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# Disability as a job resource: The role of job crafting and organizational citizenship behaviours. Towards an approach to value diversity in organizations

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✎ **ABSTRACT.** Il tema delle opportunità per lavoratori disabili è molto dibattuto in Italia, in vista di politiche sempre più inclusive sia nel pubblico che nel privato. Lo scopo di questo studio è verificare se l'incontro con la disabilità possa essere considerato una risorsa ed un promotore di comportamenti proattivi di job crafting ed extra-ruolo. I risultati, dopo opportune analisi di attendibilità, confermano tramite modello PLS-SEM che i lavoratori che considerano i colleghi con disabilità come uno strumento di crescita sono più propensi a mettere in atto quei comportamenti che possono migliorare la qualità della vita organizzativa e il benessere individuale. La percezione costruttiva della disabilità potrebbe essere inclusa quindi, di fatto, nelle risorse lavorative secondo il modello Job demands-Job resources.

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✎ **SUMMARY.** The number of employment opportunities afforded to people with disabilities in Italy is still not entirely satisfactory. Managerial policies should build a more favourable context, full of stimuli, support and backing for the promotion of good disability management practices within both private and public organizations. The aim of this study was to investigate how disability understood as a resource can positively influence the organizational climate and, consequently, the enactment of supportive and proactive behaviors, using the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) as a starting paradigm. Analyses were performed on 129 school educators in May 2021, who answered a structured questionnaire comprising several constructs, such as the perception of disability as a resource (2 items), job crafting (9 items) and extra-role behaviours (4 items). The mean age of the respondents was 51.6 years; most of them were female, married or cohabiting, and had a university degree. The study was performed through a non-parametric approach (PLS-SEM) and validated through bootstrap. Analyses showed that the relationship between disability as a resource and extra-role behaviors was partially mediated by the effect of job crafting. Results highlighted that workers with a predisposition to consider their colleagues with disabilities as a tool for growth are more likely to implement those behaviors that can improve the quality of organizational life and individual well-being, such as those oriented to proactivity and those aimed at expressing support, voluntary actions, and professional development even when this is not immediately required by the role.

**Keywords:** JD-R model, Disability, Well-being, School educators

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## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between people with disabilities and employment is still not entirely satisfactory in Italy. Twenty years after the approval of the law on targeted employment (L.68/1999), the labor and social inclusion of people with disabilities, despite having made important steps forward, is still a goal far from being achieved. Recent developments in equal opportunities legislation have raised new and relevant issues for companies to consider. Among these, disability management is a crucial interest issue in the organizational debate. In fact, in recent years the employment of people with disabilities has become a central issue in Europe. According to data reported by the European Commission, the employment rate of people with disabilities is only 11.3%, and 10.3% of unemployed disabled people are currently looking for work.

In Italy, up to 66% of people with disabilities remain excluded from the labor market. To cope with this employment imbalance, it is certainly necessary for people with disabilities to be facilitated to achieve higher levels of acceptance, integration, and social inclusion within employment contexts.

One of the first objectives to be pursued to promote greater inclusion is to strengthen the employability of people with disabilities, understanding them as a resource for the organization, rather than identifying them as a disadvantage. Particularly inclusive organizations, which aim to accommodate a diverse workforce, become necessary and could provide a solution to achieving higher levels of employment for people with disabilities (Zijlstra, Mulders & Nijhuis, 2012). Disability management is an excellent response at company level to effectively pursue this goal. According to a classic definition, “disability management is a strategy that aims to prevent or reconcile disability in the workplace, using coordinated actions to ensure quality employment for people who experience temporary or permanent functional limitations” (Akabas, Gates & Galvin, 1997).

Depending on and respecting the work ability of each worker, disability management is concerned, on the one hand, with finding diversified solutions that emphasize the skills and strengths of workers with disabilities and, on the other, with promoting an organizational culture free from prejudice and discriminatory feelings with benefits that are widely documented in the literature, not only at the professional level of the individual worker but, above all, in the organizational context.

