

Well-Being At School: The Impact Of School Organizational Climate On Teacher Morale

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ABSTRACT

School Organizational Climate is a multidimensional psychological construct specific for schools contexts. Many studies underline its importance in sustaining teacher well-being. However, so far, few studies were addressed at identifying, among its various subdimensions, which are the specific predictors of teachers well-being. Among various tools used to measure organizational climate, the School Organizational Health Questionnaire (SOHQ; Hart et al., 2000) is one of the most comprehensive, consisting of eleven dimensions describing school climate (appraisal and recognition, curriculum coordination, effective discipline policy, excessive work demands, goal congruence, participative decision making, professional growth, professional interaction, role clarity and student orientation) plus one dimension, i.e., morale, which can be considered an important indicator of teacher well-being. According to Hart et al. (2000), morale can be defined as the energy, enthusiasm, team spirit and pride that teachers experience in their school.

The aim of the present paper is to identify in a sample of primary and middle school teachers (n=378), the antecedents of morale, among the eleven subdimensions of SOHQ describing school climate.

Through a multiple linear regression, the results identified three variables that positively affect morale: goal congruence (p=0.00), curriculum coordination (p=0.00) and participative decision making (p=0.09).

In sum, the results show that teacher morale is greatly affected from organizational processes and less from social and work-related factors. Therefore, the present study suggests that measures addressed at fostering the quality of organizational processes may be implemented in order to enhance teacher well-being

INTRODUCTION

As highlighted in several decades of research in the field of Occupational Health Psychology (OHP), teaching is a highly stressful occupation (Hakanen et al. 2006; Zurlo, Pes, & Cooper, 2007; Converso et al., 2015). Literature showed that sources of stress may include professional isolation, organizational injustice, high relational demands from with children/students, disciplinary problems, work load, disagreement with colleagues or conflict with parents (Zurlo, Pes & Cooper, 2007; Capone & Petrillo, 2016; Viotti et al., 2016).

School organizational climate (SOC, Tsui & Cheng, 1999; Hart et al., 2000; Burns et al., 2013) is a multi-dimensional construct related to the teacher's work conditions at school. Since the 1950s, the study of organizational climate was an important research topic in the OHP. It was defined as a shared perception of how things are done and a set of expectations and incentives that describe the characteristic behavioral processes of a social system in a particular time in a given context. These processes reflect the values, attitudes and beliefs of the organization's members, becoming then part of the climate (Payne & Pugh, 1976).

Many scales have been developed to measure this construct at school (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991). One of

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them is the School Organizational Health Questionnaire (SOHQ, Hart et al., 2000; Guidetti et al., 2015). It is a self-reported questionnaire that measure morale and 11 different dimensions of school organizational climate. Morale, being an important component of personal and organizational well-being (Narvaez et al. 2008), is a dimension that was previously studied in the association with climate. Generally, morale is a construct that also may affect job performance, commitment with school and, also, the sense of achievement from job. Morale has been defined as the energy, enthusiasm, team spirit and pride that teachers experience in their school (Hart, Conn, & Carter, 1992; Doherty, 1988; Evans, 1992). There are many studies on primary and middle school teachers that have been used the SOHQ instrument; before the Hart's study, other authors (Doherty, 1988; Evans, 1992) investigated the morale dimension identifying many of its antecedents and its outcomes. However, to date, no study has examined the impact of school climate on teacher morale.

The aim of the present paper is to identify in a sample of primary and middle school teachers, the antecedent of morale, among the eleven subdimensions of SOHQ describing school climate.

METHOD

Data collection

Teachers from eighteen public school institution in a region of Northern Italy were involved during the academic year 2012/2013. Presentation of the project, sharing of content, objectives and modalities of implementation were first presented to School Leaders, and consequently to all the participants involved in the research project. The self-reported questionnaire was administered, anonymously, to a total sample of 378 teachers, and its completion was based on consent for the processing of the data, conducted in privacy and in accordance with current Italian legislation. It took place during working hours, at the individual sites, in the presence of researchers of the Department of Psychology who were available for clarification about the questionnaire completion.

