

*Conceptual paper***Historical landmarks of decent work***Submitted in February 11th**Accepted in May 13th**Evaluated by a double blind review system***TÂNIA FERRARO¹****NUNO REBELO DOS SANTOS ²****LEONOR PAIS³****LISETE MÓNICO⁴****Structured Abstract**

Purpose: this article systemizes the main historical milestones which led to the current concept of decent work and presents some implications for business.

Approach: after presenting the scenario which gives a special meaning and importance to decent work, the historical landmarks are systematized until the definition of the Decent Work Agenda.

Findings: *Decent work* is a concept that has evolved since the ILO Foundation in 1919 and had several important steps throughout its development: Philadelphia Declaration in 1944, ILO constitution update in 1946, Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, Human Development Report, first edition in 1990, World Summit for Social Development in 1995, ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in 1998, World Economic Forum in 1999, Global Compact in 2000, United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000, ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization in 2008, Global Jobs Compact in 2009, and inclusion in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Throughout this development we can witness the refinement and operationalization of the concept, its institutionalization and its spread at political level, at least as an intention.

Practical implications: the business area is a privileged forum to turn policies into practices and some examples are provided.

Value: although decent work emerged in a very different social and economic scenario from the present time, it is claimed to be even more topical and relevant for the development of business and society today.

Keywords: business ethics, business management, decent work, human rights, workplace relations.

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Acknowledgments

This study was supported in part by grant from the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), Ministry of Education of Brazil, Brasília, DF, Brazil (bolsista CAPES, Proc. Nº BEX 9703/13-6)." - this information is related to Corresponding author.

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the concept of decent work (DW). It aims to present the main historical landmarks in the evolution of the concept up to the present day and some implications for businesses. It begins by framing the study in the present context, creating the necessary setting for subsequent presentation of historical developments in DW. Finally, it characterises this concept more precisely from what the International Labour Organization (ILO) defined as the Decent Work Agenda (DWA) or decent work approach. It is argued that the spread of DW as it is currently understood is an endeavour that requires the action of multiple stakeholders at different levels.

From the 1980s, economic transformations have led to flexibilisation of labour relations and changes in the labour market worldwide (Standing, 2013; ILO, 2002). The economic crisis of 2008-2009 (ILO, 2015) accentuated this tendency even more and despite the increasing evidence of the importance of creating more and better jobs and promoting productive work (ILO, 2001a, 2009, 2015), there is a general tendency towards increasing unemployment (ILO, 2009, 2015), long-term unemployment affecting young people more particularly (ILO, 2015), informal work (ILO, 2009), underemployment (ILO, 2009), flexible contracts ignoring previously won rights and precarious employment (ILO, 2001a). Today, we witness workers accepting unfairly low salaries, less healthy working conditions and reduction or loss of rights (Standing, 2013). This situation appears to affect even the most highly qualified employees (Armano and Murgia, 2013). The existence of a new class of precarious employees has even been proposed (Standing, 2013; Wiegratz, 2013). According to Wiegratz (2013), through changes in the relationship between capital and work, global political and economic changes have created a new redistribution of power with different levels and forms of exploitation. This situation is a cause for concern for all, particularly for those involved in national or international public policies.

The transformations in work relationships, with the decline of job security, downsizing, the increase in temporary or fixed-term contracts, reduction in trade union membership (e.g., in USA) (Rousseau, 1989, 1990), among other changes (Anderson and Schalk, 1998), have generated a spontaneous review of expectations and mutual obligations, which are modifying the psychological contract between employees and organizations (Guest, 2004a, 2004b; Rothwell, 2015; Sok, Blomme and Tromp, 2013). At a macro level, changes are becoming increasingly dynamic in the labour market and have an impact on labour relations. At an inter-individual level, the notions of fairness and trust, considered central in psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1989) and in employment relations (Guest, 2004b) remain relevant, although they must accompany those transformations in workplace relationships. There has been emphasis on career self-management and the importance of employability (at its different levels of analysis), not only for the unemployed but also for all employees (Sok, Blomme and Tromp, 2013). The change is observed in "accountability for career management from the employer to the employee" (Hirschi, 2012, p. 369), with considerable transfer of the responsibility and risks

previously accepted by organizations, to individuals (Rothwell, 2015). Employment flexibility often means contract flexibility and increased use of fixed-term or temporary contract arrangements, frequently representing less investment in training, greater “[...] job insecurity, a sense of marginalization and loss of opportunity for development, for career and for organizational identification” (Guest, 2004a, p. 2).