These managerial policies have the role of building the most favorable context, full of stimuli, support and backing for the promotion of good disability management practices within both private and public organizations. This recent disability management within employment contexts places the disabled worker and his or her enhancement at the center, proving to be an excellent transversal tool for reconfiguring the organization to accommodate and manage the needs of people with disabilities within the company’s areas and processes, from strategic management to human resources management.

Starting from these premises, the aim of this research work was to investigate how the perception of disability could positively influence the organizational climate and, consequently, the enactment of supportive and proactive behaviors, namely those of job crafting and extra-role, using the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2014, 2017) as a starting paradigm.

## Job crafting

In the course of their work experience, employees redefine and design their work in a personal way according to the significance they attach to the tasks and duties they must perform (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Several studies have shown that workers with disabilities can also engage in job crafting behaviors, adapting and modifying their roles, tasks, and social interactions in the workplace in relation to their specific needs (Brucker & Sundar, 2020; Macchitella et al., 2021). There are three areas of application of the job crafting approach, namely task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting (Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli & Hetland, 2012). Specifically, task crafting concerns modifications to work activities and how they are performed. Relational crafting refers to social interactions, the reformulation of relationships and the construction of new ones, both with members of the organization and with people outside it; one could consider this aspect as integrated with task crafting by referring to the shaping of the relationship during the performance of a task, thus, in this case, the way in which the activity is individually shaped (Sundar & Brucker, 2019). Finally, cognitive crafting relates to perceptions of one’s work and the tasks to be performed; this area does not refer to a physical change but to changing perceptions to increase meaningfulness (Brucker & Sundar, 2020; Sundar & Brucker, 2019). Job crafting, therefore, is an example of a proactive

behavior in which workers engage to adapt their work to their needs, skills, and preferences (Tims & Bakker, 2010), even in emergency situations (Signore et al., 2020). Proactive behaviors refer to self-initiated, future-oriented actions aimed at seeking opportunities to improve one's position by changing oneself or one's surroundings in problematic situations (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Job crafting describes the ways in which employees modify their task, acting on the cognitive and relational boundaries of their work to find more meaning in it (Demerouti et al., 2020; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). From a quantitative perspective (Tims, Bakker & Derks, 2012), job crafting has been categorized through four distinct dimensions, including:

- increasing structural job resources, i.e., the propensity to develop individual skills;
- increasing social job resources, i.e., changes concerning relationships with colleagues and supervisors, requesting feedback or advice at work;
- increasing challenging job demands, specifically the search for new tasks with increased responsibilities;
- decreasing hindering job demands, i.e., those behaviors aimed at the reduction of emotionally and cognitively burdensome work aspects.

For the purposes of this study, job crafting was studied in its positive component, i.e., not considering the sub-dimension of decreasing hindering job demands since, as verified by Rudolph et al. (Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne & Zacher, 2017) and Lichtenthaler and Fischbach (2019), it leads to withdrawal behaviors and correlates negatively with personal growth, fueling a prevention-based job crafting that loses its proactive connotations.

## Extra-role behaviors

Extra-role behaviors are those behaviors which strengthen the social context and increase the effectiveness levels of the individual worker. They are behaviors that are not formally required in the job performance, for example, engaging in work activities, volunteering, helping colleagues, following rules and in general, supporting the organization's objectives (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Organ, 1988). Some forms of extra-role behaviors are organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) and contextual performance behaviors (CPB): Organ's (Organ, 1988) research work shows that although these behaviors are similar in that they are not formally rewarded,

“they differ in that contextual performance behaviors are incentivized by rewards such as appreciation from the supervisor” (Stoner, Perrewé & Munyon, 2011). Macey and Schneider (2008) state that organizational citizenship behaviors contribute to the effective functioning of the organization: workers perform extra-role behaviors so that they can effectively achieve their goals in the work context. Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004), in their research, elaborate on the relationship between work engagement and extra-role performance: job resources (e.g. social support) are predictors of performance; when employees exhaust work resources, there is a reduction in motivation and withdrawal from work activities. “Work engagement represents a form of intrinsic motivation in which behavior is performed for its own sake, in order to experience the pleasure and enthusiasm inherent in the work activity” (cf. Vallerand, 1997). The level of motivation in work performance can compensate for the lack of certain skills or competences that are relevant to perform a given task (Amabile, 1996); thus, work engagement enables one to value and complete the tasks that one performs.

