

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

Elena Catenacci*, Giovanna Fungi*, Francesca Pergolizzi*

*IESCUM, Milan & ACT for KIDS and TEENS, Milan

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.

AIM

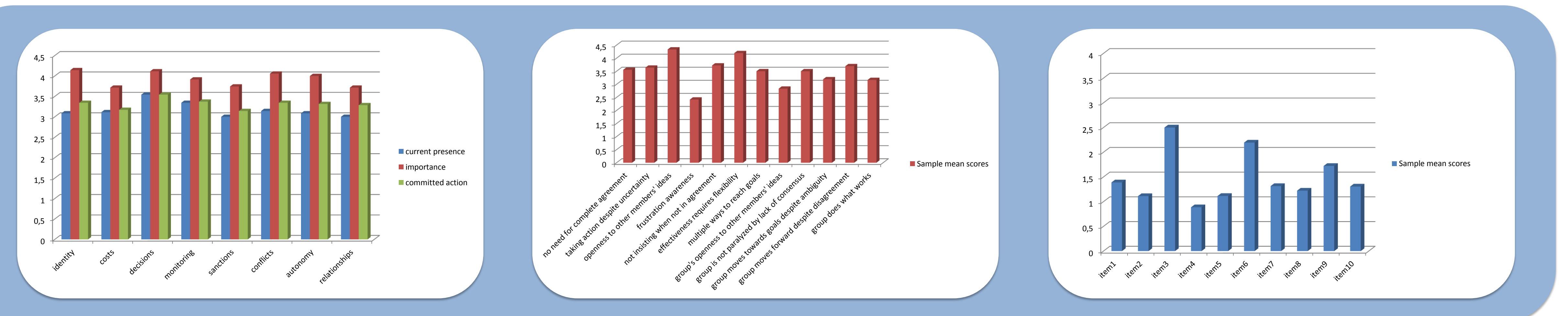
The assessment phase is intended to describe the characteristics of CCs, understood as the principles leading the work of groups, and psychological flexibility, which refers broadly to one's openness to experience, ability to consciously attend to events, and ability to persist or change behavior in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

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

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.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY SURVEY

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.

PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

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).