Measures

The data were obtained by means of a self-reported questionnaire including a socio-demographic section and the SOHQ (Hart et al. 2000; Italian translation by Guidetti et al., 2015). The original version of SOHQ consisted of 57 items grouped in 12 sub-dimensions: morale ($m=15.31$; $sd=2.91$; $\alpha=.87$; 5 items: "There is good team spirit in this school"), appraisal and recognition ($m=15.36$; $sd=3.92$; $\alpha=.85$; 6 items: "I am regularly given feedback on how I am performing my role"), curriculum coordination ($m=12.35$; $sd=2.25$; $\alpha=.83$; 4 items: "There is sufficient contact between different sections of the school in curriculum planning"), effective discipline policy ($m=12.4$; $sd=2.15$; $\alpha=.66$; 4 items: "The rules and sanctions relating to discipline in this school are well understood by both staff and students"), excessive work demands ($m=10.89$; $sd=2.75$; $\alpha=.78$; 4 items: "Teachers are overloaded with work in this school"), goal congruence ($m=15.42$; $sd=2.55$; $\alpha=.72$; 5 items: "There is agreement in the teaching philosophy of this school"), participative decision making ($M=11.47$; $Ds=2.48$; $\alpha=.80$; 4 items: "I am happy with the decision-making processes used in this school"), professional growth ($m=10.91$; $sd=2.67$; $\alpha=.80$; 5 items: "I am encouraged to pursue further professional development"), professional interaction ($m=23.08$; $sd=3.56$; $\alpha=.89$; 7 items: "There is good communication between staff members in this school"), role clarity ($m=13.67$; $sd=1.86$; $\alpha=.63$; 4 items: "I am always clear about what others at school expect of me"), student orientation ($m=13.34$; $sd=2.09$; $\alpha=.78$; 4 items: "This school promotes the concept of students being individuals") and support leadership ($m=15.85$; $sd=3.32$; $\alpha=.88$; 4 items: "There is support from the administration in this school"). Teachers were asked to respond to each item on a 4-point scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

Participants

Three hundred and thirty-seven teachers correctly filled out the questionnaire and thus were considered for the presented study. Sixty-eight (20.2%) of them were kindergarten teachers, 169 were teachers of primary school (50.1%) and 100 (29.7%) of secondary school. Of them, 90.2% ($n=308$) were female and 6.8% ($n=23$) were male. Participants were aged between 24 and 63 years ($m=45.32$; $sd=8.83$). Educational level were 50.1% had completed high school, 15.4% had a bachelor degree, 18.7% a master degree and 7.4% a PhD or a specialization degree. Most of the participants were married (70.2%), 17.5% single, 5.6% divorced and 1.8% widowed. 65.9% had at least one child. Concerning professional data, participants had a job tenure in the Italian public school system ranging from less than a year to 41 years ($m=19.67$; $sd=10.68$). The majority had a permanent (72.5%) and full-time contract (85.2%).

Data analyses

All the analyses were conducted by using IBM SPSS 23.

Pearson's correlations were performed in order to check the significance and the direction of the relationships among all the variables under study. A multiple linear regression was performed in order to identify, among the dimensions of the organization school climate, the predictor of morale. Firstly, using the stepwise method, morale was entered as a dependent variable whereas all the 11 variables describing organization school climate as independent variables. Once the algorithm identified the final solution it was adjusted for control variables (i.e., gender, age, and scholastic degree) using the enter method.

RESULTS

Pearson's correlations are reported in Table 1. All the 11 dimensions describing the school organizational climate showed significant correlations with morale in the expected direction. As expected, the only negative correlation was found to be between morale and excessive work demands ($r=-.17$). Among the 11 variables of the school climate, excessive work demands was also the weakest correlate of morale. On the other hand, morale showed the strongest associations with goal congruence ($r=.64$), curriculum coordination ($r=.59$), participative decision making ($r=.57$), and professional interaction ($r=.57$).