## The theoretical reference model: Job demands-Job resources

The Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2014, 2017) postulates the existence of specific dimensions in each job occupation. These factors can be divided into two broad categories: demands and resources. Work demands include all the physical, organizational, social, and psychological aspects that characterize the job and require an effort of adaptation and an expenditure of psychophysical energy. Resources, on the other hand, include all the physical, organizational, social, and psychological aspects that make it possible to achieve the objectives of the job, mitigate the psychophysical costs of coping with the job demands and stimulate learning and personal development (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Bakker and Demerouti (2007) specify that demands are not necessarily negative aspects of work; at the same time, resources simply serve to manage demands, but have positive value in themselves that is independent of them. Demands and resources generate two independent psychological processes: the excessive presence of demands such as high load, role ambiguity and poor control can trigger a process of health deterioration, which in the long run can lead to various stress-related outcomes (depression, burnout,

physical illness, etc.). On the contrary, the presence of resources such as autonomy, feedback and support from colleagues can activate a motivational process, which promotes involvement, willingness to learn and to achieve high performance.

## Objectives and assumptions

Starting, therefore, from the theoretical premises just stated and from the theoretical framework of the JD-R model which considers personal and work resources as factors able to promote psychological health at work and prevent negative outcomes, the investigation has the general objective of verifying whether the perception of disability in the workplace as a tool for growth can be considered a job resource. Therefore, the research hypotheses were formulated as follows (see Figure 1):

H<sub>1</sub>: the perception of disability as a resource has a positive influence on job crafting behavior;

H<sub>2</sub>: job crafting positively influences extra-role behavior;

H<sub>3</sub>: disability as a resource has a positive impact on non-role behavior.

## METHOD

The assumptions of the study were explored through a non-parametric approach, namely Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Models (PLS-SEM; Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2021; Wold, 2006). In contrast to parametric Structural Equation Models, PLS-SEM reveals some basic assumptions, characterizing itself as a robust method that works well with smaller sample sizes. Furthermore, this method does not require assumptions on data distribution and residuals and does not consider indices such as skewness and kurtosis that are necessary prior to data analysis. In addition, PLS-SEMs also allow to easily handle single-item constructs and consider constructs, represented by composite variables, as approximations of the latent concept (Signore, Catalano, De Carlo, Madaro & Ingusci, 2019).

## Sample

The sample under study is composed of 129 subjects of school professions (managers, teachers, substitutes, collaborators) belonging to schools in Salento, Italy. The

questionnaire under study was completed in May 2021. The sampling was carried out by means of a non-probabilistic snowball procedure, and the interviewees belonged to a convenience sample. Specifically, respondents representing a specific pool of school professionals were asked, once they had completed the questionnaire, to send it to school workers they knew.