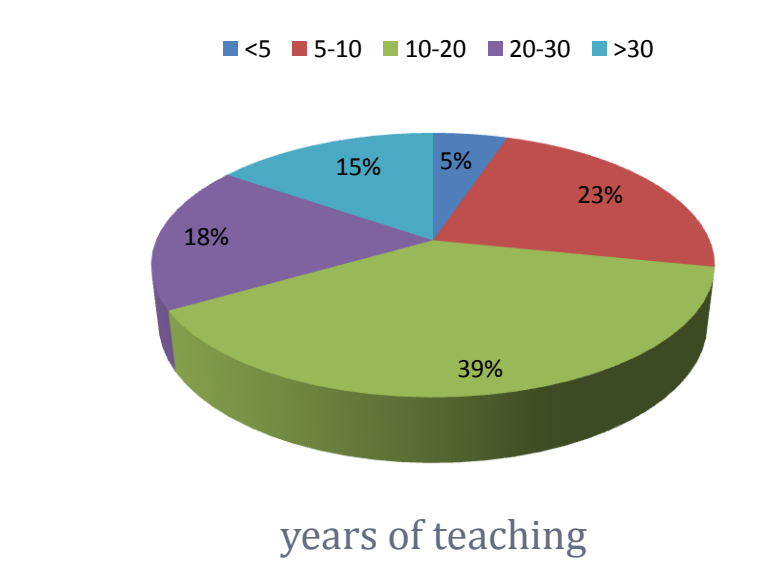
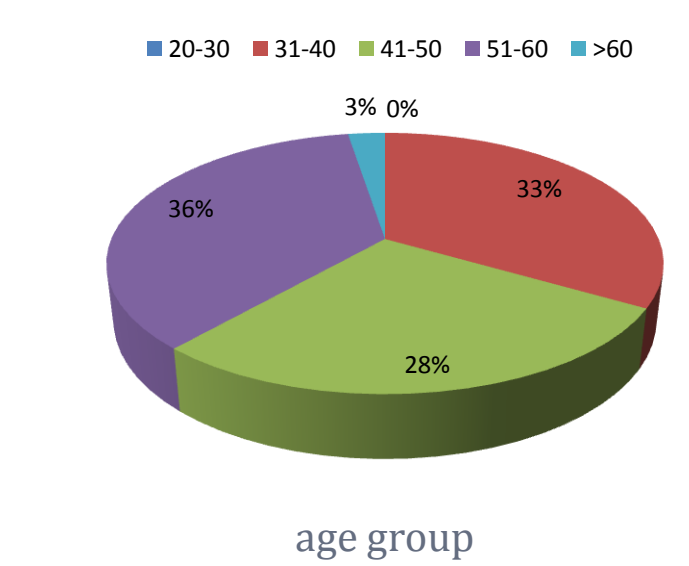
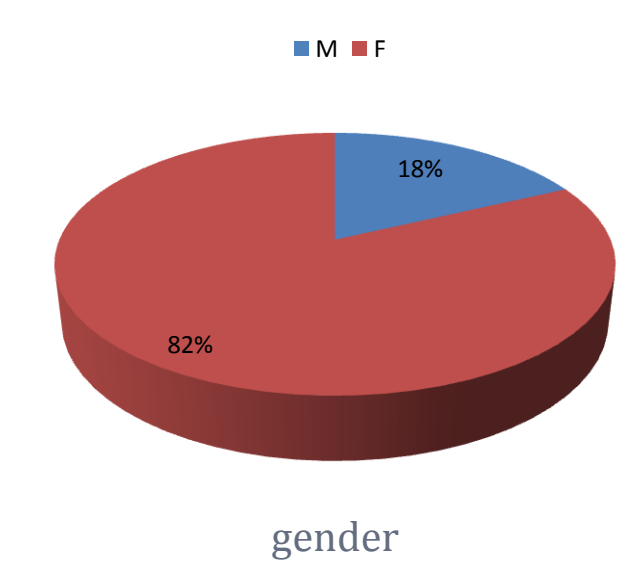
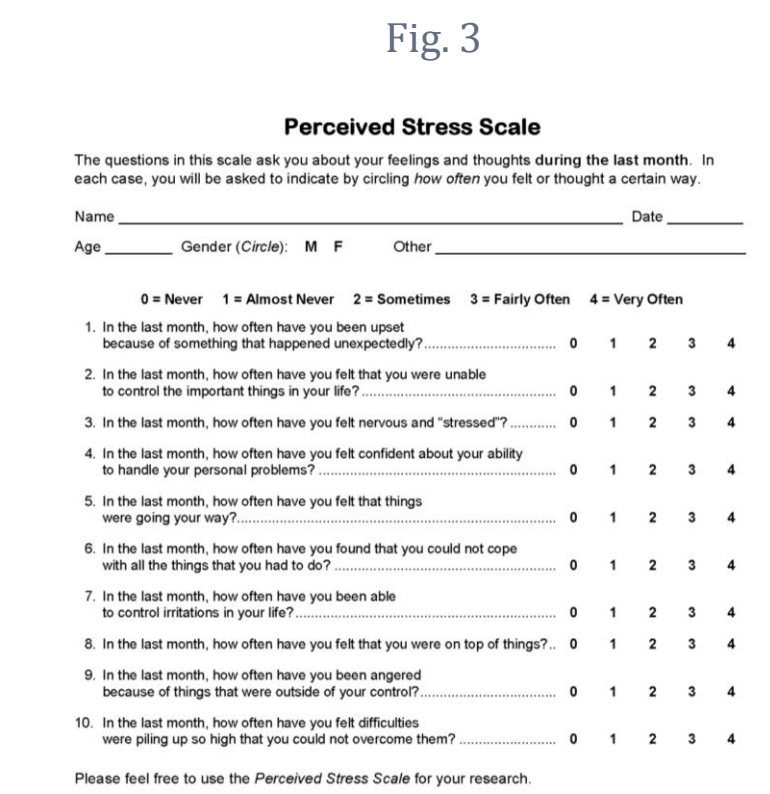
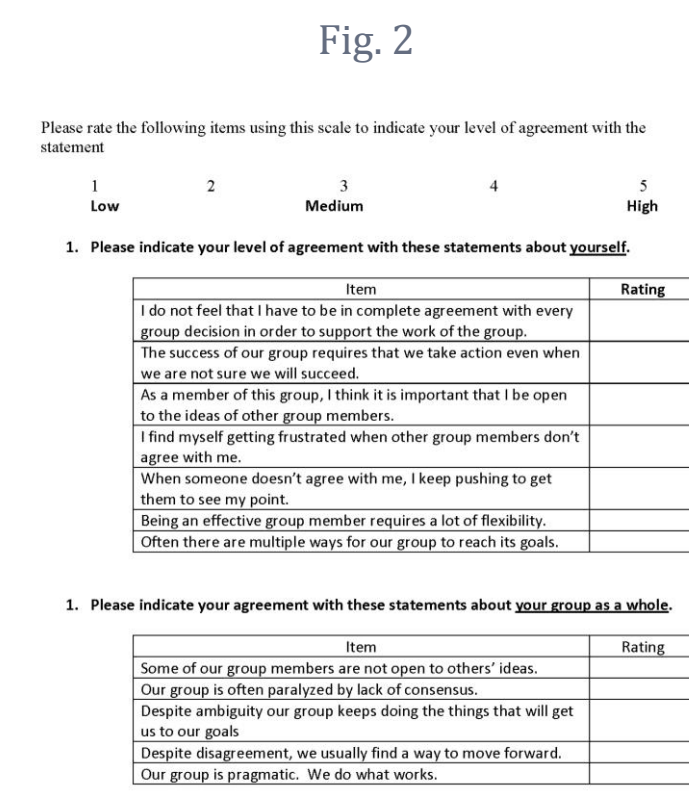
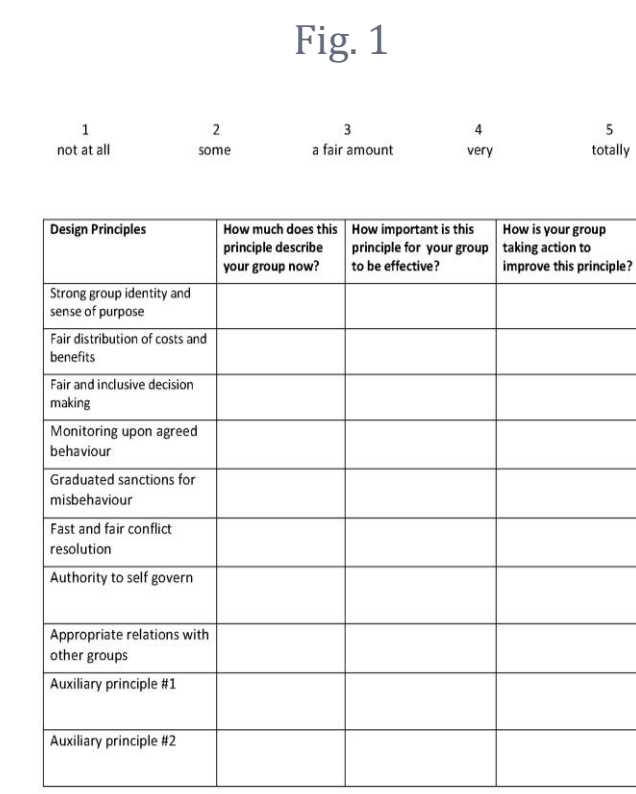
Teachers also described themselves as being confident about their ability to handle their personal problems (item 4) and they often felt that things were going their way (item 5).

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.



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.