Globalization has created great economic opportunities but at the same time contributed to “social inequalities and personal insecurities” (ILO, 2001a, p. 28). The internationalization of business and technological innovations with consequent improvements in communication shorten response times and the distance between people. Intensification of the communication network between people has the positive consequence of bringing them closer, and simultaneously contributes to labour markets being increasingly competitive, and professional insecurity increases. More and more, institutions concerned with international relations, such as the United Nations (UN), and with specific policies, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) – specialized in work, emphasize job creation (and quality jobs) as a key to economic development (ILO, 2014). In this context, the concept of DW, proposed in the scope of the ILO, is an institutional effort to combat the degradation of the labour market. With this, the ILO associates itself with the intention to build a future that values human development in general and economic and social development in particular. Somavía (ILO, 2001a, p. 29) states that DW is a people-centred approach and emphasizes: DW “[...] is not defined in terms of any fixed standard or monetary level. It varies from country to country. But everybody, everywhere, has a sense of what decent work means in terms of their own lives, and in relation to their own society”.

If globalization has contributed to increased competitiveness, it has also contributed to a new conception of an inter-connected world (Méle and Sánchez-Runde, 2013) and an interdependent one, which implies shared and common responsibilities. More and more people and business leaders are aware of the consequences of their actions for the environment and the community (whether immediate or generally, such as humanity as a whole). There has probably never been so much talk about respect for the environment, sustainability, the need for equity and lines of fairness (ILO, 2001a), or what is a socially responsible investment (Schwartz, 2003; Strudel, 2003). Never before have so many rights been denied, and at the same time never before has so much been thought or spoken about the relevance of Human Rights in general and at work.

New relationships in the workplace have shown the insecurity and instability associated with increasingly internationalized and globalized competitiveness. However, the current context has also allowed greater interaction among people, greater experience of diversity in the workplace and a feeling of belonging to a global community in which responsibilities are shared. This makes it possible for a large number of people to perceive themselves as stakeholders with respect to different topics, including the environment (and climate change), health (and pandemics) and national and international security.

Nevertheless, the DWA (or decent work approach, terms used indistinguishably in ILO documents) of ILO, does not only express concern about organizations, about the formal sector, but also about the informal sector. It focuses therefore on all types of workers, but above all on those ‘invisible ones’ who often do not appear in official statistics.

A decent work approach is seen as “[...] For many, [...] the primary route out of poverty. For many more, it is about realizing personal aspirations in their daily existence and about solidarity with others. And everywhere, and for everybody, decent work is about securing

human dignity” (ILO, 2001b, p. 7-8). ILO’s strategy for a DWA “is about rights, dignity and a voice’ and also ‘it is about the economic, social and political empowerment of people” (ILO, 2003, p. 17). It is proposed to show it is possible to promote simultaneously lasting and sustainable economic development and social and human development at regional, national and local levels (ILO, 2001b). In addition, for organizations this agenda can form a guiding proposal of transformations that can be made so that relationships in the workplace accompany the sense of community, shared responsibility and a common purpose (ILO, 1999b) which seem to configure and make viable a “new architecture of global governance” (ILO, 2000, p. 3).

2. Historical overview of decent work

Until the emergence of the DW concept, proposed in 1999 (ILO, 1999b), by the then director-general of ILO, Juan Somavía, various key ideas grounded, guided and favoured elaboration of the concept and the very work of this institution. We now summarize the main landmarks of that historical path.

ILO Foundation

The ILO was founded in 1919, and its creation is part of the *Treaty of Peace* (also called *Treaty of Versailles, TV*) following the First World War and signed in Versailles. Part XIII of this treaty deals with the topic of ‘Labour’ and begins with the proposition to create a permanent ‘work organization’. This organization aimed therefore to improve the working conditions leading to greater social justice, peace and world harmony, eliminate suffering (or fatigue), and abolish deprivation at work (TV, 1919). The quoted document specifies this new organization’s way of operating and its composition. For that improvement, the interdependence of nations stands out, as “the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries” (TV, 1919, p. 193). Work is therefore considered one of the ways to combat inequalities, to ensure social justice, and consequently world peace.

Concerning its composition, it was established that the structure should be tripartite (article 393 describes the composition of the Governing Body at the time, TV, 1919). Having identified the problems related to work matters, they should be discussed always considering three parts: government representatives; workers’ representatives and employers’ representatives. Since then, the ILO has developed its work in various instances, involving different participants in a wide variety of meetings. The International Labour Conference (ILC) is held annually (as foreseen in articles 389 to 391, TV, 1919).

This XIII part of the Treaty of Versailles (1919) is considered the first ‘*Constitution of the ILO*’ (referring here to the document regulating how an organization functions). ILO’s work has developed through identification of problems, discussions with representatives of member countries, workers and employers in search of solutions and adoption of ‘conventions’ and ‘recommendations’ on the questions raised. The ‘conventions’ proposed are automatically accepted by member countries, but even so, only come under law and incorporate, to some extent, nations’ labour legislation, once ratified. This does not always happen. Exceptionally, the ILO resorts to the ‘Declarations’. Summarizing, as

the result of its work, the ILO produces conventions, recommendations, declarations, resolutions and protocols with the aim of guiding development of better (and fairer) working conditions.