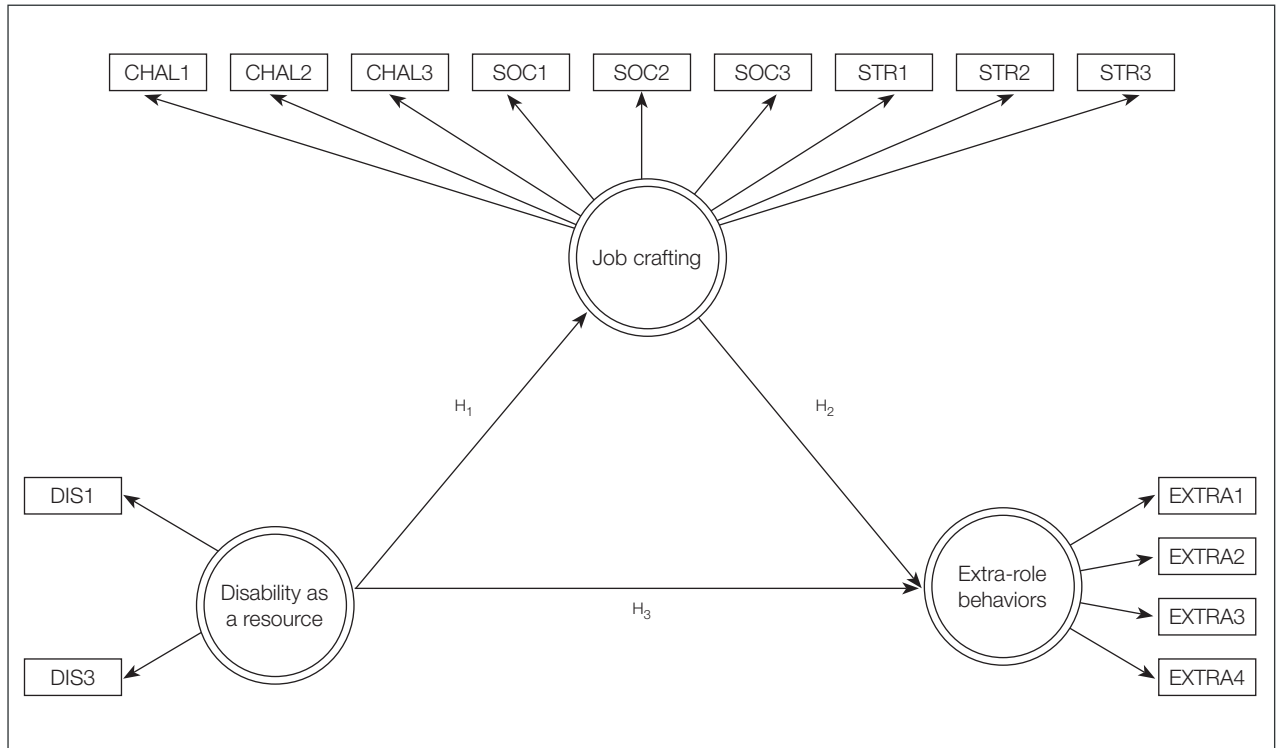
The subjects were guaranteed anonymity and voluntarily decided to participate in the research after learning the research details. All the criteria for being included in the study were in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the World Medical Association (Declaration of Helsinki). Informed consent was obtained for all participants. The data obtained was analyzed in an appropriate form without any possibility of tracing it back to the individual. In descriptive terms, the average age is 51.6 years, ranging from 32 to 66 and with a standard deviation of 7.61 years. The most frequent age of the subjects is 50. In terms of gender, the sample was strongly skewed towards women (95.3%, men 4.7%). Most of the subjects are married/cohabiting (76.0%), single/unmarried (10.9%) and separated/divorced (10.1%). 50.4% of the individuals declare to have a university degree, 27.1% a high school diploma and 22.5% a post-graduate degree. Finally, 55.8% of the subjects have dependent children, while 44.2% do not.

## Measures

The study aims to explore the extent to which perceptions of disability as a resource can influence the development of proactive behavior and organizational citizenship behavior. To test the hypotheses explained above, measures were used through Likert scale questionnaires (Corallo, Latino, Menegoli & Striani, 2020) already validated in the literature. Specifically (see Table 1):

- The perception of disability as a resource was measured using two items from Santilli's (Nota, Santilli, Ginevra & Soresi, 2014) work for people with disability questionnaire, with  $\alpha$  Cronbach = .51 and  $\omega$  McDonald = .53. An example of an item is: "Based on my professional experience with work colleagues who have any form of disability: I believe that he/she is perceived as a resource in the workplace". The response scale ranges from 1 = Completely disagree to 5 = Completely agree.
- Job crafting was measured in its sub-dimensions of increasing structural resources, increasing challenging