Table 2 reports the results of the multiple regression analysis. Using the stepwise method, the software identified the final solution in three steps. At step 1, it extracted as best predictor of morale, goal congruence ($\beta=.72$; $p=.001$), reaching the 51% of the variance explained. At step 2, as the algorithm added curriculum coordination ($\beta=.24$; $p=.001$), the β value associated to goal congruence decreased ($\beta=.56$; $p=.00$), and R^2 reached the value of .54. At step 3, also participative decision making ($\beta=.16$; $p=.009$) was included. At this step, goal congruence and curriculum coordination showed a β value of, respectively, .45 ($p=.001$) and .21 ($p=.001$). The final solution thus obtained was adjusted for control variables (i.e., age, gender, and school grade), using enter method. At this step, the variance explained was 56% and whereas goal congruence ($p=.001$), curriculum coordination ($p=.001$) and participative decision making ($p=.09$) kept their significance, none of the control variables considered were found to significantly affect morale.

Table 1. Internal consistency, descriptive statistics, and correlations of the subscales used in the study

	α	M(sd)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Appraisal and recognition	.85	15.36(3.92)	1	.552**	.463**	-.225**	.667**	.488**	.557**	.507**	.363**	.505**	.565**	.462**
2. Curriculum Coordination	.83	12.35(2.25)	.552**	1	.513**	-.140*	.520**	.352**	.671**	.383**	.436**	.401**	.688**	.598**
3. Effective discipline police	.66	12.40(2.15)	.463**	.513**	1	-.163**	.460**	.317**	.569**	.416**	.533**	.377**	.607**	.498**
4. Excessive work demands	.78	10.89(2.75)	-.225**	-.140*	-.163**	1	-.241**	-.240**	-.106	-.049	-.042	-.265**	-.224**	-.178**
5. Participative decision-making	.80	11.47(2.48)	.667**	.520**	.460**	-.241**	1	.543**	.599**	.464**	.362**	.602**	.666**	.570**
6. Professional growth	.80	10.91(2.67)	.488**	.352**	.317**	-.240**	.543**	1	.378**	.329**	.354**	.534**	.483**	.408**
7. Professional interaction	.89	23.08(3.56)	.557**	.671**	.569**	-.106	.599**	.378**	1	.514**	.495**	.438**	.648**	.570**
8. Role clarity	.63	13.67 (1.86)	.507**	.383**	.416**	-.049	.464**	.329**	.514**	1	.419**	.413**	.489**	.316**
9. Student orientation	.78	13.34(2.09)	.363**	.436**	.533**	-.042	.362**	.354**	.495**	.419**	1	.312**	.519**	.411**
10. Supportive leadership	.88	15.85(3.32)	.505**	.401**	.377**	-.265**	.602**	.534**	.438**	.413**	.312**	1	.544**	.470**
11. Goal congruence	.72	15.42(2.55)	.565**	.688**	.607**	-.224**	.666**	.483**	.648**	.489**	.519**	.544**	1	.674**
12. Morale	.87	15.31(2.91)	.462**	.598**	.498**	-.178**	.570**	.408**	.570**	.316**	.411**	.470**	.674**	1

**Significant correlation at the level .001 (2-tails)
* Significant correlation at the level .05 (2-tails).

Table 2. Stepwise regression analysis

Step		t	p
1 (R ² =.51)	Goal Congruence	15.25	.001
2 (R ² =.54)	Goal Congruence	8.85	.001
	Curriculum Coordination	3.72	.001
3(R ² =.55)	Goal Congruence	6.09	.001
	Curriculum Coordination	3.50	.001
	Participative decision Making	2.62	.009
4 (R ² =.56)	Goal Congruence	5.77	.001
	Curriculum Coordination	3.33	.001
	Participative decision Making	2.95	.003
	Age	-1.78	.785
	School grade	.27	.775
	Gender	-.68	.492

CONCLUSIONS

The factors that emerged as predictor of teacher morale represents three aspects describing the organizational processes: goal congruence, curriculum coordination, and participative decision making.

In line with this, results showed that teacher morale was greatly affected by organizational processes and less by social and work-related factors. Therefore, the present study suggests that measures addressed at fostering the quality of organizational processes may be implemented in order to enhance teacher well-being.

The present study has some limitations. The most important is its cross-sectional design. It is assumed that organizational climate are antecedents of morale. However, the opposite could also be true. Therefore, longitudinal study design should be used in the future instead of cross-sectional.

Another limitation is that all of the measures employed were self-reported. Future studies may benefit from the employment of data from multiple sources.

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