Philadelphia Declaration

On 10 May 1944, during the 26th ILC (in Montreal), there was adoption of the *Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organization*, also known as the *Philadelphia Declaration* (1944), which presented “the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organization and of the principles which should inspire the policy of its Members” (ILO, 1944, p. 4). This Declaration showed more fundamental ideas related to the work of the ILO and others were once again emphasized:

- a) The principle that “labour is not a commodity” (ILO, 1944, p. 4);
- b) The statement appears once again that the central nature of social justice as a way to ensure world peace (ILO, 1944, p. 4): “[...] experience has fully demonstrated the truth of the statement in the Constitution of the International Labour Organization that lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice [...]”;
- c) Prominence is also given to defending conditions of people’s freedom, dignity, economic security and equal opportunity to achieve “both their material well-being and their spiritual development” (ILO, 1944, p. 4-5).

Until 2016, the *Philadelphia Declaration* (1944) continues to be an important document and is part of the current *ILO Constitution* (1946) in the form of a permanent appendix.

ILO Constitution and ILO as UN specialized agency

Despite the original text of the *ILO Constitution* (TV, 1919, Part XIII) receiving some amendments in 1922, 1934 and 1945, the 1946 version, approved at the 29th ILC (in Montreal), is considered an important reference. The introduction perpetuates the idea that “[...] universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice” (ILO, 1946, p. 204), as in the *Philadelphia Declaration* (1944). Furthermore, in 1946, the ILO became the first UN agency.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In 1948, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948) was published. The document refers to Human Rights in general, and is related to the topic studied mainly in articles 23 and 24 focused on human rights at work. It is important to mention the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, because although not an ILO document, it deals with Human Rights, a matter closely related to decent work, especially in those articles referring to Human Rights at work. More recently, Somavía (ILO, 2008b) stated that progress grounded on equity is based on respect for human rights, many of which relate to work.

ILO and UNDP

In 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), aiming to discuss the human dimension of development, published the first *Human Development Report*, including an appendix with technical information about formulation of the Human

Development Index (HDI), created following the orientation of Mahbub ul Haq. With this report (UNDP, 1990), the UNDP defines and proposes a method for measuring human development.

Despite not finding references that associate the proposition of the DW construction 1999 with development of the HDI, a strong affinity of ideas is seen between the two proposals, regarding human development in different instances (Anker, Chernyshev, Egger, Mehran and Ritter, 2002; Godfrey, 2003). The *Human Development Report* of 1999 (UNDP, 1999) was devoted to the human aspect of globalization and the 2000 report dedicated to ‘Human Rights and human development’ (UNDP, 2000). This document defend seven forms of freedom:

(1) Freedom from discrimination - for equality; (2) Freedom from fear - with no threats to personal security; (3) Freedom of participation, expression and association; (4) Freedom from want - to enjoy a decent standard of living; (5) Freedom to develop and realize one's human potential; (6) Freedom from injustice and violations of the rule of law; and (7) Freedom for decent work - without exploitation (UNDP, 2000, p. 3).

All seven forms of freedom mentioned are markers for increasing commitment to Human Rights in general (Fukuda-Parr, 2001; UNDP, 2000) and as observed, the last fundamental freedom is precisely freedom for DW.

ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and Its Follow up

On 18 June 1998, during the 86th *International Labour Conference*, the ILO launched the *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and Its Follow up*. This declaration is:

[...] to reconcile the desire to stimulate national efforts to ensure that social progress goes hand in hand with economic progress and the need to respect the diversity of circumstances, possibilities and preferences of individual countries (ILO, 1998, p. 1).

The basis for that declaration had been set in 1995, during the ‘World Summit for Social Development’ (Servais, 2011). The *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and Its Follow up* (1998) was the third step in consolidating what can be called *core labour standards* (as in ILO, 2001a). It was a decisive step in various governments’ commitment to fundamental rights at work represented by the grounding principles of:

- a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
- b) the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour;
- c) the effective abolition of child labour; and
- d) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation (ILO, 1998, p. 7).

These principles and rights reaffirm the main aspects of the *ILO Constitution* (1946) and the *Philadelphia Declaration* (1944).

Juan Somavía as ILO Director-General

On 22 March 1999, Juan Somavía assumed functions as the Director-General of the ILO (ILO, 1999a). It is relevant to highlight that he stated: “The central purpose of the ILO

today is to promote opportunities of decent work for all people” (ILO, 1999a, p. 4). As the first representative from the Southern Hemisphere to become Director-General of the ILO, he also does so at a time when creativity (ILO, 1999a), renewal and modernization of the ILO (ILO, 2001b) was hoped for to accompany the end of the Cold War and the desires for fair globalization and opening up of international markets. His period in office began, therefore, with great expectations for changes in the ILO.

Although the notion of DW was mentioned previously in his speech on taking up functions (ILO, 1999a), his proposition is usually formally and chronologically associated with the report he presented in the 87th Session of ILC, in June 1999, where DW is characterized as follows:

The primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity (ILO, 1999b, p. 3).