**Figure 1** – The study hypotheses



**Table 1** – Descriptive statistics of the study variables

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>
Disability as a resource	3.20	3.00	.78
Job crafting	4.21	4.22	.93
Extra-role behaviour	3.40	3.25	.88

demands and increasing social resources, through 3 items for each sub-factor (9 items in total) using Ingusci et al.'s (Ingusci et al., 2018) job crafting short scale. Examples of items, for each dimension, are: "When an interesting project is proposed, I actively put myself forward to collaborate on the presented idea" (increasing structural resources), "I ask colleagues in the groups I am part of to give me directions and suggestions to improve my work" (increasing social resources), "I try to refine my skills" (increasing structural resources). The Cronbach  $\alpha$  and McDonald  $\omega = .93$ , with a response scale ranging from 1 = Completely disagree to 5 = Completely agree.

- Extra-role behavior was measured by means of 4 items from the George et al. (George, Levenson, Finegold & Chattopadhyay, 2010) scale. Reliability is respected as  $\alpha$  Cronbach = .89 and  $\omega$  McDonald = .90, on a scale ranging from 1 = Completely disagree to 5 = Completely agree. An example of an item is "I am committed to performing tasks beyond my responsibilities for the benefit of the organization".

## RESULTS

The correlations between the latent variables are all positive and significant. In particular, the greater the perception of disability as a resource, the greater the likelihood of developing proactive behavior within work boundaries and extra-role actions in a spontaneous manner, as shown by the Table 2.

Analyses on the mediation model were carried out

by validating the results through bootstrap resampling performed 5000 times. Both models, the measurement, and the structural model, show satisfactory results. In particular, the proposed items are all good indicators of the hypothesized latent variables, as they are greater than the cut-off of .70. The convergent validity of the latent dimensions is respected as the Average Variance Extracted for each construct is greater than 50% (see Table 3), as well as discriminant validity, which allows us to establish that the highest correlation of each manifest variable is with respect to its reference factor.

Regarding the structural model, the analysis shows (see Figure 2) that considering disability at work as a resource has a positive effect on proactive job crafting behaviors ( $\beta_1 = .47$ ,  $p < .000$ , CI [.34; .61]). Therefore, for those who consider the encounter with disability as a potential benefit and tool for growth, the possibility of developing spontaneous and creative behaviors to adapt job boundaries to their needs is greater. At the same time, disability as a resource leads individuals to perpetuate supportive behaviors, with greater commitment to colleagues and the organization itself even when this is not directly required ( $\beta_2 = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ , CI [.01; .38]). Finally, job crafting, considered in its positive sense of an increase in challenging demands, structural resources, and social resources, shows a positive association with extra-role behaviors ( $\beta_3 = .48$ ,  $p < .000$ , CI [.30; .64]). The relationship between disability as a resource and extra-role behaviors is therefore partially mediated by the effect of job crafting. The total variance of job crafting explained by disability as a resource is 21%, while the variance of extra-role behaviors explained by disability as a resource and job crafting is 34%.

