PROMOTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHERS' GROUP WORK: THE ASSESSMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY AS PRELIMINARY PHASE FOR INTERVENTION.

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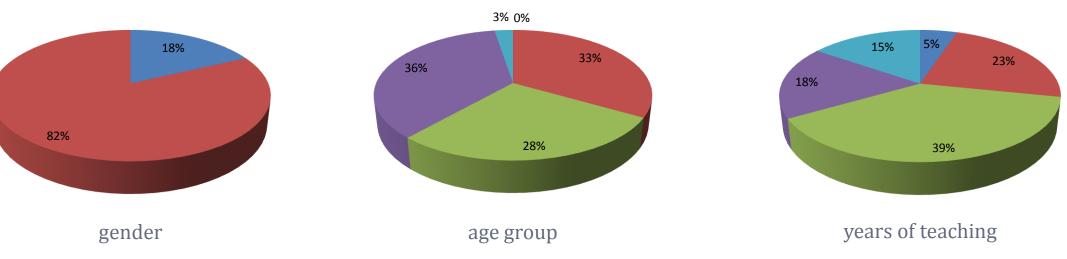
INTRODUCTION

Effective teachers' teamwork is considered to play a crucial role within school improvement strategies intended as prevention and community based interventions (Angle, 1996; Bauwens, Howrcade, 1995; Barnett, Dieker, 1996). "Teachers need to engage in taking care of their relations with colleagues: it is necessary for them to find a way to collaborate [...], to respect each other and develop a solid agreement on programs and methods [...] which they need to consistently follow." (D'Alonzo, 2012).

In this poster we describe the assessment phase of a project aimed at exploring and enhancing psychological flexibility in teams of teachers (Consigli di Classe – CC) of Italian Secondary schools. We refer to an ACT based approach which can help groups to take the committed actions needed to achieve common goals (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, Wilson, 2012). This project could have a positive impact on individual teachers and the whole school communities including staff, families and students.

Fig. 2 Fig. 1 Fig. 3 Please rate the following items using this scale to indicate your level of agreement with th Perceived Stress Scal The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month How much does this How important is this How is your group principle describe principle for your group taking action to your group now? to be effective? improve this prin ender (Circle): M F cate your level of agreement with these stat Strong group identity and I do not feel that I have to be in complete agreement with ever sense of purpose group decision in order to support the work of the group. Fair distribution of costs benefits we are not sure we will succeed. Fair and inclusive decisior s a member of this group, I think it is important that I be op making to the ideas of other group members Monitoring upon agreed behaviour ind myself getting frustrated when other group members dor agree with me Graduated sanctions fo When someone doesn't agree with me, I keep pushing to ge misbehaviour nem to see my point. Fast and fair conflict esolution Authority to self govern lease indicate your agreement with these statements about your group as a whol Appropriate relat other groups Some of our group members are not open to others' ideas. Auxiliary principle # Our group is often paralyzed by lack of consensus. Despite ambiguity our group keeps doing the things that will ge us to our goals uxiliary principle # espite disagreement, we usually find a way to mo Our group is pragmatic. We do what wor M F ■ 20-30 ■ 31-40 ■ 41-50 ■ 51-60 ■ >60 ■ <5 ■ 5-10 ■ 10-20 ■ 20-30 ■ >30 3% 0%

	0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Oft	en	4 = Ve	ry Ofte	en	
1.	In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	0	1	2	3	4
2.	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable					
	to control the important things in your life?	0	1	2	3	4
3.	In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?	0	1	2	3	4
4	In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	0	1	2	3	4
5.	In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	0	1	2	3	4
6.	In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	0	1	2	3	4
7	In the last month, how often have you been able					
	to control irritations in your life?	0	1	2	3	4
8.	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	0	1	2	3	4
9.	In the last month, how often have you been angered					
	because of things that were outside of your control?	0	1	2	3	4
10.	In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties					
	were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	0	1	2	3	4



AIM

The assessment phase is intended to describe the characteristics of CCs, understood as the principles leading the work of groups, and psychological flexibility, which refers broadly to one's openness to experience, ability to consciously attend to events, and ability to persist or change behavior in the service of chosen values (Wilson et al., 2014). In addiction to that we evaluated the groups' level of perceived stress.