Institutionally, the ILO, in the voice of its Director-General, comes therefore to defend more intensively the need to generate jobs and with quality, highlighting that both are important: quantity and quality. It emphasizes that DW means many things: “It could relate to different forms of work, and also to different conditions of work, as well as feelings of value and satisfaction” which arise from work (ILO, 1999b, p. 4).

UN Global Compact

Even before the proposition of DW as an objective of the ILO, Annan, then UN Secretary-General, in his speech at the *World Economic Forum*, in Switzerland, at the time of the proposition of the *Global Compact*, the origin of the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), mentioned *decent labour standards* and requested all the participants at the forum to defend them, with the total support of the UN: “You can uphold human rights and decent labour and environmental standards directly, by your own conduct of your own business” (Annan, 1999, p. 2). His intention was to encourage alignment of the objectives of the international community and the business world.

In July 2000, the challenge proposed by the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan (Annan, 1999), was consolidated in a document known as the *UN Global Compact* (UN, 2000a). This document represented the result of partnerships between government, civil society, the business area and the market with the mediation of the United Nations and was the expression of common goals in fighting corruption, environmental protection, defense of human rights and decent labour standards, and social inclusion, in the form of ten principles. Among these, principles 3 to 6 refer to “[...] core labour standards including freedom of association, elimination of forced or compulsory labour, abolition of child labour, and elimination of discrimination at work. These four core standards derive from the constitution of the ILO and are internationally recognised as fundamental labour rights” (Seppala, 2009, p. 404). The aim was for these to be adopted in business worldwide and to contribute to activating support for the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs). With voluntary adhesion and without the intention of serving as a regulatory instrument, approximately 8000 companies in more than 140 countries are signatories of the pact (UN Global Compact Office, 2014), “currently the largest collaborative strategic policy initiative for business in the world” (Baumann-Pauly and Scherer, 2013, p. 1). In 2016 there are more than 12.000 signatories in 170 countries (UN Global Compact Office Website, 2016). Therefore, the *UN Global Compact* brings to business management possible actions to align with global initiatives associated with human rights and sustainability.

United Nations Millennium Declaration

In September 2000, the UN General Assembly approved the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* (UN, 2000b). This calls for collective responsibility in supporting and defending human dignity, equality and equity at a global level. Unlike the *UN Global Compact*, directed to the business world, this declaration was approved by signatory political leaders. These committed themselves to combat, reduce and eradicate extreme poverty, based on values considered essential for international relations in the 21st century: *freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility*. The declaration also puts forward key objectives to be attained and which at the same time represent means to transform the listed values in actions. The connection between the Decent Work Agenda (described in detail further on) and the *UN Millennium Declaration* (UN, 2000b) is based on the former's importance for the millennium objectives to be reached (ILO, 2005). The ILO defends that: "[...] For growth with equity, decent employment and incomes must be at the heart of economic and social policy" (ILO, 2005, p. 1).

Although this declaration is formulated at the level of national and global policies, it has obvious impacts on individuals, organizations, and other social agents. The values defended in this declaration cannot be imposed and call for inter-connection and interdependence between nations and people (UN, 2000b). While national and global policies can promote them, the responsibility for putting them into practice belongs to all stakeholders at the various levels in the social system.

ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization

In 2008, a new declaration by the ILO reaffirmed the central nature of the DWA as a key policy and an operational concept to focus the ILO team on its essential strategic objectives, the *ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*. This declaration represented a contemporary vision of the ILO's mandate in the Era of Globalization (ILO, 2008a). It reaffirms ILO values and tripartism as the way to promote progress and social justice in the globalized world. Decent work is the essence of this declaration and is understood as the guiding central idea of fairer globalization. Once again, its transposition to practice requires the active involvement of all stakeholders in the social system.

Global Jobs Compact

From the international economic and financial crisis and its impact on jobs, the ILO proposed a global pact in favour of employment, as a global political strategy. Based on the DWA, the *Global Jobs Compact* (ILO, 2009) aimed to shorten the distance between economic recovery and the creation of job opportunities with DW. To do so, the document presents proposals for protecting people's dignity, and strategies aimed at prosperity, and a more socially just and sustainable World Economy and globalization process.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

During the last United Nations Summit (25 to 27 September, 2015), the global community evaluated the outcomes of efforts to attain the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was proposed. This document intends to guide human development until 2030 and is structured on 17 Sustainable Development

Goals. Decent work was included as Goal 8 (Berry, McWha-Hermann and Maynard, 2016). This inclusion highlighted the importance of DW. Attainment of this objective will require investments in “[...] formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services” (UN, 2015, p. 19).

Due to being a multi-disciplinary concept, despite having been proposed back in 1999 (ILO, 1999b), DW remains a construct to be deepened in the scope of various disciplines and perspectives. Table 1 presents a summary of the historical milestones described here.