**Table 2** – Correlations between the variables of the hypothesized model

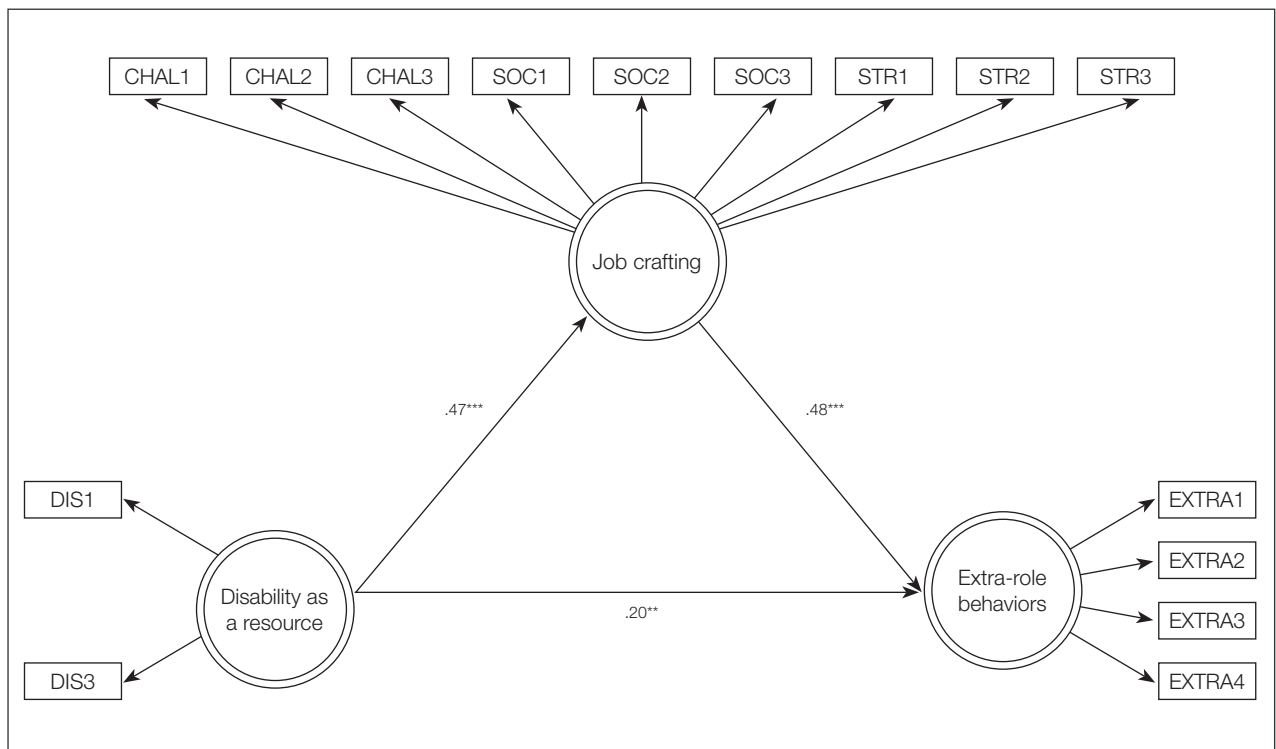
	Job crafting	Extra-role behaviours
Extra-role behaviours	.53 ***	
Disability as a resource	.45 ***	.42 ***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 3** – Extracted mean variance of latent variables

	AVE	M AVE (BOOTSTRAP = 5000)
Disability as a resource	.67	.67
Job crafting	.77	.77
Extra-role behaviours	.60	.69

**Figure 2** – The research hypotheses of the study and the relationships identified





## DISCUSSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

As explained in the introduction to this paper, the relationship with disability is a very controversial topic that is the result of numerous legislative and ethical discussions. One issue that is certainly widespread is not only the inclusion of disabled workers in jobs, but also and above all the way in which they are psychologically represented by their colleagues' perception (Sparf & Ohman, 2014). Although several research in the literature have been able to highlight ambiguities from this point of view (Beatty, Baldrige, Boehm, Kulkarni & Colella, 2019; Harlan & Robert, 1998), few empirical experiences allow us to answer the question of whether disabled workers can be considered an added value for the organizations in which they are placed, in terms of cultural, social and also productivity enrichment (Yorkston, McMullan, Molton & Jensen, 2010). The aim of this work was to explore how the perception of disability could be placed within a theoretical framework that considers the existence, in every work context, of elements predisposing motivational processes (job resources) and elements hindering organizational wellbeing (job demands). The results of the study, although extremely exploratory and preliminary, have shown that workers with a predisposition to acceptance of their colleagues with disabilities (where acceptance means the perception of the same as a resource, as a tool for growth, as an added value) are more likely, consequently, to implement those behaviors that can improve the quality of organizational life and individual well-being, such as those oriented to proactivity and those aimed at expressing support, voluntary actions and professional development even when this is not immediately required by the role. This result is of particular interest because it allows disability to be considered a resource and is associated with positive processes in terms of organizational outcomes. In this sense, therefore, *disability management* takes on a different connotation, as it is no longer only oriented towards the inclusion of disabled workers in professional contexts, but also aimed at becoming a tool for growth which can improve the individual's propensity to undertake paths to make the management of work more consistent with their needs and interests (job crafting). Moreover, as shown by several studies, the increase in extra-role behaviors is associated with greater involvement and commitment to work, as well as identification with the organization itself (Orlowski, Bufquin