METHOD

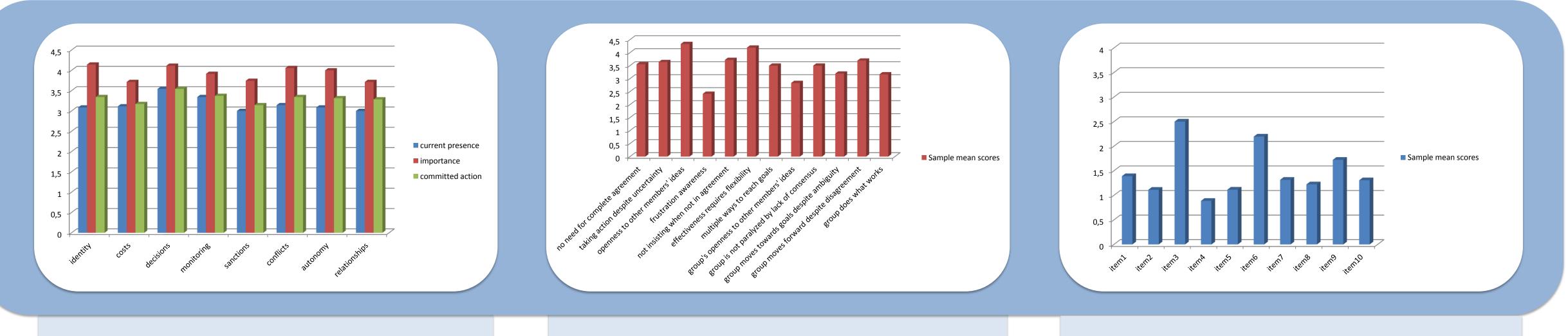
39 teachers were involved as members of 5 different CCs. Each teacher received a presentation of the project, an anagraphic questionnaire, a questionnaire adapted and translated from the Rating by group members of the core and auxiliary design principles (Wilson et al., 2014) – fig. 1, a questionnaire translated from the Psychological Flexibility Survey (Wilson et al., 2014) – fig. 2 and the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, 1994; Italian version by Fossati, 2010) – fig. 3.

The sample includes 22 female and 7 male Secondary school teachers. Most of the teachers are aged between 51 and 60 and have between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience.

Of the 39 teachers, only 34 subjects were considered: 2 teachers did not return the questionnaires filled in, 2 teachers responded to the surveys in an incomplete way and 1 teacher copied the answers of a colleague.

RESULTS

The results obtained by each CC have been grouped together and described as a single group including all the teachers involved in the survey.



RATING BY GROUP MEMBERS OF THE CORE AND **AUXILIARY DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY SURVEY

PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

It is possible to describe our sample on the basis of how the 8 principles proposed by Ostrom (1990, 2010; Cox et al., 2010) are present in the teams of teachers, of the importance given to each factor for achieving the objectives of the group, and of the actions taken to improve these principles within the CC.

The most present principles (first column) are Fair and inclusive decision-making and Monitoring agreed upon behaviors.

The less present principles are Graduated sanctions for misbehaviors and Appropriate relations with other groups.

The principles rated as more important (second column) are Strong group identity and understanding of purpose, Fair distribution of costs and benefits and Fair and inclusive decision-making. Principles rated as less important are Fair distribution of costs and benefits and Appropriate relations with other groups.

Groups act more (third column) for enhancing Fair and inclusive decision-making and Monitoring agreed upon behaviors, while they act less for improving Fair distribution of costs and benefits and Graduated sanctions for misbehaviors.

For all of the 8 principles, it is possible to observe a discrepancy between the importance given to the principles, the actual presence of the principles in the teams of teachers and the committed actions taken by the groups for improving the principles.

Data collected through the Psychological Flexibility Survey report an overall good level of flexibility (m = 3.48), both referring to the individuals and referring to the groups.

In the sample, flexibility is described mostly by the fact that teachers give importance to being open to the ideas of other group members and to the belief that Being an effective group member requires a lot of flexibility. Inflexibility is described mostly by the fact that some members of the group are reported as not being open to others' ideas and that members report they do not find themselves (are not aware of) getting frustrated when other group members do not agree with them.

The stress level perceived by our sample of teachers lays within the mean if compared with the author's datas (Cohen, 1994).

Specifically, in the month prior to filling the survey in, teachers belonging to our sample sometimes felt nervous and "stressed" (item 3), mostly perceiving they could not cope with all the things that they had to do (item 6).

Teachers also described themselves as being confident about their ability to handle their personal problems (item 4) and they often felt that things were going their way (item 5).

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

From the collected data, teachers seem quite aware of the importance of some of the basic principles proposed by Ostrom (1990, 2010; Cox et al., 2010) for a good teamwork, as well as of the relevance of being flexible in order to be effective members of the CC; on the other hand, there still is good room for improvement for the adoption of these principles, and for teachers to engage in committed actions in the direction of strengthening these group characteristics. This consideration, once shared with the groups of teachers, can represent a powerful starting point for the second phase of the project.

This step will involve some CCs in an intervention designed to increment the level of the group's psychological flexibility, inspired by PROSOCIAL (Wilson et al., 2014) a framework for improving the efficacy of groups that is being developed by the Evolution Institute (http://evolution-institute.org).

A limit of this assessment phase has been the implementation of the questionnaires separated from a direct contact with the teachers. Teachers' participation and involvement in the present phase of the project would have been facilitated by the possibility to organize an introductory meeting with the CCs. This limit will be addressed in the following phases of the project.