Table 1. Main historical milestones in decent work

Milestone Document	Institution Responsible	Date	Main contributions to DW development
<i>Treaty of Versailles/ ILO Foundation (1919)</i>	League of Nations (Principal Allied and Associated Powers)	28 Jun 1919 (date of signing)	- Part XIII of this treaty deals with the topic of ‘Labour’, a section formalizing the foundation of the ILO. Other relevant sections: - “world peace can only be assured through social justice” (TV, 1919, p. 193), with work being one of the guarantees of social justice; - In the introduction to this Section I: the list of improvements to working conditions; - interdependence between nations (TV, 1919); - Tripartism in the ILO’s form of operating.
<i>Philadelphia Declaration</i>	ILO	10 May 1944 (26 th ILC)	It presents “the purposes and objectives of the ILO, and the principles that should inspire its members’ policies” (ILO, 1944, p. 4). Highlighted among them that: “(a) all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity; [...]” (ILO, 1944, p. 4-5).
<i>ILO Constitution updated (amendments)</i>	ILO	1946 (29 th ILC) In effect from: 20 Apr 1948	“[...] peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice” (ILO, 1946, p. 204).
ILO became a UN specialized agency (1946)			
<i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>	UN	10 Dec 1948 UN General Assembly	Articles 23 and 24 (UN, 1948).
<i>Human Development Report – 1st Edition</i>	UN	1990	The change in the way of assessing development from a perspective that concentrated on economic development to a new one focused initially on socio-economic development, emphasizing poverty. With the proposition of <i>Human Development Index</i> (HDI), human development came to be considered (UNDP, 1990, p. 105).
<i>World Summit for Social Development</i>	UN	06 to 12 Mar 1995	Action Programme regarding ‘workers’ basic rights’ – consensus and commitment among various governments.
<i>ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work</i>	ILO	18 Jun 1998 (86 th ILC)	The Declaration covers four fundamental principles and rights at work (previously mentioned) (ILO, 1998).
<i>World Economic Forum</i>	UN	01 Feb 1999	Proposition of <i>Global Compact</i> , origin of the <i>Millennium Development Goals</i> (MDGs) – mentions the importance of adopting <i>decent labour standards</i> (Annan, 1999).

<i>New ILO Director-General: Juan Somavía.</i>	ILO	22 Mar 1999 – 2012	New Director-General’s four strategic objectives: promote and realize fundamental principles and rights at work; create greater opportunities for men and women to secure decent employment and income; enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all; and strengthen tripartism and social dialogue; (ILO, 1999a, p. 5).
ILC 87 th Session, 1999 <i>Decent Work, Report of Director-General</i>			
<i>Global Compact</i>	UN	26 Jul 2000	Code of behaviour, with voluntary membership, for organizations and business in general. Launched by the Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan, aiming to involve business leadership in supporting ten principles of business citizenship distributed over four topics: human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and fighting corruption.
<i>United Nations Millennium Declaration</i>	UN	08 Sep 2000	Adoption of the <i>UN Millennium Declaration</i> representing the commitment of political leaders of the nations represented at the UN to fighting and eradicating poverty (UN, 2000b).
<i>ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (ILO, 2008a)</i>	ILO	10 Jun 2008 (97 th ILC)	Adoption of the <i>ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization</i> , to be implemented through the DWA and its four strategic objectives. “The Declaration institutionalizes the Decent Work concept developed by the ILO since 1999, placing it at the core of the Organization’s policies to reach its constitutional objectives” (ILO, 2008a, p. 1).
<i>Global Jobs Compact</i>	ILO	19 Jun 2009 (98 th ILC)	A global policy instrument that aims to “provide an internationally agreed basis for policy-making designed to reduce the time lag between economic recovery and a recovery with decent work opportunities. It is a call for urgent world wide action: national, regional and global” (ILO, 2009, p. III).
UN General Assembly – 69 th Session – 2015			
<i>United Nations Summit</i>	UN	25 to 27 September 2015	Adoption of the post-2015 development agenda: proposition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Inclusion of decent work in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (as Goal 8).

Presentation of those milestones intended to show that the proposition of the DW construct has already covered a lot of ground. Secondly, it also shows the recurrence of some ideas present throughout its history which reinforce the essential elements of the decent work approach, and the notion of DW as a basic universal aspiration which, at the same time, needs to take into consideration the institutional and structural characteristics of each country (ILO, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2008a, 2008b; Ghai, 2005, 2006). Thirdly, this route culminated recently with the inclusion of DW as an important part of the UN Agenda until 2030 (UN, 2015).

Other initiatives (both public and private) have been added to those milestones in constructing an integrated decent work approach oriented towards joint economic, social and human development: voluntary private initiatives such as “[...] codes of conduct, social labelling initiatives, certification, licensing, monitoring and social audits” (ILO, 2001b, p. 44) among others, which although not enforced by law, complement the existing legislation. An example is certification such as a ‘Great Place to Work’ which defines standards for assessing employees’ quality of life and job quality in a wide range of companies.