& Nalley, 2021; Pace, Ingusci, Signore & Sciotto, 2021; Wright, George, Farnsworth & McMahan, 1993). These elements make it possible, therefore, to reflect constructively on the inclusion of disabled workers in organizations, not only as a social right and an instrument of inclusion, but also as an element capable of fostering behaviors that gives direct and indirect benefit to companies. In fact, as widely demonstrated in the study, perceiving disability as a potential and as a tool for growth directly favors the development of organizational citizenship behaviors and, at the same time, job crafting. In fact, the objective of national and international policies, especially in an extremely controversial and changeable period like the one characterized by the pandemic and, in all likelihood, also in the period following the pandemic, should be to safeguard as far as possible not only company productivity but also the well-being of workers, from the perspective of healthy organizations, that is, workplaces in which the objective is to promote productivity by improving well-being (Lowe, 2012). This study has highlighted a crucial aspect: disability, when considered as a development factor, influences aspects that favor positive organizational outcomes. According to the JD-R model, therefore, it can act as a work resource, thus impacting on those demands that the worker is forced to face every day. The resulting reflection therefore has cultural implications but is also empirically connected with tangible results. In healthy organizations "culture, climate and good practices create an environment that can promote workers' health, safety and organizational effectiveness" (Lowe, 2020): in this sense, therefore, disability seems to be associated with behaviors that create an environment suitable for the development of good practices, thus being part of the factors that predispose the constitution of a healthy organization. Finally, in a working context such as the current one, the watchword is to provide workers with tools to create transversal competences, capable of making an organization sustainable. These include being open to challenges, a dimension of job crafting, a construct that seems to be more activated when disability in the organization is seen as a resource. Therefore, considering disability from a constructive point of view can be a key and strategic factor, as it implements proactivity and commitment to spontaneous actions. Therefore, there is a need for a rethink on the subject, based more on empirical studies that can highlight the applicative implications of dealing with diversity capable of promoting growth and development in individual, group, organizational and inter-organizational terms, as positive



psychology affirms (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000; Di Fabio, 2017; Seligman, 2004).

Finally, the study implicitly reveals how a positive climate can be established when disability is seen as a development pathway. This statement provides an opportunity to highlight a variety of findings: first, the idea of implementing training and knowledge paths in the form of sessions to reinforce and support the idea of a new culture of disability as a resource can be helpful in improving the organizational climate and coexistence among its employees. Moreover, disability, which is among the forms of diversity that employees in an organization may have, can be seen not only as a factor to be managed, but to be used in a constructive sense to foster positive organizational processes. Implementing training courses aimed at making people aware of disability and providing support for a new working culture that considers it as a resource can have two purposes: functional to both improving organizational wellbeing but also aimed at deriving value from the knowledge, sharing of experiences and transmission of skills that contacts with disability can foster.

## Limits

This study is exploratory and preliminary in nature. In view of this premise, it is also necessary to consider certain characteristics of the study that undermine the generalizability of its results. First, the measures surveyed are of a self-assessment type, so their non-objectivity is obviously a risk. Further studies could use more structured and complex indicators to confirm or disprove the results. Secondly, above all, the construct of disability as a resource needs to be further explored by means of more reliable and numerous questions. In fact, although the manifest variables have satisfactory saturations with the latent construct, their internal consistency is lower than the recommended cutoffs even though the exploratory and preliminary nature of the study has been repeatedly stressed. Finally, some sample's features, as size and convenience, further undermine the generalizability of the results, which are based on non-parametric methods of analysis.

**Declaration of interests.** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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