisions.

This study also has some implications from a systemic perspective. The fact that Fondazione Marangoni and arguably other LTC organisations are capable of developing and implementing OWPs that efficiently address crises like the current COVID-19 pandemic proves that social welfare can be successfully complemented, and in some cases anticipated, by the activities of non-governmental organisations. Consequently, a

reflection on the welfare mix (Henriksen et al., 2015) and the subsidiary activity of organisations in civil society is still necessary to improve understanding of LTC organisations' role and contribution to welfare in times during which the limits of traditional sector boundaries blur.

## 7 Conclusions, limitations and future research lines

This study focused on the ethical grounding of OWPs adopted by an LTC organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research delved into the effects of OWPs from an organisational ethics perspective, not only to understand and report what occurred during the past months but also, and above all, to rethink the contribution of OWPs to the improvement of LTC organisations in times of crisis.

This study has highlighted the positive outcomes obtained by Marangoni Foundation in its management of the pandemic emergency through the implementation of extraordinary OWPs. The activities implemented were related to the ethical dimensions of management in terms of their effects on individuals, managers, the organisation and society. The case study analysed provides evidence on the implementation, modification and adaptation of OWPs during the first critical period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings demonstrate that organisational ethics plays an important role in the development of OWPs. In particular, they reveal that planning and investing in OWPs before a crisis can lead to positive responses from workers, contribute to organisational resilience and promote human capital.

Despite the efforts made in this study, it is necessary to recognise some limitations. First, it is important to take into consideration that our case, the Marangoni Foundation, was purposely chosen because this LTC was completely free of COVID-19 cases in both guests and operators during the most critical phase of the health emergency. Consequently, our findings would not be generalisable without further research. Second, according to our findings it might be arguable that organisations that have not previously invested in OWPs may not be able to implement such policies during an emergency to the extent that they will be accepted by employees or have beneficial repercussions. To confirm this conclusion, future studies of cases that have not previously implemented OWPs will provide additional evidence. Moreover, it would be interesting in the future to replicate this research by involving negative case studies and by taking into consideration longer periods. Consequently, it would be informative to study cases among those particularly affected by the pandemic to explore whether the aspects highlighted by this research as determining the success of Marangoni Foundation management have been lacking in other structures. Finally, an empirical study with a representative sample of private and public organisations could confirm or refute our findings.

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