Despite persistent criticism of initiatives of corporate social responsibility that would only mean superficial changes often directed to producing an ecological business image and reputation (*greenwashing*, for example) (Laufer, 2003), many organizations are still concerned about adjusting to Socially Responsible Investments (SRI) criteria, with actions that can be monitored through indices such as the ‘Domini 400 Social Index’ or ‘Dow Jones Sustainability Group Index’ or even the ‘FTSE4Good Index Series’ (ILO, 2001b). Those indices are related to actions of social accountability which help to differentiate companies that really are committed to social responsibility from those that publicize such initiatives to enhance their own corporate image. Once more we underline that transposition to the practice of decent work requires the active involvement of all stakeholders in the social system, particularly businesses.

3. Sharpening the Decent Work Approach

Among the important characteristics to be highlighted in the decent work approach, Sen (2000) shows four: a) This is an inclusive and universal approach, applying to all, even to those in the informal, irregular sector, the self-employed and domestic workers; b) It is an approach based on human rights at work and ethical claims, with a focus that transcends their legal recognition. Focusing on human rights at work, it does so from a perspective of social ethics, as “part of a decent society” (Sen 2000, p. 122-123); c) Inserts work in a wide economic, political and social context (emphasizing democratic values); this not only has an impact on labour legislation and work practices but demands an open society and promotion of social dialogue; d) Regarding international political relations, it intends to extend the way of thinking, proposing a change in the ‘international’ approach (with relationships of exploitation between nations and perceptions of citizenship associated with different national understandings of human rights) to another ‘global’ one (in tune with a notion of global citizenship and human rights understood as universal) (UN, 1948).

In favour of fair globalization (ILO, 2008a) or as a proposal committed to constructing this ‘fair globalization’, the decent work approach aligned with the *UN Millennium Declaration* (UN, 2000b) and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948) considers human rights at work as part of global citizenship. Therefore, despite recognizing cultural and national influences in understanding and experiencing Human Rights in general, and Human Rights at Work specifically, for the ILO the latter must be universally respected and valued.

The ILO, represented by Somavía (ILO, 2008b), recognizes the problems and difficulties created and/or faced by globalization, but also sees it as an opportunity for economic and social development. The proposition and defense of DW is a way to ensure globalization takes place more fairly, sharing its positive aspect. In a previous intervention, Somavía (ILO, 2003, p. 7) stated: “[...] We need growth with equity – a globalization that leaves no one behind. That is the whole meaning of the Decent Work Agenda”.

The essential values of ILO and DW

The first components of the DW concept go back to the ‘Declaration of Philadelphia’ (1944). This contains the four principle values of the ILO: *freedom, equity, security and human dignity* (ILO, 2008b). The concept is therefore created in the scope of the ILO and

is intimately linked to the essence and mandate of this organization. In addition, the explicit values underlying the DW concept constitute guidelines for social agents, to beyond what can be the legislative restrictions which can be established nationally and internationally.

The strategic objectives of ILO and DW

The report of the Director-General of ILO (ILO, 1999b) highlights the importance, through conditions of freedom, equity, safety and human dignity, of building equal opportunities for women and men to achieve '*decent and productive work*'. Somavía also stressed that DW "*is the converging of all its four strategic objectives: the promotion of rights at work; employment; social protection; and social dialogue*" (ILO, 1999b, p. 3). Those objectives were the setting out point for ILO's statistics to develop initial proposals to measure decent work in countries. From a practical point of view, fundamental principles and rights are the preconditions of decent work, while employment or work with quality and security is the content, and social dialogue is the "process whereby it can be achieved" (ILO, 2001b, p. 59).

The majority of Humanity works, or depends on people who work, and therefore working in decent conditions seems to affect everyone. It is at work that the balance between various human rights and duties can be put into practice. *Respect for human rights in the workplace* says a lot about the rights and duties of all involved. The job can be seen as the situation in which everything can happen: work relationships, the feeling of belonging, recognition, reward, production and the feeling of being a productive element of teams, organizations and society. It is also through work that matters of 'social protection' are organized. The *social dialogue* ensures the possibility of being heard, understanding that one's manifestation in the world makes a difference and brings contributions. It also ensures that individuals can be involved in decisions concerning themselves and all those they are concerned about. Dialogue involves communication, and in this respect is related to the sharing of perspectives and sense (making them common) and at the same time involves listening, an appropriate distribution of power and the possibility of transformation.

Characterization of decent work

Systemization of DW led to the proposition of the DWA, formed of 11 substantive elements (ILO, 2008c, 2013), resulting from the work of continuous reflection and research, mostly promoted by the ILO. From these propositions, it is possible to highlight the multi-faceted aspect of the concept of DW. This complexity expresses the diversity of points of view concerning what is morally acceptable at work. The question asked is to what extent it is possible to create a set of attributes of work universally accepted as desirable, which can be set as a goal in the various countries and regions, or even globally. That is precisely what is proposed by the ILO in formulating the concept of DW. In Table 2 these 11 elements are presented:

Table 2. ILO substantive elements of the Decent Work Agenda

Substantive Elements (SEs)	Content
1. Employment opportunities	Job creation, promoting employability and productivity investing in knowledge and skills (ILO, 2002).
2. Adequate earnings and productive work	Employment-related income that allows an <i>adequate living wage</i> , ensuring economic well-being of individuals and their households and others ‘dynamic aspects of continuing to provide adequate income’ such as ‘whether individuals are able to improve future work and income via training and further education’ (Anker et al., 2002, p. 22; ILO, 2013).
3. Decent working time	Adequate hours of work considering physical and mental health, balancing between work, family and/or personal life with adequate hourly pay and employment opportunities (Anker et al., 2002). “Employment working time” (ILO, 2013, p. 88).
4. Combining work, family and personal life	Balance between work, family and/or personal life considering gender equity (Anker et al., 2002). “A small set of decent work indicators related to standards and fundamental principles and rights at work and social protection: [...] (1) Anti-social/unusual hours and (2) Maternity protection.” (ILO, 2013, p. 103).
5. Work that should be abolished	“Unacceptable work” (Anker et al., 2002, p. 7-8). Combat and eradicate all forms of “forced labour and child labour especially hazardous and other harmful forms of child labour.” (Anker et al., 2002, p. 16).
6. Stability and security of work	Job security and with stability (Anker et al., 2002).
7. Equal opportunity and treatment in employment	Fair treatment at work (Anker et al., 2002).
8. Safe work environment	Objective conditions of safety and health at work preserving and promoting “physical and psychological integrity of the worker” and “perceptions of these conditions”. As well as preventive actions to do so. (Anker et al., 2002, p. 49).
9. Social security	Social security can be defined as “a basic human right and a means to foster social cohesion, human dignity and social justice.” [...] providing “basic protection against the financial consequences of basic life contingencies for workers and their families” (Anker et al., 2002, p. 53). “[...] social protection against life contingencies (such as ill health, old-age, unemployment, and disability) as well as for poverty. [...]” (Anker et al., 2002, p. 52).
10. Social dialogue, workers’ and employers’ representation	Meaning “[...] the extent to which workers can express themselves on work-related matters and participate in defining their working conditions. This can be channeled through collectively chosen representatives or involve direct interaction between the worker and employer. [...]” (Anker et al., 2002, p. 55). It also means: freedom of association and the right to organize and collective bargaining. (ILO Conventions N. 87, 1948 and N. 98, 1949). “[...] these rights need not necessarily coincide.” (Anker et al. 2002, p. 55). “Representational security” (ILO, 2000, p. viii).
11. Economic and social context for decent work	“Three aspects of the context are considered here: (i) socio-economic context which may condition or affect the sustainability of decent work; (ii) socio-economic performance that the achievement of decent work might affect; (iii) aspects of employment composition that are needed to measure some decent work indicators.” (Anker et al., 2002, p. 59).

With the advance of studies towards construction of DW indicators, Anker et al. (2002) warned of the existence of aspects in DW that are absolute in nature, as is the case of the standard relating to fundamental rights at work. However, others are of a more relative nature. We refer specifically to those related to culture, where it can be stated there is a cultural interpretation of what they really mean. This is the case, for example, of the meaning of DW conditions. When focusing on each substantive element, it becomes clear that each of them depends on multiple social agents: the individual, the team/organization, the partnerships/relationships between organizations, governments, international and global agents. Giving an example, employment opportunities depend on (a) the action from the individual who may become employable through their effort, (b) the business management practices, (c) the public policies at national, international and global levels. The same can be said regarding the other substantive elements (Ferraro, Pais and Dos Santos, 2015).

4. Management implications

Considering each of the 11 substantive elements of DW, several implications for business management can be pointed out. Regarding *employment opportunities*, since business leaders are entrepreneurs they contribute to creating new jobs. However, educational and developmental public policy also has a key role in labour market vitality. Workers have a shared responsibility for managing their careers and professional development. More pro-active workers who put effort into their employability will have more employment opportunities than others less engaged in such an effort.

Corporations and other organizations aim to create value, its type depending on the specific activity carried out by the organization in question. Management and leadership actions which meet the substantive element called *adequate earnings and productive work* require an organizational philosophy that maintains the focus on the main purpose of the organization while expressing it in practices that comply with social, economic and environmental sustainability. Work design practices and management processes are specially related to these three dimensions of sustainability. Business leaders and managers' challenge is to build solutions that enable development and sustainability. Economic sustainability ensures company viability. Social sustainability focuses on social vitality reconciling work and a decent life for workers. Environmental sustainability guarantees that products and/or their side effects are reconcilable with a healthy environment for present and future generations. Solutions suitable for each business will be specific and are the challenge that managers and leaders have to deal with. Public policies and international organizations' standards or recommendations (such as those of the UN and the Global Compact) are available and should be adopted as guidelines.

The substantive element of *decent working time* points out that working time should allow workers to live other dimensions of citizenship. HR managers have responsibility for promoting flexible working time arrangements (WTA) (Hoffmann and Greenwood, 2001) when possible. Flexibility in work schedule design (Tepas and Monk, 1987) can help in dealing with the different moments of organizational and workers' lives. Different WTA reconciling workers' needs and corporations' needs, whether permanent or one-off, are a challenge for managers and leaders. This challenge should be solved through dialogue aiming for creative and intelligent solutions specific to each organization, which in its best version makes laws unnecessary.

Another substantive element is *combining work, family and personal life*. This relates to policy and practices on work-life balance and also to the preceding substantive element. Several laws and standards have been adopted concerning workload and combining work and rest pauses. It is the case of professional drivers and pilots. Besides the law, managers and leaders can adopt family-friendly policies and human resource practices aiming for a constructive fit between work and other dimensions of life.

Work that should be abolished is another substantive element of DW and closely related to business ethics. Any type of work that runs counter to the law is a criminal act. Work that goes against Human Rights or ethics must be excluded from the alternatives considered in management decisions, whether punishable by law or not.

In the business field, *stability and security of work* depends on public employment policies but also on fair, ethical and non-opportunistic contracting. It is precisely concerning contracting decisions that managers and leaders have great responsibility in this substantive element. Besides that responsibility, *stability and security of work* is an issue that crosses borders, considering the high interdependence between countries and regions.

Equal opportunity and treatment in employment is a substantive element of DW closely related to human resource policy and practice. It is through the direct intervention of leaders and managers that those policies and practices are put into effect. For example, non-discrimination of pregnant women and transparency in promotion are firstly the responsibility of organizational managers and leaders. An internal observatory on equal opportunity and treatment could be a good initiative in this domain.

In countries with clear, advanced regulations on a *safe work environment*, if managers and leaders simply comply with the law workers are guaranteed that condition. Ferraro et al (2015) emphasize “decent work needs to be steadily updated” (p. 39) and this is especially true in this substantive element. Scientific knowledge evolves and new findings update information on risk in the workplace. Managers and leaders have to remain alert to new discoveries and technological advances in order to ensure a safe workplace for workers.

Social security is mainly beyond corporations’ responsibility as it depends on public policy. Managers and leaders are merely required to comply with the law. However, those who decide to offer more than what is compulsory are welcome. That is mainly relevant where public policy is weak in protecting employees and their families. Some best practices can become the next general practices. For instance, some employers include health insurance, or pension complements as part of workers’ rewards.

To implement decent work, managers have to include workers’ participation in decisions which directly affect them in accordance with the substantive element labeled *social dialogue*. The way participation is put into practice needs to fit local culture, as highlighted by Ferraro et al (2015). It is important to consider that participation is time-consuming, but that must not lead to the conclusion it should be minimal. Managers have rather the challenge of designing fair, effective and creative management processes which reconcile business aims and participation.

Finally, the *socio-economic context* has an impact on DW. Any corporation is also part of that context. All of us are co-authors of the socio-economic context. Decent work depends on that context. In boom times, its implementation is easier and the interpretation

of the practical meaning of each substantive element is less restrictive. In times of shortage, its implementation is harder and the meaning of substantive elements seems to be more restrictive. However, once again it is the ability to design intelligent management solutions which comply with the definition of DW and still address the business's purposes that really makes a difference.

5. Conclusions

This paper began by characterizing the intense social and economic transformations that have taken place particularly since the 1980s, which frame work at the present time. We pointed out the increase of migratory fluxes, internationalization of business, intensification of communication and the exchange of ideas between nations, regions, communities, organizations and people. We also underlined the consequences, in the field of work, of economic integration: many countries show high rates of unemployment and underemployment, with an increase in precarious work, with transfer of responsibility and risks from organizations to individuals, increased numbers on the verge of poverty and growing income inequality.

In this context of work and business today, the concept of DW becomes exceptionally pertinent and topical. We presented the main historical milestones leading to the emergence and development of that concept. We referred particularly to the role of the ILO and that of the UN. Key matters guiding the work of the ILO were discussed, such as: improvement of working conditions, the interdependence of nations and tripartism, ensuring that workers, employers and governments have a voice; the core values of freedom, human dignity, security and equal opportunity/equity; identification of core labour standards; and finally, the strategic objectives that have guided the activities of the ILO (standards and fundamental principles and rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue).

The Decent Work Agenda emerged as the updated and enhanced understanding of decent work today. Looking at its 11 substantive elements we are led to precise understanding of the action required from multiple social agents to reach high quality jobs in enough quantity. The intention was to show that this set of questions cross institutional borders and can serve as a compass to guide social agents' action in pursuing decent work. Indeed, if it is true that the historical context at the time of the emergence of the decent work approach was very different from what it is today, its relevance has become even greater in the current context.

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